

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: IN THE LION'S MOUTH: ADVOCACY AND
INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING
ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE
EARLY 21ST CENTURY

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This study explores what might qualify investigative reporting about the environment as advocacy. It applies a phenomenological approach to gathering and sorting data, which resulted in the identification of several essences of investigative reporting about the environment. This study further analyzes data using grounded theory. According to grounded theory, categories emerge from interview data and, through a process of reduction, produce a mid-range theory. Adhering to method and theory, this work identifies a new kind of investigative reporting the author terms *integrated investigative reporting*. It appears environment reporters are leading the way on this emerging form.

Some investigative reporters writing about the environment go two steps beyond the approach endorsed by Investigative Reporters & Editors, known as The Paul Williams Way. A pioneering finding, those steps have roots deep in phenomenology, a process of meaning making dating back to Aristotle. In that respect, the use of phenomenological process seems to point to a constructivist approach taking hold in news reporting today.

This dissertation also reveals that personal narrative is fast becoming a component of investigative reporting, particularly in the form of online diaries. Several more bridges also surfaced in this study. One connects professional and academic research approaches. Another demonstrates an innovative approach to a literature review, which the author calls a *literature synthesis*. Another shows how to combine objectivist grounded theory with Charmaz's interactionist approach to grounded theory, which study participants described doing in their investigations.

This writing refutes the professional idea that training investigative reporters in how to work an environment story requires that more attention be paid to the scope of the story than the process of story collection. Rather, this study reveals that the study participants tease out scope by going two steps beyond standard investigative reporting practice.

Challenges to some tenets of journalism appear in this study as well, including Lippmann's notion that "there is but one kind of writing possible in a world as diverse as ours. It is a unity of method..." and Kovach and Rosenstiel's notion that journalism of assertion is weakening the methodology of verification journalists have developed.

IN THE LION'S MOUTH:
ADVOCACY AND INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING
ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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2004

for Daniel Cohen
who convinced me
between the Illinois-Indiana border
and the Ohio-Pennsylvania border
that I could do this now

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rolling between states on Highway 80/90 in daylight on the way to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in August of 1999, Daniel Cohen gave me the kind of talk he said he would give to his son and daughter if they would only give him the chance. Daniel, recently divorced, was moving from Chicago to Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania in the lush Delaware Water Gap to live in the family's house, which his father was leaving to move West. I was living in Chicago, my home town, and thinking about moving to Washington, D.C., where it was easier to find work as a reporter. There for two weeks, I had returned to Chicago only to decide three days later to go back and look for a staff job rather than freelance work in the nation's capital. Daniel, whom I had known for a while, was going my way and offered me a lift as far as Harrisburg.

Somewhere just past the Illinois-Indiana border he asked where I would like my career to take me, or something like that. We were silent while I dug for an honest answer, then broke the silence with, "I want to teach at a university or college." The long-time independent businessman asked me why I did not do it now. I listed all the reasons why. "You're not thinking like an entrepreneur!" he said, which really got to me because he knew I'd been self-employed pretty much since age 23 – about 17 years at that point. That is when I began to listen to Daniel with my heart. Shortly thereafter he pulled over on the side of the road, went around to the back of the car, retrieved a legal pad, and shoved it in my hands along with a pen. Back in the car he asked me question after question. I wrote them down, discussing them and making lists as the answers came. By dark I had the equivalent of a five page business plan charting my next move: to get my doctoral degree in journalism now and move my

career along. It was my first business plan ever. From the moment I arrived in Washington, D.C., that August, I began working it. I even visited the College of Journalism at the University of Maryland in College Park to see what I thought. I thought the rooms there were too dark, but I accepted an assistantship there anyway when it was offered the following April, thinking: location, location, location. As of March 2004, I am in the final stages of that business plan, hoping to get hired by a school matching the profile I set in writing while rolling down Highway 80/90. That school and I have found each other, but I have not yet been hired.

All of this makes me wonder where I'd be now if I had followed my father's urging to write a business plan for myself when I began freelancing. Many times he sat down with me to help me think things through, just like Daniel did. We would sit at the kitchen table, one or the other of us with a legal pad and pen, and we would try to work something up. But I could never commit to the plans we had outlined. They never felt whole. I now know they lacked an appeal to my soul. I would slip them in a drawer or put them on my bulletin board and that's where they would stay – inactive. That this one had come together so spontaneously and neatly I took as an omen. This one spoke to me from somewhere deep within, and I knew, somehow, that if I just kept listening to that still small voice I would get where I needed to go. I am where I need to be because of the talk Daniel Cohen gave to me instead of his children that day.

I am also there because from an early age my father told me success is failure turned inside out, my mother listened to me with her heart instead of her head, and my sister taught me to try another way whenever something didn't work the way I thought

it should. Also in that landscape is my Aunt Phylis, who gave me counsel when I asked, and not when I did not ask; Aunt Libbie, age 97 as of this writing, who lifts my soul with her amazing good cheer; and my academic guru, JoAnn Valenti, who bugged me for years to get my doctoral degree because, she said, the academy needs me. A pillar to lean on since I started at the University of Maryland, JoAnn, who retired last year from Brigham Young University as professor of mass communications, one day called me a high-maintenance student, a quality I said I had picked up from students I had taught at Columbia College in Chicago and DeVry University in the Chicago suburbs. JoAnn carries a whip in her back pocket and has used it on me when necessary.

In the company of angels is Todd Steven Burroughs for his wisdom, encouragement, and willingness to read the first drafts of every piece this effort (the first chapter took about 12 passes) and lay a ruler down on each page to check the margins for conformity to publication standards; Kathy McAdams, who has stood by me since the beginning, for her tolerance, flexibility, and the gift of her time – which she gave unselfishly in the way of a dedicated mentor; Sol Bernstein for helping me come up with the label *integrated investigative reporting*, and Kent Silberman, from whom I am sure I have learned more than I realize.

There are parts of this dissertation that Judith Paterson will recognize as the fruits of her labors as much as mine. They are in the stories I tell about myself. Judith has helped me be brave, helped me face myself without fear of what I might discover, and put it in writing. She is a hearty talent, professor, and example to follow, as is Bill Starosta, a gentle giant who instead of taking offense when I said to him, matter-of-

factly, “Why would anyone study intercultural communication?” set out to open my mind with his parables, questions, and challenges, and succeeded. He also spent time talking with me about how one might make a difference in this cockeyed world, as did Andrew Wolvin, who gave me the opportunity to investigate and play a part in developing the emerging conversation about intercultural listening. Some of the thinking produced from that effort and humor-packed heightening of awareness sessions with Bill in his popular office at Howard University appears in the conclusion to this research effort.

Also helping me live my questions is Steve Barkin, my eclectic advisor for comprehensive exams and this effort. Recently, he took his light out from under a bushel basket, where it had been for a while during illness. Steve, it is good to see you again. Your voice lends much to the fray. There is so much work to be done. So much to discover. I am looking forward to exploring the theories presented here with you.

My dissertation victims, Dale Willman, Charles Pekow, David Helvarg, Tom Bayles, Tom Meersman, and Paul Rogers, could be characters in a Firesign Theatre comedy routine. Along with their willingness to be forthcoming, they showed me the patience, tolerance, and self control required of mavericks. The myriad of other people who contributed to this work helped me see what was right there in front of me.

Thank you, thank you, thank you all, for sharing your richness with me.

Finally, all quotes from the Society of Environmental Journalists listserv were used with permission.

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One of the reasons this [environment] beat is perpetually interesting is that it's the grandest train wreck of ideological, scientific, and financial interests imaginable.

Peter Dykstra
Society of Environmental Journalists
listserv, December 8, 1998

Half of environmental journalism is having the story, half is having the credibility.

Len Reed
Science and Environment Editor
The Oregonian (Portland)

PRELUDE

I hung up the phone and decided I had to see the place. On this story, one of my first efforts as an environment reporter, my government, resident, and activist sources spoke with so much love in their hearts and tears in their voices about Sterling Forest that I spent part of my rent money to fly to New York State from the Chicago area to meet them. Many lived in homes nestled at the base of the forested foothill that charmed them. I went for the butterfly watch, an area phenomenon resulting from the diurnal butterfly hatch. Led by a resident naturalist in his 80s, the gathering of children and parents and men and women and teenagers was held in one of the forest's meadows, about two-and-a-half hours (60 miles) away from the Big Apple's growling traffic. Afterward the tall, gentle, rugged John Yrizarry led us up giant boulders to a mountain ledge that rounded a rocky foothill for a walk in the woods I would never forget. I was on the Appalachian Trail, a place I had never heard of before.

For accommodations I had borrowed an old, heavy canvas scout tent. As directed by two of my sources, I camped on part of the trail sheltered by tall, narrow-trunked trees at the top of Fitzgerald Falls. I was 36, staying in a tent for the second time in my life, and had only a vague idea of what it meant to be that close to nature. I had planned to stay alone, but my sources wouldn't let me, warning of bear and bobcat. That weekend people literally were dying from the heat in New York City. But in the woods, the night chill forced long sleeves and made for good sleeping weather. The source camping across the log from me reminded me to check for ticks as we

retired. I asked what they were, how to do it, and why. That weekend I heard a tree fall in the forest. All in all, it was the kind of exposure to another world I had hoped environment reporting would provide.

The story I was gathering revolved around this debate: Carve another city into the wilderness? If so, why there? If not, why not there? Let a wedge of lush meadows, lakes, bogs, and rocky ridges remain a haven from the traffic, pollution, and congestion? Or not. That is the way I saw it. From the interviews, I could not tell if any of my sources were exaggerating. So I went to take a look for myself.

At issue was a tract of 17,500 acres surrounding 660 acres of the Appalachian Trail, a federally protected scenic hiking path running from Georgia to Maine and through that particular forest. In 1993 when I wrote the first of what would be more than a dozen and a half stories about Sterling Forest, Trygg-Hansa, a Swedish multinational insurance conglomerate, owned those acres in New York's Orange County, which accounted for most of the forest. In 25 percent of that space the company planned to develop a model city for 35,000 residents and 20,000 employees of light industry proposed as part of the project.

There, tucked in the speed traps along Route 17, songbirds in Sterling Forest hold choir practice for 62 of the state's 130 species of butterflies, as well as the endangered timber rattlesnake, bog turtle, cricket frog, barred owl, and Cooper's hawk. Prized for its rhododendron bogs, spring-fed lakes, and hardwood trees, its 22,000 steep mountainside acres in the Hudson Highlands mostly in New York but also in New Jersey shelter at least 15 threatened species as well as some listed as a special concern by either or both states. The forest also serves as a rest stop and

breeding ground for songbirds migrating between the Northeast and the rain forests of Central America and South America.

Sterling Forest was among 75 sites New York had designated for conservation, but funds were not available for its purchase. At the time Joseph Martens, Energy and Environment Deputy Secretary to then-Gov. Mario Cuomo, told me the state had been negotiating with Trygg-Hansa's Sterling Forest Corporation, a holding company for the forest, to negotiate a compromise. The state favored some development, he said, because it could not afford to buy the entire parcel for a state park.

Local conservation groups and some government officials began working against the project, including Sterling Forest Coalition, a workforce formed specifically to raise funds for purchase and to lobby the federal government for a financial commitment. It consisted of people from the towns of Warwick, Tuxedo, and Monroe, each of which governs part of Sterling Forest. National activist organizations later joined their effort. The Coalition was renamed Sterling Forest Resources. Among other things, it established a forest stewardship program that would include data collection on wildlife in the woodland, which was added to the group's agenda. Still, this was a case of neighbor against neighbor: village leaders in all three towns had approved the development, eyeing the increased tax base.

Opponents argued that hundreds of less sensitive sites in the surrounding region were already primed for development, that punching holes in Sterling Forest would destroy flyways for migrating songbirds, and that it also would open the forest up to domestic animals that could prey on the natural inhabitants. Once the land is cleared, they argued, the deer and raccoon populations would increase, and the forest

would lose its shy creatures: bears and bobcats. A broken forest does not sustain wildlife, they argued, citing scientific studies and case examples.

Another conservation concern also hung in a dark, ominous way over the proposed development. About two million residents and businesses in the adjacent New Jersey counties of Passaic, Morris, and Bergen depend on the forest's watershed as a natural purification system for their drinking water. The proposed development was expected to dump – or “channel,” as corporation executives preferred to say – five million gallons of treated sewage daily into the North New Jersey District Water Supply Commission's two reservoirs, which get 20 percent of their water from the forest's streams.

Proponents of the project called it the most environmentally sensitive use that could be made of the forest because it permanently protected 76 percent of the property while absorbing a portion of the 50,000 households projected for Orange County over the coming 25 years. They also argued that Sterling Forest is not pristine. In fact, in the 1950s a nuclear power plant, now closed, was sited there. Later, several low-polluting companies established themselves there, and some of their employees bought property and built houses in the woods. A small ski resort also was developed there.

Construction of the model city was proposed along the banks of the heart of the forest: the bogs and lakes that are breeding grounds for frogs, salamanders and insects, and that other wildlife also depend on for water. Roads would be built to provide easy access to the development for humans, but would make it more difficult for wildlife to reach the bogs and lakes to reproduce, for instance, as traffic increased.

A young, gray-suited public relations official for Sterling Forest Corporation met me at the Red Apple Rest, a cafeteria-style truck stop at the bottom of a hill on the outskirts of the forest. He asked me how I could walk in the woods barefoot, wearing shorts and a sleeveless shirt. “Aren’t you concerned about ticks and ringworms?” he asked in a menacing, citified tone. I said no, and asked him why I should be. It was my third meeting with one of the corporation’s representatives.

Seeing that forest and meeting the people who populated the story made all the difference for me when it came to writing future articles about the woodland and the politics involved. It changed my writing and news judgment. As a freelance reporter I wrote that first story for Environment & Development, a newsletter published by the American Planning Association, from the comfort of my small home office in a suburb of Chicago called Highland Park. All the facts were there, all the stakeholders were represented, but the writing lacked color. The reporting was unquestionably neutral. I didn’t care one way or the other; I just wanted to help everyone have their say, have a voice in the debate. I wanted to make a living reporting about the environment and couldn’t afford to take a position and lose potential outlets for my stories due to lack of objectivity, the kiss of death in the journalism business. In writing that first story I labored dramatically over word choice and perspective, struggling to tell the story fully but in the limited space provided. In the end, the article I developed displayed a detached case study of urban sprawl. It was journalism as it should be, by early 20th century iconoclastic news media critic and journalist Walter Lippmann’s definition; but it was not what environment reporting seemingly has helped journalism mature into at the turn of the 21st century.

Lippmann, an influential political journalist beginning in the early 1900s until his death, graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Harvard University and went on to introduce the idea of establishing an objective research method for gathering news stories, one similar to that practiced by scientists. The approach aimed to get at more of the truth. It was an era of faith in science. The cornerstone of journalism ought to be the study of evidence and verification, he said. The idea caught on, and much of journalism in the United States thereafter became known as “objective journalism.”

I came back from Sterling Forest to find a letter from an editor at Wildlife Conservation magazine saying I would make back the rent money I had spent to meet my sources. They wanted to run 800 words. The magazine is published by the Wildlife Conservation Society, a nonprofit group based at the Bronx Zoo in New York City.

As mentioned, after seeing the forest my reporting of the story changed. It improved, in my opinion, and seemingly in the opinion of the magazine editors to whom I was pitching. One version or another of that first story sold 12 times. My query letters had become more vivid, had more blush, and were laced with possibility. I attribute this to the shift in tone, voice, and attitude infused into my writing by the emotional impact of spending some time in the wildness that is Sterling Forest.

The resulting stories, some of which are excerpted here to assure clear context rather than in an appendix, sometimes appeared as “he said, she said” reporting, the sort that presents opposing viewpoints through quotes alone and avoids description, voice, characterization, setting, and other literary devices providing unspoken context. Gradually the stories I wrote started getting more space – possibly due to increasing

acceptance of environment reporting, possible due to the change in presentation to include stronger voice. The first story went something like this:

The controversy continues: Carve another city into the wilderness, or...
At issue is...
The proposed development would...
Quote
International Paper, International Nickel, New York University, and IBM all have offices in a big complex developed in the forest...
Trygg-Hansa, a Swedish multinational insurance conglomerate, owns the unsplintered chunk of forest...
Quote
Quote
Quote
[etc.] (Schwartz, July 1993)

Subsequent stories I wrote included more numbers and more description to go with them, which seemed to add clarity and intensity to their implications as well as depth to the controversy. I wanted to make people feel for this forest, make them think about the long-term changes resulting from proposed development there. I wanted to encourage them not to take the open space for granted, and I wanted them to make themselves heard – whatever their position – at public hearings. At that point, though, I had fallen in love with the forest.

I could no longer write dispassionately about the forest. And that helped me tell the story. Perhaps it was seeing the woodland. Perhaps it was the impact of what 12-year-old Jennifer Lengares of Hewitt, New York, said to me on the record: “Everyone’s talking about saving the economy,” she said. “Well, you’re not going to have an economy if you don’t save the ecological system first.” This experience made me stop and think about the essence of environment reporting, and what it gave me as a person. What it gave me was a gift I could not keep to myself. I had to find more

environment stories to tell because somehow they made me feel connected to a community, a need I wanted to fill. I was sure there were more people like Jennifer Lengares out there who wanted to be heard.

As sales of my freelance articles increased, I began to look at them and try to figure out what was capturing editors. Some of the stories set a scene, described the characters minimally, quoted stakeholders, and got out of the way. That's what seemed acceptable, non-advocacy journalism. Others, like the first one, adhered strictly to hard-news style, or the journalistic formula writing known as the inverted pyramid, which puts information in a sequence descending from the most important or timely bit of news to the oldest or least significant detail. For example, this excerpt from the August 1994 issue of Planning magazine, published by the American Planning Association, bearing my byline and providing an update on the Sterling Forest story a year after the first one was assigned:

CONGRESS TO CONSIDER FUNDS FOR STERLING FOREST

Congress this month will consider a \$35 million authorization for the purchase of the 17,500-acre Sterling Forest, a privately owned woodland tract on the New York-New Jersey border. If the land is acquired by the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, as planned, it would create the largest public park established in the Northeast since World War II.

Months of stalemate were broken in May when...(Schwartz, 1994, August)

The following excerpt from E The Environmental Magazine published in the September/October 1996 issue offered yet another update on the story and also appeared as hard news.

SPRAWLING SHUTDOWN

Three years ago, New York State's Sterling Forest was set to be bulldozed in favor of sprawling urban development. Some of the 17,500 acres of pristine woodlands would be turned into a model city – the largest between New York City and Buffalo, New York...

But conservation efforts have led to an agreement by the land's owners, Zurich Insurance Corporation of Switzerland, to sell 15,280 acres of the forest for \$55 million... (Schwartz, 1996a)

I still wince at the word “bulldozed,” a loaded word added by the editor of the story in E. In my opinion, that is a slant that shuns some readers who might otherwise be receptive to the news. In my opinion, this article screams: I am against development of this forest! Even though it is true I would rather woods were not cut to make way for housing and economic development, I would always write with an open mind. I would always write as an observer of the parade, not as part of the parade, to paraphrase New York University sociologist and journalism watchdog Jay Rosen (1999). This story, as edited, presents a clear position suggesting a closed mind on the issue. Consequently, it qualifies, for me, as advocacy journalism. It does not directly state its position but makes the magazine's point of view known by bending and twisting and distorting the news to fit the publication's agenda.

By Kovach and Rosenstiel's (2001) methodological definition, the loaded word “bulldozed” in the E article, although inaccurate in describing the action that would result if development plans did not go through, would qualify as adding something that was not there because it provides an inaccurate description of what is actually occurring. What was really happening was two factions with opposing viewpoints and special interests were attempting to agree on a price for the woodland. The owners of Sterling Forest Corporation wanted to divest themselves of most of the

woodland from the point of acquisition. What was at stake was the heart of the forest, the 25 percent marked for development. The story in E leaves out that important point of reference, thereby deceiving its audience into thinking the entire 17,500 acres would be destroyed by development. Not so, even if the development had gone through as initially proposed.

Another story about Sterling Forest published under my byline in the September/October 1996 issue of Appalachian Trailway News moves away from a political focus to a grassroots one. This story, about a community effort to literally take stock of the forest, describes several naturalists in the area and their neighbors, all volunteers with Sterling Forest Resources, who took it upon themselves to count the birds, frogs, salamanders, and other reptiles in the 25-acre swath of forest just above Fitzgerald Falls and along the Appalachian Trail to Mombasha High Point. They planned to compare them with findings from a similar patch of terrain 30 miles north in Black Rock Forest, about eight miles off the trail. After a five paragraph lead that set the scene and included dialogue, the reader learns that “the two surveys will help researchers reasonably extrapolate upon parts of Sterling Forest currently off-limits except by permit from Home Insurance Company, the woodland’s owner.”

Before I continue, a note is required to clarify who owns Sterling Forest. Many reporters covering the story, myself included, could not keep straight the structure and interests of the owners of Sterling Forest Corporation. Eventually, in 1996, Louis Heimbach, then chairman, president and chief executive officer of Sterling Forest Corporation, took five minutes to explain it to me in a personal interview. He said,

Trygg [Hansa] has a controlling interest in the stock of the Home Insurance Company. Home Holdings is the holding company. Trygg has a controlling interest in Home Holdings, and the Home Insurance Company is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Home Holdings. Sterling Forest is owned by the Home Insurance Company. Zurich Insurance holds the run-off company that has assumed effective control of Home Holdings. Zurich is a minority shareholder. Home Insurance Company is no longer writing insurance; they are just paying their claims. Zurich also is not writing any new policies. Zurich is controlling Home Holdings right now. It's not ownership. It's a little different. Ownership hasn't changed, but the control of the company changed. Zurich owns the company. The deal that Zurich struck with Trygg allows them to buy the stock that Trygg holds in Home Holdings at a certain point in time. The Home Insurance Company owns Sterling Forest Corporation. (Heimbach, 1996)

Such is an example of how complicated it can be on the environment beat to clearly report what seems a simple and obvious detail.

I continued to sell stories about the forest. A new client I hooked on the story, Urban Land magazine, taught me another lesson in environment reporting – one I later heard was more common than not. On that leg of my journey as an environment reporter, I learned that some environment stories get spiked – that is, editors decide not to run them – when a source complains that the article advocates a position. The complaint is sometimes less than honest, stemming from ulterior motives, as this next section reveals.

In this case, the editor did not mind cutting context and balance – that is, had no reluctance about removing the story's spine. It was safer. The update I wrote for the magazine, a publication of the Urban Land Institute, which favors development in most cases, was sent to an Institute member for fact-checking. That member, Louis Heimbach of Sterling Forest Corporation, declared the article an example of advocacy journalism. The article, like the others, gave a sense of what was at stake and what

might change if the development went ahead as planned. It seemed appropriate and necessary context to include. Yet the article I provided, Heimbach told my editor (who later told me), did not describe Sterling Forest Corporation's conservation efforts or sustainable building practices that were included in the development plans for the part of the forest it still owned. Instead the article leaned toward opposing the development, he declared, contending an article appearing in *Urban Land* should focus solely on the kind of development proposed, and exclude political controversy.

My editor concurred with his argument, although had assigned a different story. In the end, that editor decided not to run the story in any form. According to my file for that assignment, the feature focus was almost entirely on the development proposed and political controversy surrounding it. In addition, I had been given room to write by my editor, meaning if I wanted to I could turn in a piece of literary journalism – the name given to reporting applying storytelling techniques used in fiction to journalistic articles. Although technology compatibility prevents me from providing the final draft of the spiked story (it is stored on early format Macintosh disks and I can no longer retrieve the file), an early version, provided here in part but at length because it is a primary source, went like this:

With John Humbach as my passenger, I am driving the speed limit along a winding road with an occasional mildly steep incline. There is a double yellow line separating the two lanes of opposite traffic. A large, black, 4-wheel-drive truck with fine racing lines painted along its length just below its windows begins to tailgate the electric blue plastic Mitsubishi Eclipse sports car I have rented. It threatens to pass, but a string of cars rounds the bend from the other direction. The driver begins to honk and gesture in my rear view mirror to encourage me to accelerate. He honks again, but doesn't swear at me. Again, he threatens to pass, but changes his mind. He is almost on my bumper. I slow my speed by 10 miles per hour. This really steams the driver. We continue along the curling road with the big, black 4-wheel-drive on our tail,

and finally pull over on the gravel shoulder because John and I can no longer carry on a conversation with the distraction. The driver of Big Blackie rushes by, with two other cars accelerating behind him.

John and I look at each other. He says, “You should see this road during rush hour. That’s what it’s like. Bumper to bumper for miles. Most people take the train or the bus. It’s an hour to New York City; but lots of people drive, especially on the weekends. Getting through here is...” he gestures palm up to a string of cars heading in the opposite direction and collecting in bumper-to-bumper formation, though it is Saturday afternoon. Traffic in the direction we are traveling is almost nonexistent, except for Big Blackie and the two cars behind him.

I look down the hilly road we are descending and try to peek around the iron-soaked cliffs we are passing. There is another car coming at us in the adjacent lane. It is somewhat challenging to stay on my side of the road – I sometimes cross the double yellow line and have to correct my steering. The road tilts in toward one cliff from another and gently wraps around the foothill. The sky is beyond plain blue to azure, with a hint of light purple. The colors in the sky are perhaps the most distinguishing feature of the northern Appalachian Mountain area. I know this, though I’ve seen them only once before. A few white cloud puffs linger wistfully above.

John is the attorney for Sterling Forest Resources, and a professor of property and land use law at Pace University in New York. We are driving along Route 17 through Clinton Woods development in Sterling Forest, and past industrial development including a closed nuclear reactor built in the 1950s but now sitting idle like an iron maiden out of commission. We drive around Greenwood Lake development and Indian Kill Reservoir, which serves as the drinking water source for existing development in Sterling Forest. It was contaminated only once, by human waste dumped in the reservoir and causing disease, John says. There have been no reports of contamination since, he tells me, but poses this question: ‘If Sterling Forest Corporation was having problems keeping coliform out of the drinking water supply for a few hundred people, I mean, think of the magnification of the management issues and the cost issues that are entailed in protecting the drinking water of 2 million people in northern New Jersey when 6 million gallons per day of sewage effluent is put into their supply.’

Greatly scaled-down development plans for the hard rock, heavily wooded, steeply sloping mountainsides known as Sterling Forest is the consequence of a recent deal that will set aside 90 percent of 17,500 privately-owned acres of the forest for conservation purposes.

That means Sterling Forest will not become the suburban enclave within an hour’s train commute to New York City its owners envisioned three years ago. It will also make the woodland the largest tract of forest in the Northeast.

Fears that massive development would contaminate the run-off from its mountain slopes – one in New York and the other in New Jersey – which flow

into two reservoirs providing drinking water to about two million people in New Jersey, put Sterling Forest in the national limelight. The woodland also is home to 62 of New York State's 130 species of butterflies, as well as endangered timber rattle snakes, bog turtles, salamanders, and 15 other threatened species of wildlife.

The states are contributing \$10 million each to the purchase, and \$5 million from the Wallace Fund will serve as the downstroke. Congress is expected to contribute \$17.5 million, but some representatives from states in the West have tied the forest's sale to legislation that could open Utah wilderness for development. That's not the sort of trade conservationists pulling for Sterling Forest say they will consider.

Brokered by two private non-profit organizations, the Trust for Public Land and the Open Space Institute, the agreement sells 15,280 acres of the privately-held section of the forest to them for \$55 million, considerably less than the \$150 million price tag reportedly sought by the owners, Zurich Insurance Corporation of Switzerland, for the full property in 1993.

The remaining 2,220 acres were held back 'because the government couldn't afford the whole thing,' said Louis Heimbach, chairman, president and chief executive officer of Sterling Forest Corporation.

The corporation has agreed to put 3,000 units and 3.3 million square feet of commercial/light industrial space on its parcel, which is in an already-developed area. The corporation originally planned to develop a model city for 35,000 inhabitants and 20,000 workers on 25 percent of the full 17,500 acres...

In looking at this example from my printed file so many years later, I still cannot locate what Heimbach is labeling advocacy. A story with only one perspective does not adhere to journalistic standards to provide fair and balanced reporting. Therefore, I reason, I was being asked to revise the article into a piece of advocacy journalism.

While I was reporting about Sterling Forest, no development occurred there. With the federal government eventually providing a healthy chunk of money for the conservation effort, Sterling Forest Resources continued to negotiate for the remainder of the forest.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The prelude just offered is the story behind this dissertation. It shows the dimensions of my particular interest in seeking an answer to the central question posed for this work: What might qualify investigative reporting on the environment beat as advocacy? This effort is an attempt to further my understanding of what might determine a piece of writing as advocacy journalism on the environment beat. Relying on primary sources, I attempt to get at the essence of how investigative reporters on the environment beat do what they do, what they get out of it, what covering the environment means to them, and what makes it important to them to not only cover the environment as reporters, but do it as investigators.

Journalism in these times, and as I perceive I practice it, is characterized by an information collection process aimed at providing a fair and balanced news report. Accuracy and truth also are aims. This style was first seen in the penny press, started by James Gordon Bennett's New York Sun, and which owed its nickname to the fact that penny papers sold for one or two cents daily instead of several dollars per year. The penny press also relied on advertising for funding rather than subscriptions, an original concept of the time that gave it independence from political support and therefore viewpoint.

With publication of Public Opinion in 1922, Lippmann forwarded the concept of fair and balanced news reporting by suggesting that journalists follow the scientist's

lead to produce objective research on which to build their stories. This idea was intended to raise the character of both the journalist and the stories provided, elevating them above articles that were based in rumor more than fact. As such, he attempted to locate a method for journalists to use for approaching the truth, and reporting it. Lippmann (1931) described journalism as practiced by “untrained accidental witnesses.” His effort in part sought to improve the quality of journalism in the United States and also prevent a resurgence of yellow journalism, a type of gaudy reporting dominant in the late 1800s revolving first around sin, sex, and violence, and second around accuracy. Paneth (1983) further defines yellow journalism:

To the familiar exaggerations of sensationalism, yellow journalism added the elements of misrepresentation and falsehood – scareheads printed in huge black or red types, faked pictures and stories, reckless editorials, the superficiality of the Sunday supplement. (p. 527)

Lippmann decided that academic training in journalism would improve the quality of reporting and editing, news selection, and of the stories themselves. The scientific process he advocated involved basing reports on direct observation rather than hearsay, for instance. In Liberty and the News, he wrote, “There is but one kind of unity possible in a world as diverse as ours. It is unity of method, rather than aim; the unity of disciplined experiment.” The field of journalism, he wrote, ought to make its cornerstone the study of evidence and verification (in Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001, p. 73).

Journalism in the United States Today

Every journalist today operates by relying on some highly personalized method

of testing and providing information – an individual discipline of verification. This method is intended to sift through the rumor, the gossip, the failed memory, and the manipulative agendas to try to capture something as accurately as possible, subject to revision in light of new information and perspective. Journalism alone is focused first on getting what happened down right (pp. 70-71).

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) forward Lippmann's thinking by further asking how journalists can convey their particular reporting method to their audiences. Rather than spending time looking for something to add to the existing news, usually interpretation, Kovach and Rosenstiel suggest reporters use their time to independently discover and verify new facts. Through their research with working journalists the research team identified five qualities that define what they call the intellectual principles of a science of reporting, or journalism. They are:

- 1) Never add anything that was not there.
- 2) Never deceive the audience.
- 3) Be as transparent as possible about your methods and motives.
- 4) Rely on your own original reporting.
- 5) Exercise humility. (p. 78)

One example of transparency comes from the August 22, 2003, edition of The New York Times. In it, reporter Katherine Seelye delivers news about a new government rule that, if adopted, would allow many older electric power plants and oil refineries, for instance, to bypass existing laws requiring them to install anti-air pollution devices when upgrading facilities. In telling the story, Seelye says up front – in the second paragraph – that a draft of the new rule was made available to the paper by the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group. It wasn't until the ninth paragraph that readers learn the rule and its details have been “a closely held

secret within the administration.” The last paragraph of the story also reveals who did the investigating to find details of influence peddling high up in the Bush Administration. The article provides that:

During the preparation of its report on energy policy, Mr. Cheney’s [energy] task force was visited often by officials from several industry groups and companies seeking to alter the new source provisions.

According to documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act by the Natural Resources Defense Council, those visitors included officials from the Edison Electric Institute, the North American Electric Reliability Council, the National Mining Association, the American Petroleum Institute, and the Southern Company.

By including these paragraphs late in the story, Seelye shows she is adhering to the method of journalism described by Kovach and Rosenstiel.

What is Journalism?

Journalism derives its name from the French word *jour*, meaning “day” (Cates, 1997). As defined by Columbia University mass communication sociologist James Carey, “journalism is a diary, a daybook, a record of the significant happenings, occurrences, events, and sayings during the life of a community.” As such, journalism preserves not only the exotic, rare and sacred but also the common, ordinary, and repetitive events of life, he writes (p. vii). Benjamin Bradlee, while executive editor of The Washington Post, formally described journalism as a profession where reporters and editors are “pledged to approach every assignment with the fairness of open minds and without prior judgment. The search for opposing views must be routine. Comment from persons accused or challenged in stories must be included. The motives of those

who press their views upon us must routinely be examined, and it must be recognized that these motives can be noble and ignoble, obvious and ulterior” (Webb, 1978).

The New Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language (1981) defines journalism as an occupation involving reporting of the news and typified by “a type of writing ideally characterized by objectivity, but sometimes written to appeal to current public taste” (p. 520). The Random House Dictionary (1978) specifies journalism as “the profession of gathering, writing, editing, or publishing news, as for a newspaper.”

Beyond the Inverted Pyramid and Ping-Pong Journalism

Lippmann’s notion that a journalist’s method of collecting information can be done in an objective manner to make the article itself as objective as possible (the notion of objectivity for Lippmann held that the *process* was objective, *not* the reporter). Within Kovach and Rosenstiel’s description of an objective process for reporting news, which is in keeping with Lippmann’s notion, there seems to be room for stories that go beyond the inverted pyramid or ping-pong style of journalism (also called “he said, she said” reporting) to journalistic storytelling containing a plot, point of view, characterization, theme and setting. These elements frame a story for the reader, listener, and viewer.

Framing refers to the part of the story the writer chooses to tell, and the perspective from which it is told. Frame analysis theory, as established by Erving Goffman (1974), holds that when we cannot explain something, we try to force it into a frame we do understand, such as race, cultural deviance, or religion. Goffman contends that our choices of frames help us hear certain aspects of talk while not

helping us to hear other parts of a conversation. Within this system, frame is synonymous with context: that which leads up to and follows and often specifies the meaning of an expression.

Meaning is dependent on context. Meaning occurs only when the ingredients are mixed together and baked, so to speak. For instance, there may be flour, yeast, sugar, and salt in a kitchen as well as water, and milk in the refrigerator, but they do not become dough simply because they are in the same room together. Only by mixing the contents and kneading them together – creating active relationships between them – does the meaning of the ingredients become clear. In other words, the meaning of the ingredients in relationship to each other is the dough, or context. This is the way meaning is produced, according to Goffman's frame analysis.

Framing, or Point of View

According to Schultz (1990), in literary language, framing specifically refers to point-of-view, the "basic element of storytelling that lets readers know the writer is taking responsibility for what he or she has to say." It is the writer's explanation. As a storytelling element, when point-of-view is applied in fiction writing, much of what writers have to say is discovered through that writer's explanation of the teller taking the vantage point or internal point of view of certain characters, and the "you" and the "we" of the reader implicitly or explicitly (p. 147). Without a point-of-view, Schultz writes, "much important perception, voice and knowledge gets excluded from the story." He contends that when writers exclude point-of-view they censor and suppress

what they have to say. In other words, when frames of reference are left out, context gets lost and ambiguity prevails. The result is unstable meaning.

Point-of-view decisions force the writer to answer this crucial question: Whose story will I tell? Each perspective is worth telling. To decide what point of view to use, writers are taught to ask themselves which “character” interests them the most, and which story is close enough to his or her own experience so the writer can empathize more directly, can draw on details, information, and relationships from that experience in order to write with conviction. The writer’s temperament and character and needs are critical to those choices. Armed with some of the demands of the story, the writer will pick the viewpoint that feels right for the story, and [comfortable] for the writer (Rule and Wheeler, 1993, pp. 181-182). Further, a perceptive perspective will sell a story (see Bugeja, 1998; Hay, 1990; Garrison, 1999; Fredette, 1988; and Graham, 1993). All these points are crucial to credible journalism. When used responsibly, framing of a story enhances its value to readers, viewers, and listeners by adding context.

My experience, described in the prelude, has led me to think that there is a place for grounded writing with a point of view in journalism. As in the case cited from E magazine earlier, the tone of the article appearing in that general circulation publication, a tone inserted by management, necessarily marks the entire publication as an outlet for special interest or advocacy journalism. In the case of E, nothing is hidden. The editors are honest about their agenda. In that respect they are transparent, one of Kovach and Rosentiel’s markers for journalism of verification. The publication clearly favors conservation of large tracts of habitat based on the quality of protection

contiguous acreage affords certain species. It is directing its articles towards activists, aiming to mobilize them around issues of special interest. In contrast, the American Planning Association, although a lobbying organization, did not slant its articles.

Yet reporters for E can be voting members of the Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) while reporters for Planning magazine cannot because the publisher of the magazine, the American Planning Association, is a lobbying organization. In this respect, SEJ's membership rules mirror those for obtaining a press pass to cover the nation's capitol. There, anyone working for a lobbying organization cannot hold a press pass.

Muckraking as Advocacy

Like a good muckraker, I have carefully constructed a strategy for my investigation into the question of whether all investigative reporting on the environment beat is destined to be labeled as advocacy. "Muckraking," as defined by Serrin and Serrin (2002), sought to do journalism as well as do good. The term especially applies to an era in reporting when a group of authors and magazine journalists exposed American political and business evils (Paneth, 1983). Its origins may be traced to the social disasters of the Reconstruction Era and the Gilded Age, to their political corruption and financial crises, to the magnate who was indifferent to the law and to the citizen who cried, "I simply demand justice! Where is she?" (p. 306).

There is nothing objective about the way muckrakers gathered their information or presented it. It was the sort of reporting Lippmann was responding to

with his notion of practicing journalism with a unity of method that produced a more objective report than the type some muckrakers provided. Muckrakers in general showed their enthusiasm for a course of action and supported it outwardly, often to the edge of financial breakdown. Whether in the case of conservation where the cause was to establish a system of national parks, protect birds from the demands of fashion especially for hats, or crusade against species extinction¹, muckrakers carried the advocacy torch like Olympic champions. The term “investigative reporting” technically applies to all such reporting after the muckraking era, but many journalists today are sentimental about the term and feel honored when it is applied to them.

Muckraking didn’t last long, in part due to declines in support for publications due to the points of view appearing in their pages. The muckraking period in journalism generally occurred between 1890 and 1920 and was carried out by a group of journalists who shared a general desire for social reform, a faith in the ability of government and society to overcome problems, and a belief that their exposés would result in action (Quick, 2003, p. 1026). In what became known as the circulation wars of the 1890s, muckrakers worked against the spread of yellow journalism – that form of extreme sensationalism based more on gossip and ulterior motives than fact, and initiated by newspaper moguls William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer. No clear reasons can be delineated to explain why muckraking came to an end, but speculation at the time had some saying it lost its support or that its energy went into the Progressive movement, while others recorded that the muckraking magazines had

¹ Martha, the last passenger pigeon, died in the Cincinnati Zoo in 1914. The species was hunted to extinction within 50 years. Martha’s death marks the only time a precise date is known for when a species disappeared from the earth.

encountered increasing difficulties in operation due to a loss of financial support (Paneth, p. 307).

Another factor likely contributing to its decline was the establishment of the Committee on Public Information, headed by George Creel and created in 1917 by President Woodrow Wilson just after the United States entered World War I. The committee used the newly passed Espionage Act to limit publication of materials that questioned the war effort, mainly by revoking newspapers' mailing privileges. Consequently, the effort put forth by the government to control the news media led many editors to question the veracity of news told in support of a single point of view. This trend, combined with a general postwar disillusionment towards extreme political and social ideas, accelerated an existing trend towards the objective model of newsgathering (Quick, 2003, p. 1027) first articulated by Lippmann in 1922.

Investigative Reporting and Advocacy

Investigative reporting differs from muckraking in that the investigative report brings an intellectual process to the effort, according to Paul Williams, the former investigative reporter and Ohio State University professor who authored the first book attempting to explore and chart the world of investigative reporting, presenting it "as it had been and as it could be" (Williams, 1978). Williams describes investigative reporters as on a mission, meaning they go into a story looking for something in particular. He writes, "You are here to tell how things really work, not how the civics books say they work" (p. 6). The investigative reporter, he continues, goes on the trail to find a predator. The quarry does not sit waiting; it tries to escape. But the reporter

finds and follows its footprints, watching the trees and rocks for claw marks or tufts of fur. The reporter stays on the hunt day and night, trying to anticipate the quarry's next move. Eventually the reporter bags it and hangs up its hide in public. Much of the thrill is in the chase, and the hunter is honored as a hero for outwitting and capturing the cruel individual beast (p. 6). It is the predator hunting the predator. But what investigative reporters hunt is based on a certain set of values that describe the culture in which we live.

There is a down side to such righteousness. Williams explains it this way: The investigative reporter consciously chooses to get in harm's way, and his reward is about equal parts of pain and pleasure. He is practicing... 'high risk' journalism. He is raising moral issues. He is pointing out conflicts and contradictions.,

...The reporter for the hometown newspaper must live with the knowledge that his big story will bring opprobrium and grief to the family of his subjects; that it may close an industrial plant and wipe out hundreds of jobs; that it can queer a deal for a proposed new factory whose payrolls, it will be argued vehemently, will far outweigh a few thousand dollars of insiders' profit for a few city officials. The aggressive hometown reporter of business news or consumer interests will also find himself at odds with the newspaper's business manager – and perhaps with its publisher.

To cope with these dilemmas requires a certain amount of missionary zeal, or... 'a low threshold of indignation'...(p. xii-xiii)

Investigative reporters today developed as legacies to muckrakers, who typically took strong positions on issues when they brought them to the public. As evidenced by letters to the editor, the public gives good reception to investigative reports, sometimes lured by fascination and intrigue. Just like activists or doctors, investigative reporters have been described as responding to a calling: for them, it is to try to expose wrongdoing, in the words of legendary investigative reporter Stanley Penn, who joined The Wall Street Journal in 1952 and retired from there at the end of 1990 (Penn, p. v).

Harry (1984) wrote that the soul of his line of work – investigative reporting – is finding the “dirt” – something some one or some organization does not want other people to know about (p. 11). In describing investigative reporting, he writes, “Its motto is ‘expose, expose, expose’ – a direct contradiction of so called journalistic ‘objectivity’ because it is based on the presumption that there *is* something to expose along with the judgment that it is in the public interest to expose the conditions reported.” Harry describes the investigative reporting process as beginning with the presumption that there is something fishy about the subject. Then the reporter develops a hypothesis about what kind of criminal or other illegal and unethical acts the subject might be involved in, carefully constructs a strategy of investigation, and sets out to prove or disprove the hypothesis. He writes,

This is hardly the kind of ‘objectivity’ that J-school grads espouse on their first months on the job. If the investigator can prove his or her hypothesis about the subject of investigation, the job is done. By contrast, the so-called ‘objective’ reporter is usually limited to simply reporting allegations about a person along with that person’s denials and explanations. (p. 15)

That has been the problem, some say, with reporting about the environment. Like investigative reports, news stories about the environment do not lend themselves to the kind of “he said, she said” reporting – or ping-pong reporting – that works on political beats. Investigative reporting is rarely this kind. It consistently includes the reporter’s point of view, somehow.

Investigative Reporting and Advocacy in Environment News

LaMay and Dennis (1991) reprint in Media and the Environment an article by Teya Ryan first published in the Gannett Center Journal’s 1990 issue focusing on

environment reporting. Ryan says the term advocacy journalism appropriately describes the product she delivered as senior producer for Turner Broadcasting's Network Earth program. She writes, "There is an argument that all environmental reporting, balanced or not, is advocacy, just because it raises awareness of these issues" (p. 95). Advocacy journalism, she writes,

is most responsible and works best if not everyone does it (and certainly many news media do not want to do it). Some organization – a CNN, Washington Post, New York Times, Los Angeles Times – has to provide what would be considered a more balanced perspective, the kind that, in the midst of the Exxon oil spill, for example, provides the oil company's perspective as well as the fisherman's.

Other programs do that, and they do it extremely well. ...Without this kind of counterbalance, advocacy may not have a place. But once it exists, then I think the environment may be the one area where you can say advocacy journalism is appropriate, indeed, vital. (pp. 84-85)

Jim Detjen offers a different perspective, one from journalism's print medium. As environment reporter for The Philadelphia Inquirer, Detjen helped establish SEJ before becoming Knight chair of environmental journalism at Michigan State University. He contends that environment journalists are not necessarily advocates, but that they can "perform a valuable educational role." Detjen writes that he makes an effort to tell readers about concrete steps they can take to solve environmental problems (p. 100). Doing so is not advocacy, he reasons:

I am simply presenting readers, who have a hunger to take concrete actions, with practical tips of 'news they can use.' When I have written stories about scientific research on lightning or tornados, I have also included practical tips on how to avoid injury from these severe weather phenomena. Some might call this advocacy; I prefer to think of it as public service. (p. 101).

Although "he said, she said" reporting is widely seen in all journalistic mediums and was the only style provided by wire services until recently when the

Associated Press began offering stories in the literary journalism genre, it remains problematic on the environment beat. Simply, the technique does not convey the essence of the experience of, for example, living in Anniston, Alabama, where a 2001 lawsuit marked one of the biggest yet completely under-reported environment stories since contamination was discovered in Love Canal, New York, in 1978. On August 21, 2003, Monsanto Corporation and its chemical products company, Solutia, settled the polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) pollution cases of 17,000 residents in Anniston for \$700 million. The agreement designates money will go to PCB health research, local education, personal damages, and much else that is needed in the community, according to Elizabeth Bluemink, who reported the story for the Anniston Star.

Although the story has the magnitude of some of the early stories on the beat that made careers, the fact that it did not gain national attention may indicate how numb the public has become to such stories, seeking to expect them, and expect the worst. Few outside of Anniston seem to know of the monumental case, a possible indication that environmental protection seems to have become a mainstream value.

The in-and-out reporting style common to mainstream news outlets also gives short shrift to the complexity of environment stories, which usually draw fibers from several beats into each story. In addition to political and policy issues, environment reporting tends to regularly involve chemistry, statistical analysis, meteorology, weather patterns, migration patterns, knowledge of habitat needs for everything from insects to birds to mammals to amphibians, ethical discussions about what constitutes acceptable levels of risk from pollution and contamination in our water, air, and soil, and more.

Fact and Consensus of Opinion in Environment News

Since a reporter is not in a position to verify scientific studies, consensus of opinion tends to become part of the report, although fact rather than opinion is what is called for in the kind of journalism advocated by Lippmann, Kovach and Rosenstiel, journalism schools throughout the country, and many news outlets. Creating balance in a news report or feature about the environment does not necessarily reflect truth, and can be perceived as slanted reporting because the consensus is not always aligned with fact. For instance, if the consensus of opinion is that global climate change (warming and cooling of the planet) does not exist, and 10 experts say that is true but two say it is not, is the reporter doing the public a service or disservice by providing two experts who say global warming does exist, and two who say it does not?

In this respect, advocacy in environment news is not always obvious. With science a staple of news stories about the environment, if a reporter relies on scientific consensus as the basis for a story, truth may not be served. Some reporters on the environment beat claim weighing a story in the direction of scientific consensus is the only way to report about the parade, so to speak. Reporting about global climate change brought ping-pong reporting to the surface for discussion among environment reporters more than any other story in the history of the beat, partly because so little was known about the concept when it initially hit the news. Remember when everyone called the notion “global warming?” It was the news media that educated audiences about this concern, and gradually people began to understand that it is not just warming that is worth attention, it is cooling, too.

Continuing with this example, those contending that the best way to tell a scientific story – on the environment beat or otherwise – is to find where the consensus lies can be considered advocacy journalists. Those favoring this argument say it is the reporter's responsibility to put in context the percentage of scientists who do not believe in global climate change, but that it is not the reporter's responsibility to determine which viewpoint is correct. To remove the advocacy, the reporter must emphasize that only a tiny percentage of the whole, an almost indiscernible minority, hold that the notion of global climate change is a falsehood. Sometimes in reporting there are not necessarily two equally reasonable points of view, and it is not going to be resolved with a vote.

Another view contends that reporting scientific consensus is nothing more than reporting opinion as fact. The argument here is that the result is irresponsible journalism, since scientific consensus once held that the world is flat. This position therefore holds that any article reporting opinion as fact departs from journalism and becomes advocacy writing because of its diversion from the tenets and standards of journalism as described.

Yet on the environment beat strictly reporting the facts can be problematic, as described with the example about reporting consensus. One obstacle environment reporters face all the time is that many important things about the real universe are not obvious facts that can be verified on deadline, such as global climate change. Therefore, if the notion of objective reporting is limited to reporting the facts, things that can be verified in the real universe, it would be impossible for environment reporters to tackle some significant stories – such as what endocrine disruptors are and

how they are causing deformities and other abnormalities in human and other animal offspring, for instance. Dioxin and PCBs (see glossary) fall into this category (the Why Files). Of course, a reporter who wanted to verify Einstein's theory of relativity could go back and read the research papers and attempt to assimilate the theory and experimental data which supports it, but doing so would entail far more work than any journalist has time to perform.

Scientific Terminology, Fact, and Environment News

A further problem environment reporters have with the science on their beat lies in terminology. While journalists tend to think in terms of facts, science is framed in terms of hypothesis and theory. There is no such thing as factual proof in science. There is only probability. The word "theory" is scientific parlance for what a journalist might regard as fact when reporting about global climate change. Rather than talking of factual proof, scientists prefer to talk of probability, that is, based on available evidence a particular theory appears to be correct. For example, while there is long-standing, wide consensus among scientists about the correctness of Einstein's relativity theory, recent published research reported in The Washington Post has brought the notion into question.

Beyond the Parade

Seemingly, as Rosen (1999) pointed out, it is the reporter's job to watch the parade, not become part of it. However, some in the environment reporting arena contend there is a place for advocacy in news about the environment, a point

elaborated on in Chapter 2.

What looks like advocacy on the environment beat often also looks like just plain good reporting. In addition to being subtle, what could pass as advocacy could also pass as investigative reporting in the finest tradition. For example, like the Anniston story, the story about Love Canal and what happened there centered on the effects of dioxin contamination. Dioxins are part of a larger class of compounds called polycyclic halogenated aromatics, which are emitted into the air from vehicle, factory, and even fireplace emissions and that find their way into water and soil, polluting it. Research indicates a toxic dose of dioxin – more commonly known as the poisonous ingredient in the Vietnam-era defoliant Agent Orange – fits on the head of a pin. All this had to be explained to audiences.

On any given day this author, when writing news stories about the environment between 1989 and 2001 for various print venues, was required to synthesize chemistry and statistical analyses for removing contamination from soil or water, or wildlife habitat needs and economic development plans, or some combination of economics, policy, law, and science into a given news report between 800 and 1,500 words, on the average. Environment stories are complex. Investigative reporting on the environment beat helps put it all in perspective. Without a point of view, it has no voice or perspective. As pointed out earlier and elaborated on in Chapter 2, journalism without a perspective provides unstable meaning.

Chapter Summaries

The literature synthesis provided in Chapter 2 orients readers to the conversation to

which I am contributing, and shows where this study fills gaps in the literature. That section goes into detail about what the literature provides concerning environment reporting, and also offers some insights about investigative reporting on the environment. Departing from tradition, I have seasoned this section with interviews with environment reporters to provide everyday examples showing the literature in practice, and also where ideas exist in theory only.

Chapter 3 focuses on research method and methodology. It describes why I chose to apply phenomenology as a research approach. In that chapter I explain how I attempt to get at the substance of investigative reporting on the environment beat and its relationship to advocacy.

Chapter 4 describes how and why grounded theory was applied to get at the essence of investigative reporting about the environment. This approach aims to provide mid-range theories. Several epiphanies resulted from combining this theory with phenomenology, thereby demonstrating the necessity of connecting theory with method. The mid-range theories resulting from this process are contained in my conclusions. Those theories appear to be significant and groundbreaking.

Chapter 5 presents findings from data gleaned from extensive interviews with six investigative reporters working the environment beat who are members of the Society of Environmental Journalists. All volunteered to participate. Each revealed different facets of reporting that distinguish the environment beat from all others. The conversations pivoted on what they consider advocacy journalism, how they make that determination, and the measures their editors have applied to draw that line, with a particular eye on investigative reports. Appendix B provides extensive excerpts from

the interviews, revealing each participant's attraction to investigative reporting on the environment and how the stories they write affect them on a personal level. Their responses tell, among other things, of lifestyle changes, spiritual gratification, and emotional satisfaction the work provides, even though five out of six revealed themselves as atheists or agnostics, with one declining to disclose. In so doing,

The categories presented in this section were revealed by the reporters interviewed rather than pre-selected. That standpoint is consistent with grounded theory. To produce the findings, two layers of reduction were conducted as dictated by the theory. In so doing, this chapter provides the roots for describing the essence of investigative reporting about the environment. My conclusions are offered in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE SYNTHESIS

Literature reviews in qualitative research take on three main views, according to Field and Morse (1985). From one perspective, the researcher does not consult the literature until all the field data has been collected. As a result, when the researcher goes to the literature for the first time it may be easier to confirm or deny what is located in books, journals, and other materials. The thinking is that a literature review done before field work may mislead or distract the researcher. Further concern is that the researcher might overlook a new discovery if preoccupied with finding and confirming what the literature already provides. The distraction could come in the form of seeking to prove or disprove what already is written; and could risk tainting any findings by influencing the interpretation based on a bias provided by the literature. The point of caution with this approach is that something valuable might be missed if one reads the literature before going into the field.

A second standpoint holds the opposite view. It asserts that the researcher begin by locating, reading and using all previous information to find a framework for planning observations or devising an interview outline. This is an “all-at-once” approach, or holistic approach to qualitative research.

In the third position, the researcher scans the literature to identify what is there and what is not, using the quick read to help the researcher know when a new discovery is made in the field. In this view, once field data are collected, the

researcher repeats the process to find material shedding light on findings. The researcher then selectively uses literature identified in the first read and subsequent ones to inform the work.

In all three cases, the qualitative researcher usually integrates the literature during the later phases of the research process (Learn, 1996, p. 13). Initially I had planned to follow the first approach. However, between the first and second field interviews I became eager to learn more. Unable to control my passion, I decided my time would be well spent getting a sense of the literature and what it did and did not provide. Consequently, this section reflects the results of the third approach.

This work seeks to tell a story that has not been told. It is the story of how investigative reporters covering the environment display their passion for their work, and what leads them to it. It is the story of people who cannot stand idle to injustice, who seek to right wrongs. It is the story of people who have given voice to the less influential. All from the question: What might qualify investigative reporting about the environment as advocacy?

Orientation to the Literature

Joseph Campbell, the world-renowned scholar and mythologist, believed he could review with an unprejudiced eye the religious traditions of mankind. He claimed doing so made him “aware of certain mythic motifs that are common to all, although differently understood and developed in the differing traditions” (Campbell, in Eisenberg, et al., 1990, p. 2).

Campbell’s words stand as a metaphor for what this section attempts to

deliver: a look at how investigative reporting has been interpreted on the environment beat, as well as how advocacy is defined in that quadrant, according to the literature. Certainly all disciplines have an approach to investigation because questioning is the foundation of learning. Since my subject is journalism, however, I will confine my discussion to that field.

On the environment beat just as in myth there are questions that seem larger than life. The question of advocacy, for instance, is one such example. Is every reporter on the environment beat an advocate? Each *is* working the *green* beat. What else could they be? If one does an investigative report on the environment beat, what logic defends the story as fair, balanced, and without bias? What persuasive argument protects that reporter's credibility? What shield and sword can that reporter use to present the truth as understood, without fear of being labeled an advocate, the kiss of death to any news reporter seeking to be taken seriously?

Some of the risks involved in undertaking any story on the environment beat already have been discussed. More are ahead. This section shows the drama that came unbidden to some who dared to pioneer investigative reporting on the environment, to those who tempted fate.

In the lion's mouth are those who came with documents for evidence, direct quotes for testimony, and narrative for background and context, but were punished as advocates anyway. Like all muckraking and investigative journalism, these stories reveal reporters in their noblest moments displaying outrage at injustice – with the injustice aimed at them in the form of being silenced. One of the stories is about a reporter whose editors did not stand up for her when special political and advertising

interests complained she had written a story that was not fair. Another story tells of a veteran environment reporter for The New York Times who was transferred to covering the Internal Revenue Service when his editors decided he was “ahead of the curve,” or too biased in his reporting about environmental issues in Washington, D.C. There are other stories, as well. After being outraged by injustices done to other people, some of the environment reporters quoted here became targets of seeming injustice themselves from within their own profession. Although they steadfastly adhered to the tenets of the journalism of verification described, many were reassigned by their mainstream news employers after being accused of producing advocacy journalism. They say they did not.

At base, the following consideration of the literature provides a sense of the environment beat and how it came about. It describes what prompted the beat’s creation, some of the occupational hazards both in and out of the newsroom², what comprises an investigative report on the environment beat and whether it departs from traditional investigative reporting, and a conversation about advocacy journalism and the environment beat. Overall, the literature is thin. When it comes to investigative reporting about the environment, less than a handful of secondary sources address the issue at all. Similarly, some direct discussion exists in print about advocacy and investigative reporting in general, but again, there isn’t much.

² In 2003, one star environment reporter innocently picked up a rock while investigating a river site suspected of severe contamination and tossed it in his car to take to a lab. He forgot about it, and carried it around for a month or so. Gradually, he began to lose his memory. One day he found the rock in his car, had it examined, and learned it was radioactive. As a result, he had to be chelated due to exposure.

Is the Environment Beat Here to Stay?

Some say the environment beat is an endangered species. Some say environment news is here to stay even if a reporter isn't specifically assigned to cover it. Others say there will always be a need for a beat reporter to cover the environment, arguing that environment stories are complicated, that a beat reporter will more readily see how the pieces might fit together in a bigger picture than general assignment, city hall, business, or economics reporters write a story involving the environment.

In the mid-1900s, the labor beat was a staple of most news outlets. Many in the United States workforce belonged to labor unions at that point in history. Stories about the unions and also corporations were juicy, wrought with corruption, self-interest, and injustice, which made for great reading – much like environment news today. But gradually the United States economy shifted to service-based industry from one rooted in manufacturing, and fewer people belonged to unions. Eventually the labor beat dissolved into business and metro beats.

Bill Allen, senior fellow with the Institutes for Journalism & Natural Resources, said the environment beat itself may disappear, but coverage of the environment will not. "Environment stories are going to continue to grow in importance as the various forms of global climate change intensify in the coming years. With the biodiversity crisis intensifying, with mounting evidence about over-fishing, about pollution run-off, about toxic waste, these are just going to continue to demand interest by readers and viewers and listeners and coverage by journalists. They have to do with our health, our kids, our families, in a very direct way," he said (Allen, 2003).

Allen's response reflects the mass media theory that journalists have the ability to decide what the public will think about and discuss, known as limited effects theory (see Lowery & DeFleur, 1988; Cohen, 1963). Robert McClure, a reporter with the Seattle Post-Intelligencer who covers environment stories for the paper, agreed the environment beat will not go away. Reporters may get reassigned temporarily, he said, but there are no signs in his newsroom at this point of permanently downplaying environment stories, he said (McClure, 2003).

The thing is environment reporting doesn't have to belong to one beat, said Adam Glenn, senior producer for the business, health, science and technology unit at ABCnews.com, in a personal interview with the author at the Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) conference in New Orleans in September 2003. Reporters from business, health, and municipal beats should be encouraged to contribute, he said. The commitment then becomes a policy decision to cover the environment, he explained (Glenn, 2003).

As reported by San Jose Mercury News environment reporter Paul Rogers in Neiman Reports (Winter, 2002), The New York Times reassigned its environment reporter, Douglas Jehl, to the Middle East following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York City. Jehl, the Times' former Cairo bureau chief, has since moved back to the environment beat. However, by mid-year 2003 several SEJ members who had been transferred to other beats at that time remained focused on their new assignments.

During the first eight months of 2001, environment stories (including coverage of pollution, toxic waste, air and water quality, global warming, endangered species,

energy, and land use) totaled 596 minutes on evening network news programs, according to the Tyndall Report, an analysis of network news broadcasts. Top stories were the Bush administration's energy policies, California blackouts, global warming, and air pollution. But in the last four months of 2001 – after the terrorist attacks – the networks broadcast only 21 minutes of environment news. The pace didn't pick up much in 2002. There were 187 minutes of environment news in the first nine months, putting the viewers on pace to see less than half the environment coverage in 2002 that they saw a year earlier (Rogers, 2002, p. 32).

In 10 newspaper studies conducted by American Opinion Research in 1992, readers identified environmental news as the fastest growing topic of news interest (Rogers, 2002). A growth spurt on the beat was expected as a result. Rogers observed that, “by early 2001, network TV news coverage of environment issues reached a volume not seen since the days of the Exxon Valdez oil spill a decade earlier. From Manhattan to Miami, Seattle to Southern California, newspaper editors wanted the environment on Page One” (p. 32). Yet a year later environment news on television had fallen to less than one-third of what it was a year earlier.

The beat that some considered a fad in the early 1990s appears to be sprouting a new branch. More recently, environment reporters have followed in the footsteps of reporters embedded with the troops. They have been “embedded” in weather stories, for instance, as evidenced by network and CNN coverage of Hurricane Claudette and Hurricane Isabel. “This rain feels like stinging needles!” shouted one CNN reporter in gale-force winds on a beachfront. Environment news is beginning to find a new home in the newsroom in weather reports.

Pictures and News About the Environment

Cracknell (1993) suggested that television was an ideal medium for at least some environment stories, calling them “mediagenic,” or dramatic in visuals. Such stories provide, he explains,

good pictures and easy-to-understand symbols, such as seabirds stuck in an oil slick or the menacing shape of a nuclear power plant. Photogenic natural disasters, such as the Yellowstone Park fire of 1988 or the eruption of Mount St. Helens in 1980, may also be framed as environmental stories. The growth of television and the greening of America is a topic waiting to be explored. (in Neuzil and Kovarik, 1996, p. xi)

The role of pictures is particularly important in environment stories, according to Shanahan (1993). He argues that because of technology, our actions have much broader consequences than before the industrial revolution. Waste products are flushed, thrown out, or made to disappear and leave our consciousness immediately, leading us to live “environmentally destructive lives within an otherwise clean environment” (p. 183). Pictures, he argued in 1993, can help people understand what they are doing and possibly motivate a change in behaviors and lifestyles. To do so, they must be taken in the field and brought to viewers (in the case of television) rather than bringing the wild indoors and onto a sanitized studio set to spark discussion. Bringing viewers outside rather than bringing the outside inside to viewers was key to heightening environmental awareness, Shanahan concluded.

Television and Environment News

But environment stories never took off in television news the way they did in

print. One factor determining why environment stories appear less in television news has to do with the medium; another concerns trust, said CNN executive editor Peter Dykstra, who heads the network's Science and Technology Unit. In a personal interview with the author in 2001, Dykstra, then news editor for CNN's Network Earth program, said that in television, news stories "cast everything in black and white, good and evil, right and wrong. With environment stories rarely that well defined, upper management tends to be very wary of environment stories that are potentially loaded with hype and obfuscation" (Dykstra, 2001).

Since much of the science behind environment stories depends on theories, and weighing those theories, trusting someone else to decide what science is right or what political perspective is wrong is something television news executives rarely are comfortable getting into, Dykstra explained. Keeping environmental messages sanitized is key to getting those stories into television news, then, which goes against all that Shanahan (1993) hoped for the medium. This factor may be key to why environment news did not catch on in television.

Event stories involving the environment seem best suited for television's short quotes (or sound bites), dramatic pictures, and one minute or a little more time slot in which to tell a story. As a result, the kind of complex reporting coverage of the environment required to provide a framework and clear context for a story appears better suited for a news magazine or special report according to the current formula for news. With this in mind, it seems environment news with all its diversity and complexity could support its own segment on the news, much like sports.

A package of stories about environment reporting in television appearing September 8, 2003, in Television Week concurred with Dykstra's observations, but added that stations are beginning to give some of the responsibility to staff meteorologists in an effort to provide more reports, asking them to cover weather-related environment stories. The effort seems an attempt to rise to the challenge to provide environment stories in a slow economy putting pressure on news organizations to provide more news with the same or less staff, a factor that could cause beat reporting to fall by the wayside (Whitney, 2003a). Not wanting to drop environment news from the story list, efforts seemingly are being made to try another way to get the news to the public.

Seiches on the Environment Beat

Environment reporting has been dwindling, according to Scott Miller, co-director of Resource Media in Seattle, a nonprofit resource center aimed at improving coverage of the environment (Whitney, 2003a), for reasons paralleling Dykstra's observations. Despite the current decrease, an increase in coverage is expected in 2004 as election campaigning rises to its usual shriek.

As reported in the October 2003 issue of Mother Jones magazine, the Bush administration has been "busy dismantling bedrock environmental laws and handing out favors to the biggest polluters," and has "quietly changed the rules affecting wetlands" (p. 2). Some examples: (1) Key sections of the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act have been gutted. (2) The Superfund program, which exists to provide funds to clean up toxic industrial waste such as arsenic, lead, mercury, and vinyl chloride in

48 states and more than 1,000 neighborhoods, with each site cleanup costing at least \$20 million, has been crippled. (3) The EPA's enforcement division dropped to its lowest level on record – down by one-fifth as of October 2003. As of that time, fines for environmental violations had dropped by nearly two-thirds. Criminal prosecution of the worst polluters was down by nearly one-third (Davidson, 2003). Consequently, the environment appears as this presidential campaign's political pivot point.

In 1996, news managers across mediums were telling their reporters that environment stories “just don't sell,” according to Detjen's (1996) informal survey of some environment reporters that year. One television reporter Detjen quoted saw the attitude as a potentially chilling “trend” indicating the beat was “in serious trouble. ...News consultants say that no one cares about E news, but this contradicts what most polls and viewers say.” Concern among environment reporters about the future of the beat was high in 1996. Many continue to sing this song.

Detjen's informal study fueled that concern by showing a decline in environment reporting in all mediums except radio when compared with 1995. Of television reporters surveyed, 44 percent said they spent less time in 1996 on environment stories than the previous year. By contrast, 41 percent of radio reporters said they spent more time on environment stories. Detjen offered no insights about why, except to quote a few of the survey participants saying environment reporting was not the priority it once was with news managers. He also did not disclose his research method or the number of participants in his study. Although it was the first study of its kind to provide any sort of baseline for measuring seiches on the environment beat, it is not quoted further here due to methodological concerns related

to the efficacy of the study.

Several years later, three studies by Sachsman, Simon and Valenti profiled newspaper and television environment reporters in New England (2002), the Mountain West states (2002) and in the South (2003). Of 33 television stations in New England, only four had a reporter who was assigned environment stories. Of 87 stations in the Mountain West region, nine had reporters to whom they directed environment stories, although 10 were identified in the region. In the South, 184 stations were located. Of them, 23 had at least one environment reporter (27 were identified).

By contrast, of 82 newspapers located in New England, 42 sent environment stories to a specific reporter (51 such reporters were identified). Some had more than one reporter providing environment stories. Similarly, in the Mountain West region, of 108 newspapers located, 55 had at least one reporter covering environment issues (81 reporters were located covering the environment in that region). In the South, of 310 newspapers, 124 had at least one environment reporter covering the environment (131 were located).

Based on current statistics, it would seem the environment beat is not going the way of the labor beat, despite some older journalistic reports to the contrary. Current polls continue to show audiences rate environment news as a priority, according to Willis Duff, a consultant with Audience Research and Development in Dallas, which analyzes television news markets (Duff, 2001). However, even though audience interest in environment coverage and all the categories around it – including fuel efficiencies, species diversity, and pollution – consistently ranks in the top 15 to 30

percent, television news executives place their emphasis on medical reporting, Duff explained.

Making an important observation about environment reporting in the 1980s and early 1990s, Donella Meadows (1991), syndicated columnist and former adjunct professor of environmental studies at Dartmouth University, wrote that “the environment according to the media is a luxury, something beautiful but trivial, not something that supports our lives” (p. 76). Twelve years later in 2003, Tim Wheeler said the attitude continues to prevail among news executives. Wheeler, who supervised the Baltimore Sun’s environment reporting team for many years, said the environment beat is here to stay, but it is “still seen as a frill in too many newsrooms.” He added, “I think it’s importance to well-rounded coverage of environmental issues is inescapable when you really commit to it. An environment reporter has to incorporate not just the science but the politics and the legal dimension and the human side, the human impact of the story, and the business and economic issues involved” (Wheeler, 2003). Like Glenn, when environment stories appear on city, business, or other beats, Wheeler encourages those reporters to do them. Seemingly, environment news can be found on almost every beat.

Historical Perspective

It was journalists crusading for conservation who helped create Yosemite National Park in California, the Boundary Waters wilderness area in northern Minnesota, the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine, the Everglades National Park in Florida, and the C & O Canal park in the District of Columbia and Maryland

(Serrin & Serrin, 2002). It was investigative reporting on the environment beat that introduced us to the concepts of acid rain and global climate change (warming and cooling of the planet), made us think about genetically modified crops and their impact on farmers everywhere as well as ourselves, and heightened awareness of environmental losses brought by urban sprawl.

Even before the EPA came into being in 1970, the environment beat as we know it today was brewing. In 1948, Congress passed the Federal Water Pollution Control Law in response to waste disposal problems – the first law created in the United States in the name of environmental protection. In 1956, the Water Pollution Control Act authorized the first federal money for water treatment plants. Seven years later in 1963 legislators passed the first law to protect air quality: the Clean Air Act, which authorized \$95 million to local, state, and national air pollution control efforts. Two years later in 1965 lawmakers gave the federal government the power to set water standards in the absence of state action when they passed the Water Quality Act. In 1970 when the first Earth Day was celebrated, a revised version of the Clean Air Act was approved that toughened anti-pollution laws but failed to address acid rain and airborne toxic chemicals. Editors knew there would be more news about the environment coming, and that it would be controversial.

Following the first Earth Day, news managers began to recognize the need to hire a full-time environment reporter. Before that, coverage of the environment mostly consisted of conservation writing, that which focused on habitat and open land preservation and all the reasons to do so. Newsrooms didn't have a clear place to categorize stories about pollution. Complex, they touched on health, business, politics,

and later public affairs under a new concept called environmental justice, which concerned, for instance, citing hazardous waste-producing technology in low-income areas with less clout. The term itself – environmental justice – shows the influence of activists on the environment beat. Coined by activists, the term identified a particular cause, such as an effort to prevent citing new incinerators in high-poverty areas rather than wealthier ones.

1969

The mass media and the public until the late 1960s accepted pollution as part of industrial society. This was no accident. Professional public relations specialists working for corporate America actively promoted this viewpoint. They supplied the press with plenty of good-news press releases concerning the successful efforts of corporations that were taking care of pollution problems (Sachsman, 1973, p. 3).

By the late 1960s, the picture had changed. News reporters were getting press releases not only from industry and related sources, but also from government agencies and officials, citizen-action pressure groups, and other institutions, including universities. Richard W. Darrow, president of the Hill and Knowlton public relations company in 1971 called it the Great Ecological Communications War, the war between conflicting public relations sources (Sachsman, 1996, p. 242).

As public officials began to talk about the environment, the mass media began to treat it as a serious government story, and the general public became increasingly aware that important issues were involved. Since the 1960s, government officials and

Chart 1: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS TIMELINE IN THE UNITED STATES: 1845-1991

Year	Milestone
1845	To avoid the waste and destruction of modern life, Henry David Thoreau withdraws to a cabin in the woods, later publishes <i>Walden</i> , a record of his thoughts and observations.
1849	U.S. Department of the Interior is established.
1857	Frederick Law Olmsted commissioned to develop the first great city park, New York's Central Park, introducing landscape architecture in the United States.
1864	George Perkins Marsh publishes <u>Man and nature</u> .
1869	John Wesley Powell leads first party to navigate the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon.
1872	First national park is established in Yellowstone, Wyoming.
1878	<u>Report on the lands of the arid regions of the west</u> by John Wesley Powell is released.
1879	U.S. Geological Survey is formed.
1882	The first hydroelectric plant opens on the Fox River in Wisconsin.
1890	The Census department announces the Frontier boundary, beyond which there were no more than two settlers per square mile.
1891	Yosemite National Park is established; Forest Reserve Act permits federal government to set aside public land as forest preserve (precursor of the national forests).
1892	Sierra Club is founded by John Muir, pioneer in "aesthetic" conservation movement; <u>Animal rights considered in relation to social progress</u> by Henry S. Salt is released.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS TIMELINE IN THE UNITED STATES

Year	Milestone
1895	American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society is founded in response to speed at which industrialization is destroying our natural heritage.
1897	Rise of Progressive Environmentalism, which espouses government intervention in the public interest to offset exploitation of natural resources by private developers.
1898	Cornell offers first college program in forestry; Rivers and Harbors Act bans pollution of navigable waters.
1900	Lacey Act makes it a federal crime to transport illegally killed game animals across state lines.
1902	Bureau of Reclamation is formed, propelling the Federal Land Reclamation program.
1905	National Audubon Society is founded.
1907	Gifford Pinchot is appointed first chief of the U.S. Forest Service.
1908	Grand Canyon is set aside as a national monument under the provisions of the Antiquities Act of 1906; chlorination is first used extensively at United States water treatment plants, producing water 10 times purer than when filtered; President Theodore Roosevelt hosts first Governors' Conference on Conservation.
1913	Hetch Hetchy Valley Dam, to provide water for San Francisco, wins congressional approval after a five-year battle over flooding an area of scenic beauty in Yosemite.
1914	Martha, the last passenger pigeon, dies in the Cincinnati zoo and later becomes a symbol for crusades against species extinction.
1916	National Park Service is established.
1918	Save-the-Redwoods League is created; hunting of migratory birds is restricted by treaty between the United States and Canada.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS TIMELINE IN THE UNITED STATES

Year	Milestone
1920	Mineral Leasing Act regulates mining on federal lands.
1922	Izaak Walton League is organized.
1924	Environmentalism Aldo Leopold wins designation of Gila National Forest, New Mexico, as first extensive wilderness area; shift in goals of American conservation movement occurs with First National Conference on Outdoor Recreation.
1928	Boulder Canyon Project (Hoover Dam) is authorized to provide combined irrigation, electric power, and flood control system for the Arizona-Nevada border.
1930	Chlorofluorocarbons are hailed as safe refrigerants because of their non-toxic and non-combustible properties.
1933	Tennessee Valley Authority is formed to analyze the environmental impact of hydropower projects before developing plans to harness the resources of the Tennessee River; Civilian Conservation Corps employs more than 2 million Americans in forestry, flood control, soil erosion, and beautification projects in an attempt to boost the economy while addressing the needs of the land.
1934	Greatest drought in United States history is recorded; Taylor Grazing Act regulates grazing on federal lands.
1935	Soil Conservation Service is established. Extends federal involvement with erosion control; Wilderness Society is founded to expand and protect the nation's wilderness areas.
1936	National Wildlife Federation is formed; national flood prevention policy is established by Omnibus Flood Control Act.
1940	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service consolidates federal activities in wildlife management.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS TIMELINE IN THE UNITED STATES

Year	Milestone
1946	Creation of U.S. Bureau of Land Management centralizes administration of lands in the public domain; Atomic Energy Commission is created to oversee the development of peaceful and military uses of nuclear power.
1948	Air pollution incident in Donora, Pennsylvania, kills 20 people, and 14,000 become ill.
1959	The St. Lawrence Seaway, a joint Canadian and United States project, is completed, connecting the Atlantic Ocean to the western Great Lakes and providing 9,500 miles of navigable waters.
1961	Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall articulates emerging ideas of humanity's ethical responsibility to preserve the environment as opposed to merely regulating the use of its resources.
1962	<u>Silent Spring</u> , an investigation of the dangers of unchecked pesticide use to the balance of nature, is published by Rachel Carson.
1963	First Clean Air Act authorizes \$95 million to local, state, and national air pollution control efforts; Nuclear Test Ban Treaty between the United States and U.S.S.R. stops atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons.
1964	Wilderness Act creates National Wilderness Preservation System.
1965	Water Quality Act gives the federal government power to set water standards in absence of state action; National Conference on Natural Beauty attacks the "uglification" of urban America and promotes aesthetic rather than economic values.
1966	Eighty die in New York City from air pollution-related causes during a four-day atmospheric inversion.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS TIMELINE IN THE UNITED STATES

Year	Milestone
1967	Environmental Defense Fund is formed to lead effort to save the osprey from DDT.
1969	Oil spill in Santa Barbara, California, fouls beaches and focuses nation on pollution issues; lease sale in Alaska oil fields yields \$900,220,590 in a one-day sale; Greenpeace is created, as Americans and Canadians join forces to protest nuclear bomb testing by the United States; <u>Design with nature</u> by Ian McHarg advocates letting nature set design constraints on human decisions.
1970	The first Earth Day is celebrated on April 22; National Environmental Policy Act passes, requiring every Federal agency to issue an environmental impact statement for any dam, highway, or other large construction project undertaken, regulated, or funded by the Federal government; the Environmental Protection Agency is established to research, monitor, and enforce environmental laws and issues; the Clean Air Act Amends 1963 measure, toughens anti-pollution laws but fails to address acid rain and airborne toxic chemicals; the Natural Resources Defense Council is established as a combination of lawyers and scientists to develop policies of natural resource management.
1972	Use of DDT is phased out in U.S; Federal Water Pollution Control Act (Clean Water Act) is passed, with the goal of restoring polluted waters for recreational use and eliminating discharges of pollutants into navigable waters; representatives of 113 nations gather at the U.N. Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm to develop a plan for international action to protect the world environment; Oregon passes the first bottle-recycling law; U.S. Supreme Court decision supports Sierra Club over Walt Disney Enterprises in legal battle over use of Mineral King Valley, California; Coastal Zone management Act, Federal Environmental Pesticide Control Act, and Ocean Dumping Act pass; The Club of Rome issues <u>The limits of growth</u> , provoking heated debate worldwide.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS TIMELINE IN THE UNITED STATES

Year	Milestone
1973	E.F. Schumacher publishes <u>Small is beautiful</u> ; called the “Magna Carta for Wildlife,” the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is signed by more than 80 nations; in response to CITES, the United States passes broad-based Endangered Species Act, which applies to habitats as well as living things; controversy erupts over protection of threatened snail darter during construction of Tellico Dam in Tennessee, resulting in changes that weaken the Endangered Species Act; Congress approves licensing of 789-mile pipeline from Alaska North Slope oil field to Port of Valdez; Arab oil embargo creates energy crisis in United States.
1974	Safe Drinking Water Act requires EPA to set standards and policies to protect nation’s drinking water.
1975	The last undammed river in Tennessee is dammed; after a 100-year absence, Atlantic salmon return to the Connecticut River to spawn.
1976	National Academy of Sciences reports that chlorofluorocarbon gases from spray cans are damaging the ozone layer; Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) empowers EPA to regulate the disposal and treatment of municipal solid and hazardous wastes.
1977	Department of Energy is created as a cabinet level office.
1978	Love Canal, New York, is evacuated after discovery that it sits on top of a chemical waste dump; rainfall in Wheeling, West Virginia, is measured at a pH of 2, the most acidic yet recorded and 5,000 times more acidic than normal.
1979	Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant in Pennsylvania experiences near-meltdown; <u>Gaia: A new look at life on Earth</u> is published by James E. Lovelock, who proposes that the Earth is a self-regulating entity, unconsciously maintaining the optimal conditions for life.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS TIMELINE IN THE UNITED STATES

Year	Milestone
1980	Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (Superfund) legislation is passed, requiring EPA to supervise and regulate abandoned toxic waste site cleanups; debt-for-nature swap idea is proposed by Thomas E. Lovejoy, whereby nations could convert debt to cash that would then be used to purchase parcels of tropical rainforest to be managed by local conservation groups; <u>Global 2000 report to the President</u> addresses world trends in population growth, natural resource use, and the environment by the end of the century, and calls for international cooperation in solving problems.
1981	Quebec Ministry of the Environment notifies EPA that 60 percent of the sulfur dioxide pollution damaging its air and waters comes from industrial sources in the United States; radical environmental action group EarthFirst! resorts to “ecotage” to gain objectives.
1982	World Resources Institute is founded as an independent research and policy organization to help public and private groups pursue sustainable development.
1983	Interior Secretary James Watt resigns after overseeing an era of increased development of public lands and reduced concern for environmental consequences.
1986	Catastrophic failure of Soviet nuclear power plant in Chernobyl contaminates large areas of northern Europe, mobilizes antinuclear forces, and stimulates the United States to undertake study of its federal nuclear facilities; levels of dioxin 100 times the emergency level are found in town of Times Beach, Missouri, leading to evacuation and buy-out by EPA to allow decontamination.
1987	The <u>Mobro</u> , a Long Island garbage barge, travels 6,000 miles in search of a place to dump its trash, becoming a symbol of the nation’s waste problems; the Montreal Protocol is signed by 24 countries pledging to halve chlorofluorocarbon production and use by 1999, and later amended to require phasing out of CFCs by 1999.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS TIMELINE IN THE UNITED STATES

Year	Milestone
1988	Plastic Pollution Research and Control Act bans ocean dumping of plastic materials; NASA scientist James Hansen warns Congress of global warming problem, says that “greenhouse effect” may increase drought, melt polar ice, and raise sea levels; in response to discovery of widespread radon gas contamination of homes in the United States, EPA study finds that indoor air can be 100 times as polluted as outdoor air; beaches along the East Coast of the United States, Lake Michigan, and lake Erie are closed due to contamination by medical waste washed ashore; Ocean Dumping Ban sets international legislation on dumping of wastes in oceans.
1989	New York Department of Environmental Conservation announces that 25 percent of the lakes and ponds in the Adirondacks are too acidic to support fish; Congress votes to halt timber sales in Alaska’s Tongass National Forest, the last undisturbed rain forest in the United States; Exxon oil tanker Valdez runs aground in Prince William Sound, Alaska, spilling 11 million gallons of oil in one of the world’s most fragile ecosystems.
1990	Congress extends ban on offshore oil drilling to cover 84 million acres off California, Alaska, and the East Coast; United Nations report forecasts that world temperatures could rise 2 degrees Fahrenheit within 35 years because of greenhouse gas emissions, warns that offending emissions must be reduced by 60 percent just to stabilize atmosphere at current level; Clean Air Act amendments include requirements to control the emission of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides into the air.
1991	War in Kuwait emphasizes the United States’ dependence on imported oil and underscores the environmental damages of war; the United States accepts an agreement on Antarctica that prohibits activities relating to mineral resources there, protects native species of flora and fauna, and limits tourism and marine pollution; despite an espoused “no net loss” of wetlands, the Bush administration redefines the degree of standing water necessary for such designation, with a possible result that 10 percent of the 100 million acres could be opened for development.

Source: World Resources Institute 1992 Environmental Almanac

agencies have been directly involved in environmental decision-making, and they have churned out enormous amounts of paper in the form of press releases about the environment (Sachsman, 1973, p. 7). More and more, government officials realized that the environment was more than a fad and that they would have to add actions to their words. As Walter J. Hickel explained: “When I took office in 1969 as Secretary of the Interior, pollution was no longer a joke; this fact was made clear by the nature of my confirmation hearings. The subject was aggravating millions of Americans; frustration and hostility were growing. The nation was desperately looking for leadership, and I decided that we should take the lead” (in Sachsman, 1996, p. 243).

The environment exploded onto the front pages and the airwaves in 1969. Among the stories was the dramatic Santa Barbara Channel-Union Oil leak. That and the flood of conflicting press releases about the environment caused print and broadcast editors to take seriously their own local air and water pollution problems. The environment in 1969 found its way onto the front-page agenda of the mass media for the first time (Sachsman, 1973, p. 2).

In 1969 The New York Times followed other news outlets in creating an environment beat. Following the move were major newspapers across the country. In 1969, Time magazine and the Saturday Review began regular sections about the environment, Look magazine devoted almost an entire issue to what was perceived as the environmental crisis, Life magazine greatly increased its coverage of the topic, and National Geographic offered a 9,000-word article on environmental problems. Author Paul Ehrlich’s book Population Bomb was a best seller, and the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite was presenting an irregular feature called “Can the World be

Saved?” (Rubin and Sachs, 1971, p. 1).

The 1970s

Some newspapers had reporters assigned to cover the environment a couple of days a week at that point. But when the EPA was created in 1970 to research, monitor, and enforce new environmental laws and issues, it needed a full-time watchdog, just as the newly created Department of Homeland Security does now. In this respect, it can be said that the government is indirectly responsible for motivating the creation of the environment beat.

As Chart 1 shows, early laws designed to protect air quality, water quality, prevent pollution, and preserve a certain kind of quality of life needed stronger enforcement, prompting creation of the EPA. With the shadowy background bureaucratic oversight enjoys in this and other countries, it could be deduced that a human factor convincing management to create the environment beat may be that many editors and news managers simply cannot resist a good story. Environment news promised juicy stories filled with intrigue, wrong-doing, and underdogs, the stuff that sells newspapers.

In 1971, the Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel won the first Pulitzer prize for environment reporting. The story focused on environmental problems associated with block strip mining that would have caused irreparable damage to the hill country of northwest North Carolina.

Research conducted in the San Francisco Bay Area in the early 1970s found that public relations efforts significantly influenced coverage of the environment. The

sheer number of press releases was impressive – 11 reporters received 1,347 releases in eight weeks – although what looked like a flood in 1971 appeared quite normal in the 1980s. In 1971, something like 42 percent of press releases about the environment came from government agencies and officials, 23 percent from corporations and industry-related organizations, 17 percent from institutions, including universities, and 17 percent from activist groups (Sachsman, 1996).

In a 12-day content analysis of environmental coverage in 25 of the Bay Area media, government sources were the bases of information most often identified within the stories. Sources from institutions like universities, corporations, and activist groups also were regularly identified, while industry-related groups were rarely named (Sachsman, 1976). With more than 40 percent of the press releases in that study coming from the government, environment stories were viewed as government stories also (Sachsman, 1996).

By 1974 about half a dozen reporters were assigned full-time to the environment beat, said Tom Horton, one of the first. In a personal interview with the author (Horton, 2003), he explained that he initially covered the environment three days a week and consumer news the other two for the Baltimore Sun before becoming its first full-time environment reporter that year. He remembers having few counterparts. At The New York Times was Gladwin Hill. At the Houston Post was Harold Scarlett (Palen, 1999, p. 157). The Los Angeles Times and the Pittsburgh Press also had full-time reporters. Speculation is that the Pittsburgh Press had the first full-time environment reporter in the country because of abundant industrial pollution in Allegheny County, where the city is located. The EPA ranked the county number 20

in its 1990 list of regions where the most cancer-causing chemicals could be found in soil and water in the United States (World Resources Institute, 1991).

Congress passed the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1974 to require the EPA to set standards and policies to protect the nation's drinking water. In 1976 the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act empowered the EPA to regulate the disposal and treatment of municipal solid and hazardous wastes, such as petroleum leaking from fuel storage tanks under gas stations.

Reporters working environment stories were busy. In 1978 reputations were made when a couple of general assignment reporters in the United States and Canada working around Niagara Falls told the world plainly about something called dioxin, a deadly chemical with a half-life longer than recorded civilization, and a chemical that since has become a household word. Those reporters said dioxin was suspected of causing cancer and other ailments in school children and their families in Love Canal, New York. It was the first time the notion of a cancer cluster was articulated to the public. The story broke nationally. Investigative reporters got perhaps their first taste of the environment beat. The new kid in town came of age when it was discovered that the town of Love Canal was built on a toxic waste dump.

The 1980s

In the end, Love Canal was evacuated and became a modern-day ghost town. The case prompted creation of the Comprehensive Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (Superfund) in 1980 to give the EPA the authority to supervise and regulate abandoned toxic waste site cleanups and force big polluters to pay a high tax

for contaminating the land, water, and air, money that would be used to later clean up the toxic mess created. In 1979, a second Pulitzer prize was granted for environment reporting.

Once the concept of an environment reporter caught on, pollution stories began to relate science and business and health and public policy and lifestyles to each other in a way never before conceived. Environment reporters put them together to provide context for the public, to help them think about their changing communities and the evolving world. In so doing they put before the public a new conversation, and opened it for discussion.

Stories began to break about damage to the environment from farming; chemicals in soil, water, the air; and environmental problems in Florida. In 1986 environment reporters explained the impact of irradiation after a Soviet nuclear power plant in Chernobyl failed and consequently contaminated large sections of Northern Europe for many lifetimes. That same year, Times Beach, Missouri was evacuated and turned into another modern-day ghost town after dioxin was sprayed on dirt roads there to keep the dust down.

In 1989 the Exxon oil tanker Valdez ran aground in Prince William Sound, Alaska, spilling 11 million gallons of oil in one of the world's most fragile ecosystems. The incident became a marker for the few environment reporters working in television at that point: for the first time, the world saw what an environmental holocaust looked like.

The 1990s

The environment beat remained subordinate to priorities of economic growth and performance nonetheless, and news organizations were not inclined to do anything to challenge that order (see Anderson, 1997; Chapman et al., 1997; Hansen, 1993b; Howenstine, 1987; and Linné, 1991). Cutlip's assertion in 1962 that public relations practitioners are responsible for a significant number of the stories carried by the media appeared to be true during the 1990s, in particular for complex stories such as those about the environment (Sachsman, 1996, p. 253).

The literature provides that something resembling an "ecological conscience" began penetrating newsrooms in the United States in the early 1980s (Allan, Adam, and Carter, 2000, p. 5). Quoting one environment reporter without disclosing the medium in which the person is working, Schoenfield (1980) reveals one dilemma of the beat at the time, one that continued to surface on the SEJ listserv in the mid-1990s:

Do you give readers what they should know or something they will read? The challenge of the environmental beat is to convey a sense of immediacy and pertinence, usually by telling the story in human terms. ...I try to find the human element while writing about an increasingly complex world of bewildering facts and figures. Every beat needs that, but this beat demands it. (p. 462)

This prioritizing of the human element at the time shaped what got reported and how, placing emphasis on the extraordinary at the expense of the ordinary. By 1990, however, environment stories had become predictable, wrote Tom Meersman (1990), environment reporter for the Minneapolis Star-Tribune and a volunteer for this study. "Editors assign the same old follow-up anniversary stories about Three-Mile Island (with the requisite local angle, of course), but who is reporting about the costs

of decommissioning all of those local nuclear power plants within the next decade or two, to say nothing of the long-term disposal problems? It's not so much what we are covering, but what we are not reporting, that needs attention," he wrote.

The New Century

The deeper journalism got into the new century, the more a business model emerged allowing news outlets to get financial returns from their Internet Web sites created in the 1990s. In addition to sending press releases to the news media, corporations like General Electric (GE), which owns the most expensive Superfund site in the country – on the Hudson River – put up its own Web site that to the untrained eye looks like it belongs to an activist group with a special interest in how to clean-up the Hudson River in New York State. Indeed, GE does have a special interest in that cleanup project as it is responsible for most if not all of the pollution there.

In news and feature stories tailored for the Web, environment reporters have been able to combine elements of television, radio, and print reporting as well as literary journalism into a single report. Glenn, senior producer for the business, health, science and technology unit at ABCnews.com, stressed that telling the story using links, polls, photos, and an Internet journal – the latest component of investigative reporting, one that makes the literary journalism style of personal narrative a new component of investigative reporting – enhances the telling thereby giving the story more impact. A more detailed description of personal narrative as a component of investigative reporting and the role it can play is provided by Sarasota Herald-Tribune reporter Tom Bayles in Appendix B under his name.

In The environment reporters of New England, the academic research team of Sachsman, Simon, and Valenti (2001) indicated a shift away from Detjen's 1996 findings. The research team's study revealed that environment reporters in New England were satisfied with their jobs even though they admitted to having less freedom than ever before in deciding which aspects of their news stories should be emphasized. The report also brought into view a previously undocumented trend: editors were becoming more assertive about generating environment stories themselves. Responding to the finding, Wheeler said, "The hope and the future lies with editors playing a bigger role in dictating environmental coverage as well as other coverage" (Wheeler, 2001).

Lack of autonomy was not unique to coverage of the environment in 2000, however. It was the midst of an era of downsizing, when editors were required to do more with less. Consequently, editors had become much more assertive in dictating the stories that reporters would work on, how those stories would be written, and when those stories would run. To get more out of the existing people, Wheeler explained, editors pushed them harder, and programmed them more. In defense, one environment reporter, MariAn Brown Milchman, an investigative reporter for the Connecticut Post who was interviewed for the New England study, bombarded her editors with story ideas "so the editors don't have a chance to do any of their own (stories)," she said as a panel member during a session at the Association of Educators in Journalism and Mass Communication conference in Washington, D.C. in 2001. Milchman saw it as a way of protecting her territory.

The Sachsman, et al. studies found that environment reporters today are

newsroom elders, or veteran journalists. In New England they have an average of 15 years in journalism compared to 13 years in the Mountain West. The median age for environment reporters in both regions is 45, compared with 36 for all journalists in the United States in 1992 (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996). The studies found that 46 percent of New England environment reporters and 28 percent of environment reporters in the Mountain West region, say their peers are “too green,” indicating a struggle among environment reporters themselves to come to terms with what constitutes balance, objectivity, and advocacy. In New England, only 18 percent of environment reporters compared with 31 percent of their counterparts in the Mountain West region spend between 67 percent and 100 percent of their time covering the environment.

Indicating that the environment beat offers reporters more than just a job in journalism, Valenti contends that environment reporters “tend to be happier than other reporters,” according to Rogers (2002). She told Rogers, “I am astonished at how satisfied these reporters are with their beat, with what they do, in spite of all the pressure that is out there, the low salaries, the corporate pressures, the shrinking autonomy. These are people who believe that their editors and readers value what they do. They know in their gut these are important stories that need to be told. The challenge is so compelling. And things change because of their writing.”

Reporting Risk

In the early 1970s, “environmental communication” was about environmental news sources and their links to environment reporters. It was about activists and government officials, corporations and scientific studies, and how stories about the

environment were presented to reporters and how they were subsequently conveyed through the mass media to the general public. But in the 1980s a new concept known as risk communication became important as environment stories began to become linked to health concerns (Sachsman, 1996, p. 248).

The term “risk communication” refers to the notion of explaining risk and people’s perceptions of risk in a certain way, one that may perhaps reduce or avoid panic. Many environment reporters bristle at the term, believing it smacks of corporate spin. Risk communication research provides that one in 10 million can seem like a big number and that people tend to want absolute protection from an explosion at a nuclear power facility and from getting cancer from toxic waste dumps. But it also says that many of us are willing to take the chance of exposing ourselves to pesticides in order to have a perfect lawn (Sachsman, 1996, p. 249).

Mass media research about environment stories in the early 1980s centered on the news media’s priority for providing spectacular and sensational reports about natural disasters, including earthquakes, hurricanes, drought or floods. Such stories consistently were preferred by news organizations over everyday hazards such as pesticide-dependent farming, exposure to asbestos dust, lead in gasoline, or sunbathing (Allan, Adam, and Carter, 2000, p. 6). Greenberg et al. (1989a) concluded that in network television in the United States,

the disproportionate coverage – from the scientific perspective on risk – of chemical incidents, earthquakes, and aeroplane accidents probably reinforced the public’s well-documented tendency to overestimate sudden and violent risks and underestimate chronic ones. (p. 276)

Those deficiencies in environment news at the time can be attributed to the journalistic

search for the novel and the unusual, for dramatically compelling “news pegs” confinable within episodic narratives (Allan, Adam, and Carter, 2000, p. 7). As such, the approach to reporting accidental leaks or spills does not offer a thorough accounting of the risk to the public over time. Consequently, news stories focusing solely on environmental crises showed reporters on the beat that even though they were getting news out to their audiences about a specific event-oriented environmental catastrophe, there was much more the public needed to know to understand what it meant to *them*. Wilkins and Patterson (1990) documented how event-driven environment reporting undermines and destroys meaning for news audiences:

While risk analysis indicates that not all risks are alike, news media coverage of a variety of hazards and disasters tends to follow predictable patterns. Neither the unpredictability nor the high degree of complexity of hazards fits neatly into a newsgathering process that places a high priority on meeting deadlines. Therefore, news about hazards often is molded to the medium. A day-long debate about the location of a toxic dump is reduced to 30-second ‘sound bites’ from each side and footage about angry demonstrators staging ‘pseudo-events’ for the benefit of the cameras. In the end, the audience is *entertained* by the hazard without being *informed about it*. (p. 13)

In the 1980s, the need for specialized environment reporters remained clear, but it no longer appeared that the problems in environmental risk coverage would be solved if the number of specialists was doubled or even quadrupled. The environment had become a story for virtually every local beat and general assignment reporter, and nothing short of training all of them to be environmental specialists would do the trick. Further, many editors also needed environmental training, as evidenced by McGeachy’s 1989 study of three general audience magazines. Her study found that only 0.9 percent of their pages addressed the environment in 1986 (Sachsman, 1996, p. 252).

After SEJ

In 1989, the Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) was formed to improve the quality of environment reporting. As Palen (1999) writes, its development was

situated at the intersection of two areas of scholarly research: (1) the rise of environmental journalism as a specialty field, and (2) the development of the ideal of objectivity in American journalism. ...Because environmentalism itself was considered by some to be a concern of 'activists,' coverage of it raised questions about the professionalism of reporters. Indeed, as Lewenstein (1990, p. 3) has argued in an unpublished paper, it is in the specialty areas like sports and science journalism that independence of sources, conflict of interest, commitment to journalistic ideals, and other similar issues come under the most pressure. (p. 157)

Following the creation of SEJ, an increase can be seen in the number of Pulitzer Prizes awarded for reporting about the environment, as evidenced in Chart 2. Chart 3 shows a list of Pulitzer Prize finalists for reporting about the environment.

Attraction to Environment Reporting: Advocacy?

As explained in Chapter 1, independence from vested interests was not always considered a journalistic virtue in the United States. The 1830s saw a rise in newspapers supported by advertising as a means to mass circulate and become independent from political party sponsorship. That stirring reinforced the ideal of objectivity, which was supported by new developments in technology, including the introduction of the telegraph and the rise of press associations. A rise in confidence in science spread throughout the culture in the United States, causing social change. The ideal sparked a movement toward professionalism of journalists, as discussed.

By the 1920s, the press in the United States had institutionalized the ideal of the journalist as an independent reporter of facts kept separate from values and uninfluenced by vested interests and by the reporter's own beliefs and attitudes (Palen, 1999, p. 158).

But beginning in the 1960s, the ideal of objectivity was increasingly questioned by scholars and journalists. Within SEJ, the debate about objectivity is perennial. Do most environmental journalists get into the field because they are environmentalists? If so, to what extent does that affect their work? Should they be advocates because of the seriousness of the threat of environmental degradation? Are they advocates, regardless of personal belief, simply by virtue of placing environmental issues on the agenda? These questions were debated repeatedly in SEJournal (SEJ's newsletter), at conventions, and online. However, after an early false start toward evaluating the objectivity of members' reporting, SEJ backed away from trying to use membership policy to police advocacy arising from journalists' personal beliefs. As far as SEJ was concerned, its members were free to engage in – or not engage in – advocacy journalism. What the members could not do was accept payment for advocacy from any party except their media employers (Palen, 1999, p. 158). SEJ defined objectivity by its ideal: separation of work from personal beliefs, and independence from vested interests.

All along, the Pulitzer prizes kept coming. For public service reporting. For national reporting. For editorial writing. For investigative reporting. For explanatory journalism.

Perceptions of Advocacy on the Environment Beat

The New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language defines an advocate as one who pleads the cause of another, one who defends, vindicates or espouses a cause by argument, an intercessor. Frome (1998) defines advocacy journalism as "open, honest journalism, without closed doors. It serves the interest of God-given nature and humanity rather than those who exploit and profit from them. It centers on the integrity and creativity of the writer" (p. xii).

As the beat evolved, conservation and environment reporters were grouped together. However, they were sometimes treated differently. My personal story is a case in point.

In 1998 I joined Pioneer Press, a chain of weekly newspapers in Chicago's Northern suburbs with a circulation of about 250,000. Although I had been reporting about the environment for almost 10 years at that point, I was hired as the education reporter for 16 school districts in Lake County, Illinois. Once there I sought environment stories involving pollution in my spare time, only to learn the bureau chief didn't think I was qualified to cover the environment because I did not have a background in science. The chain already had one environment reporter, who wrote exclusively about conservation.

That reporter and I worked in the same bureau. She had recently served as president of the Chicago chapter of the Audubon Society while covering conservation issues for the newspaper chain. Her knowledge of birds is admirable, and her grasp of habitat needs for birds and other wild creatures more than competent. She has authored a book about birds, and is a veteran conservation reporter. Rarely, if ever,

Chart 2:

PULITZER PRIZE WINNERS FOR REPORTING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT

Year	Category	Description
1971	Public Service	<u>Winston-Salem (N.C.) Journal and Sentinel</u> . For coverage of environmental problems, as exemplified by a successful campaign to block strip mining operation that would have caused irreparable damage to the hill country of Northwest North Carolina.
1979	National Reporting	James Risser of <u>Des Moines Register</u> . For a series on farming damage to the environment.
1992	Public Service Explanatory Journalism	<u>Sacramento (Calif.) Bee</u> . For “The Sierra in Peril,” reporting by Tom Knudson that examined environmental threats and damage to the Sierra Nevada mountain range in California. James O’Byrne, Mark Schleifstein, and G. Andrew Boyd of <u>The Times-Picayune</u> , New Orleans, La. For “Louisiana in Peril,” articles about the toxic waste and pollution that threaten the future of the state.
1996	Public Service Editorial Writing	<u>News & Observer</u> , Raleigh, N.C. For the work of Melanie Sill, Pat Stith, and Joby Warrick on the environmental and health risks of waste disposal systems used in North Carolina’s growing hog industry. Robert B. Semple, Jr. of <u>The New York Times</u> . For his editorials on environmental issues.
1998	Investigative Reporting	Gary Cohn and Will Englund of <u>The Baltimore Sun</u> . For their compelling series on the international shipbreaking industry, that revealed the dangers posed to workers and the environment when discarded ships are dismantled.

Source: The Pulitzer Prizes (online)

Chart 3:

PULITZER PRIZE FINALISTS FOR REPORTING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT

Year	Category	Description
1980	National Reporting	Staff of the <u>Los Angeles Times</u> for its series on chemicals in the environment, “Poisoning of America.”
1985	Editorial Writing	Jane Healy of <u>The Orlando Sentinel</u> for her editorials on Florida’s environmental problems.
1994	Explanatory Journalism	Staff of <u>Newsday</u> , Long Island, NY for its exhaustive investigation of breast cancer in the community, which included a probe of the environmental factors that may contribute to its spread.
	Feature Photography	Stan Grossfeld of <u>Boston Globe</u> for “The Exhausted Earth,” a year-long series depicting the social, medical, and environmental crises caused by the depletion of natural resources.
1998	Beat Reporting	Keith Bradshaw of <u>The New York Times</u> for his reporting that disclosed safety and environmental problems posed by sport utility vehicles and other light trucks.
1999	National Reporting	Staff of <u>The Times-Picayune</u> , New Orleans, LA for a revealing series on the destruction of housing and the threat to the environment posed by the Formosan termite.
2000	Breaking News Reporting	Staff of <u>The Oregonian</u> . For its comprehensive coverage of an environmental disaster created when a cargo ship carrying heavy fuels ran aground and broke apart, and how official agencies failed to contain the damage.
2004	Investigative Reporting	David Ottaway and Joe Stephens of <u>The Washington Post</u> for their detailed stories revealing dubious practices by The Nature Conservancy that produced sweeping reforms.

Source: The Pulitzer Prizes (online)

does she report about pollution matters, except as they impact conservation efforts. Although news management at all levels throughout the chain was aware of her association with an organization on which she reports, that journalist was never asked to sever her relations with the group nor was she reassigned to a different beat. Her association and status with the Audubon Society was viewed by management as an asset rather than a conflict of interest. This case makes me wonder whether a different standard of tolerance for advocacy on the environment beat exists when the subject is conservation. While a worthwhile question, I have left it for future research.

Journalists and activists and former journalists, laypeople and bloggers all voice their opinions about advocacy in journalism, and what counts as advocacy. Among environment reporters, it has been a pet topic. The first airing in print of the debate about advocacy and environment news appeared in the Gannett Center Journal in the summer of 1990. SEJ was barely a year old. Its first issue of SEJournal came out that December with two articles on the subject, one by Meersman and the other promoting LaMay and Dennis (1991), which largely reprinted the Gannett Center Journal articles.

Meersman lauded contributions the alternative press and advocacy journalists made to discussions about environmental issues. They provide a major service because, he said, quoting Rolling Stone contributing editor Mark Hertsgaard, “they ventilate issues in ways that force the major press to consider them,” (Meersman, 1990), much like Ryan’s view of the value of advocacy journalism to society, and its place in mass media. The debate about advocacy in journalism at that point centered on one point, Meersman said: “When should a reporter simply present opposing

arguments, and when should he or she feel confident enough to take the story a step further to suggest which of the claims seems to have more merit?”

At the time, the debate about advocacy journalism focused on how stories were presented. Meersman argued that some stories warrant conclusions while others do not. A more important element, he said, is what stories are chosen. In taking a stand, the Minneapolis Star-Tribune environment reporter said,

I don't believe that polluters should have the right to pollute until proven guilty, but I don't think they should be tried in the media either – challenged, yes, but not convicted. I don't believe that pollution control officials or health experts or natural resource managers always know enough or have the time to protect the environment adequately, but I don't think the alternatives are to fire them all or to shut down the industries and businesses they are charged with regulating. (p. 6)

Hamilton (1991) argues in favor of letting reporters advocate for the environment because, “environmental issues are too important for journalists not to live up to their pesky skepticism. They have to ask ‘so what’ questions, even when doing so seems rank heresy,” said the senior World Bank public affairs official and former correspondent.

Meadows writes that as a columnist she does her best to remember that the purpose of her writing is to “search for truth and to empower others to do the same. It is not to judge, accuse or rob anyone of dignity or self-respect” (Meadows, 1991). Coordinator for International Network of Resource Information in 1991 but speaking as a columnist, Meadows said,

I go out of my way to present opposing views, I don't confuse willful ignorance with real uncertainty, and I don't equate the viewpoint of a perpetrator with that of a victim. The voice of the Plum Creek Timber Company just is not credible when it comes to old-growth forest harvesting rates. The nuclear power industry has earned no points for accuracy and many

for deliberate deception. The pesticide industry is not an unbiased observer on pesticide safety. The people who defend the spotted owls, the safety of their neighborhoods and the health of their children are being selfish, too, in a way, but theirs is a broader selfishness, speaking for much larger community interests than profit-making. They deserve more than equal media respect, space and time. (p. 78)

Gottlieb (1991) criticized environment reporters for turning to environmental groups for the “environmental” point of view, which he said ignores the growing, more populist undercurrent of the environmental movement. In so doing, reporters covering the environment do not distinguish differences among the professional “environmental” groups, he wrote. Consequently, they do not see how the “dynamism of the less visible movements has affected these groups” (p. 53).

Dennis (1991) writes that the debate among environment reporters about advocacy and objectivity fuels news executives’ suspicions, “who are always on the lookout for self-serving special interests and for reporters who have lost their objectivity.” He writes,

As one who believes that objectivity is more an ideological icon in our media than an operational reality, I still recognize how deep the passions on this topic go. In earlier decades, reporters argued that human rights were so important that they could not and should not be impartial about the civil rights struggle. More recently, some newspapers and television stations have fashioned themselves as warriors in the war on drugs and have not only covered the story, but helped develop information campaigns to promote drug-free schools, for example.

However worthy the issue or cause, the goal of marshalling and shaping public opinion causes nervousness among journalists and media owners who think such advocacy could compromise the essential independence and integrity of the press. ...The environment is such a compelling concern that it is hard to imagine that there isn’t...nearly universal support for it. (p. 64)

Once again, Teya Ryan brought this simple question to the debate: “Let me first submit to you that, with respect to the environment, advocacy journalism is a

misnomer. Think a minute: Who do you know who is against the environment?” (Ryan, 1991). William Coughlin (1991), editor of the Washington Daily News in North Carolina, opposed Ryan. “Leave the crusading to the Knights Templar. You’d be better off if you keep in mind that your job is reporting, not crusading. As Newsweek said recently in regard to the savings and loan crisis, ‘In the end, voters have their own responsibility. The press can lead the horse to water. The horse has to decide whether to drink.’” (Coughlin, 1991)

Technology and environmental issue writer for the Wall Street Journal, Amal Jumar Naj, in 1991 said, “Another problem with advocacy journalism is that it assumes the media’s ability to judge scientific evidence. We as journalists simply aren’t in a position to know with certainty whether the scientific evidence that forms the basis of many environmental concerns is valid. The scientists themselves don’t know.”

Greenies or SPRIDJ?

In January of 1998, I was encouraging my editor at The Brownfields Report, Steve Kidney, to become a member of SEJ. But he did not want to join. Looking at the Spring 1997 issue of SEJournal, he said, “These articles look like they were written by a bunch of greenies. I don’t want to be associated with environmental advocates.” He specifically cited a section in SEJournal titled “The Green Beat.” I took his remark to the SEJ listserv that spring and learned that several members were annoyed by co-workers who labeled them as environmentalists no matter what they wrote, just because they cover the beat.

One daily newspaper reporter covering the environment for the Kansas City Star, Mike Mansur, said at the time he carried two business cards because he feared industry representatives would think he sided with environmental groups if he was identified as an environmental reporter. So one card read, “staff writer” while another read, “environmental reporter.” Mansur, in a personal interview in September 2003, said things have changed since then, that he hasn’t carried two cards for a while, seeming to indicate a maturing of acceptance for reporting about the environment.

Another member, Randy Edwards, who in 1998 was covering the environment for the Columbus Dispatch, reported that when he took over the environment beat many of his colleagues greeted him with comments like, “Saving the environment today?” Edwards wrote on the listserv, “Apparently it’s acceptable to advocate on behalf of good government or against corruption, but if the stories with impact lead to tougher environmental laws or protection of a valuable natural resource, suddenly the reporter is a ‘flannel-clad tree-hugger,’ (an editor’s phrase, not mine),” (Edwards, 1998). Perhaps all the teasing is merely a rite of passage, another reporter posted. Since environment reporters are “the new kids on the block, they’re just not allowed certain givens afforded established beats,” wrote David Newport, editor and publisher of Environment 21 magazine and EnviroWorld Daily News Service at the time.

By December of 1998, a decision was made to change the SEJournal section name to “The Beat” from “The Green Beat.” An announcement was made on the listserv, and the discussion of advocacy came up again. Several saw the change as unwarranted while others, like veteran multimedia reporter David Helvarg, who volunteered to participate in this study, saw it as small but mighty. He commented on

the listserv,

...[S]ince I also know several editors and executive producers who confuse the term environment with environmentalist (also analysis with advocacy, and ‘thanks for doing a good job’ with ‘I’m going to have to pay him more’), I suggest we ease their troubled souls and make ourselves more accessible by changing the name Society of Environmental Journalists to Society of Pollution, Resources and Industrial Development Journalists. Admittedly SPRIDJ (pronounced ‘Spridge’) may not be as eloquent sounding as SEJ (pronounced S-E-J), but if it means even one more editor instead of saying, ‘that sounds biased, I don’t want to run it,’ says, ‘that seems fair and balanced, but I don’t have room to run it, ‘cause it’s Monica’s birthday,’ it will have been worth it. (Helvarg, 1998)

Going Native

Among the environment reporters moved off the beat for “going native,” that is, seeming to show a leaning toward one position over another, are three investigative reporters with admirable reputations who were referred to at the beginning of this chapter. All three were reassigned under circumstances seeming to indicate that newsroom management feared costly lawsuits and cuts in advertising revenues in retaliation for the stories published. The charge used to justify the reassignments was alleged advocacy on the part of the reporters.

Detailed in Green Ink, author Frome (1998) tells of Phillip Shabecoff, Kathie Durbin, and Richard Manning, among others. Shabecoff’s story is legend among early members of the Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ). What gives it impact is that his is not an isolated case. I have heard many others like it, and read similar accounts during the early years of the SEJ listserv, an online forum where members discuss environment reporting, tap each other for sources, and alert each other to news, reports, and programs about the environment to help them do a better job.

Shabecoff told Frome he was taken off the beat not because he was accused of advocacy, but because his coverage was considered biased in favor of the environment. He argued that what environment reporters *do* is cover the debate about how to protect the environment. The overriding concern is to get below the surface.

After working 32 years as a reporter for The New York Times, the last 14 covering environment stories from Washington, D.C. where he turned up major stories, Shabecoff got a surprise. As a foreign correspondent in Southeast Asia for the paper, Shabecoff was accustomed to having to determine what was true and what was false based on his research and interviews. One day in the nation's capitol his editors told him he was "ahead of the curve," stale, biased, *too close to environmentalists*. They transferred him to covering the Internal Revenue Service. He quit (Frome, 1998, p. 31), and established Greenwire, a newsletter acting as a kind of clipping service of environment stories published and aired throughout the country by news outlets. It quickly became a popular tipsheet among reporters covering the environment. Eventually Shabecoff began authoring books about the environment. Free to be an activist, he explicitly charts a new course for the environmental movement in his current book.

In 1989, Durbin was covering drugs, gangs, and minority affairs for The Oregonian in Portland. When asked to team on an investigative report about the environment with Paul Koberstein, she welcomed the opportunity. According to Frome (1996), the two studied forests along the West Coast and interviewed many people for a six-part series to run in 1990. After it did, an angry 80-page letter arrived from a group of timber corporations specifically complaining about Durbin. She

explained to Frome,

I was attacked by the Oregon Lands Coalition, a wise-use group, which urged its members to call the Oregonian and tell the editors they were sick of Kathie Durbin's lies. My editors were nervous, but our report was accurate and overdue. ...In the process of this trial by fire I learned to be discreet about my own passionate feelings for the forest. Of course I belong to no environmental groups. I don't go to environmentalists' parties. My job is too important to me to take any chances. And I take seriously my responsibility to chronicle the struggle from all sides. I'm a professional journalist. I cannot be a causist. (pp. 30-31)

Ultimately, Durbin was relieved of covering stories about the environment and assigned elsewhere.

Frome also tells the story of Richard Manning, an investigative reporter for Missoula, Montana's daily newspaper The Missoulian, who researched and wrote a compelling series on the exploitation of Montana forests. The timber industry complained. Manning heard about it from his editor, who called to reassign him. As quoted in Frome (1998), Manning was told he had lost his objectivity. "They alleged I was too inclined to write what the environmentalists had to say and not inclined to write what the loggers had to say. They were wrong, but they and the system that has molded them are managed within the corporate system, groomed, pruned, and thinned just like corporate trees" (p. 30).

All three of the reporters – Manning, Durbin, and Shabecoff – wrote investigative stories about the environment that followed the strict rules of a journalism of verification. Still they were accused of advocacy. Therefore, the literature makes it seem impossible to produce an investigative story on the environment that could not be accused of advocacy on some level.

At a plenary session in New Orleans at the SEJ conference in September 2003,

CNN executive producer Peter Dykstra, a pioneer in environment reporting on television, described environment reporting and the journalist's responsibility to it in very serious terms. He said, "It can be done right, it can be done wrong. It can be done theatrically. But we're in the business, when it comes to reporting, of saving lives. It's not an issue of advocacy. It's an issue of humanity."

One never hears charges that police reporters are advocates because it is universally accepted that crime is bad. Police are accepted as part of the ruling structure because they protect society against chaos, which generally is perceived as good. Similarly, it is true that school board reporting is allowed to reflect the implicit assumption that education is good. Business writers presume that business and jobs serve the public interest, and down the line.

Above all others, environment reporters have been perceived as advocates – by their editors, other reporters, and some of their sources. But not often by their audiences. Really, most environment reporters are just trying to get answers to questions like, "How clean is clean?"

In early environment reports, it was a matter of showing how murky or clear the water was, for instance. But environment reports today are rarely that simple. Water, researchers now know, may be opaque or clear due to chemical contamination. In my experience, while rafting down a river in Virginia I saw part of the river suddenly become so clear I could see to the bottom. It was under a bridge where a pipe was channeling run-off from somewhere into the river. When I came home I asked some of my sources at the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Federation, and elsewhere why the water was so clear at that point, why there were not any weeds

or algae, and why the fish avoided that spot. I was told the contaminants in the run-off prevented plants and the usual aquatic organisms from growing there, that the clearness of the water made it too hot for fish and frogs and such to go in there, and that they also avoided it because there was no place for them to hide from predators in the clear water. There may be other reasons as well.

In 1966 when reporters Casey Bukro and Bill Jones of the Chicago Tribune set out to show that lakes across the country once alive with fish and other creatures “were becoming cesspools of household sewage and factory slop,” (Bowman, 1996) they didn’t need a chemist to verify the contamination. After deciding words alone would not suffice to show how bad the water was, Jones scooped up a handful of the hideous oily scum in the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal floating at the entry to Lake Michigan, and Bukro snapped a picture (p. 5). What people saw in the newspaper was black slime and grime coating Jones’ flesh. That became their test for clean water, Bukro told Bowman. The two were doing what they were paid to do: be skeptical. They were told something and questioned it. They found a problem, and revealed it to their readers. Showing the problem is a reporter’s duty. That is not advocacy.

Investigative Reporting and Environment News

Editors Greenwald and Bernt (2000) address environment reporting only generally and very briefly in The Big Chill: Reporting in the Current Media Environment, devoting only one paragraph to investigative reporting about the environment. Landers (1996) writes that in every investigative news story about the environment there are underlying issues to understand, such as risk assessment,

statistics and scientific research. Landers notes the need to navigate the EPA electronically, by phone and in person, and also highlights “two fruitful but often overlooked avenues of investigation in environmental journalism: following the money and following the science” (p. 2).

In journalistic parlance, “follow the money” refers to tracking a paper trail that may lead to money collected by someone with an ulterior motive. For instance, “soft money” in political campaigns, which has been suspected of influencing decision-making toward a special interest. “Follow the science” is a turn of that phrase and refers to the tracking of changes in scientific thought about a given concern, such as air pollution or genetic modification of seeds and crops, and reporting those changes in context.

For instance, a story about pollution’s toll on disease immunity, gathered and written by Marla Cone of the Los Angeles Times, tracks an unfolding tale of ecological problems affecting everything from beluga whales to Arizonians. It is an example of what “following the science” yields for an investigative reporter on a story concerning the environment. Similarly, Jim Lynch and Karen Dorn Steele of The Spokesman-Review in Spokane, Washington, gathered and wrote an investigative story in the “follow the money” category. The series, entitled, “Wasteland,” follows budgets and audits to reveal what is happening to taxpayer dollars in the nation’s largest nuclear waste cleanup as of 1996: the lethal brew of nuclear wastes dumped at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation (See Appendix A).

Of People, Politics, Power and Events

Is air quality improving? Is air pollution still a major problem? Is America's drinking water safe? Is it unsafe? Is ocean pollution manageable? Is ocean pollution a serious problem? How serious are air and water pollution?

Stories on the environment beat are broad and far-reaching. That is why Houston, Brussese, and Weinberg (2002) suggest singling out one aspect of a larger issue when searching for something to investigate when it comes to the environment. For instance when considering air pollution, think in terms of acid rain, depletion of the ozone layer, endangered airborne species, etc., they recommend.

While good suggestions, I expected more from the backbone of Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE), the profession's premiere organization for improving this genre in journalism. The effort from Houston, Brussese, and Weinberg, all leaders of IRE who through their efforts have brought up some of the most revered investigative reporters and editors in the business today, had little to add six years after Landers published the only handbook for investigative environmental reporting in existence today, the copyright of which is held by IRE. They offered that "investigating environmental issues requires an understanding of technical and scientific matters that most journalists lack" (p. 488). At this point in environment reporting, they are stating something that was true in the past, but just a sliver of what is true in the present.

As noted in Kriz (2002), several transformations have occurred in the 30 years since the environment beat surfaced. She writes, "Sure, editors are still interested in media investigations proving that corporations are dumping toxic chemicals into rivers. But thanks to state and national laws, many of the most acute environmental

problems...have been alleviated” (p. 47). As progress was made against the highest profile environmental problems, however, reporters on the beat found themselves in mire well beyond scientific matters. Kriz explains,

[S]cientists have unmasked more complex environmental headaches that are far harder to solve – and to write about. Some of today’s worst water quality problems, for example, are caused by polluted runoff from farms and cities and require extensive education and financial assistance to solve.

To understand such complexities, environment beat reporters need to become experts on – or at least willing to be students of – science, government policy, economics, business practices, health impacts, and civil rights issues. Writers must analyze the tradeoffs between a community’s economic and environmental needs, examine regional planning issues that impact suburban sprawl, and delve into the racial and cultural problems that result when polluting facilities locate in low-income neighborhoods.

Environment reporters also end up being arbiters of competing science, a difficult dilemma at a time when the Bush administration’s scientific statements and policies are at odds with most of the other industrialized nations on such things as global warming and genetically modified foods. Since Sept. 11, I’ve also had to become an instant expert on the national security problems facing nuclear power plants and chemical manufacturing facilities. (pp. 47-48)

In considering Kriz’s perspective, she seems to say that training investigative reporters in how to work an environment story does not seem to involve process as much as it does scope, a point not mentioned in the literature. However, the research contained herein demonstrates the need to focus on process as well. The IRE team does offer a review of the kinds of sources all environment reporters use at one time or another, which may also be viewed as a list of places to begin digging for documents when attempting an investigative report involving the environment.

Investigative stories involving the environment tend to involve several types of investigative reporting all mixed together. There is much need for investigative stories showing how pieces of the puzzle fit together – an investigative effort dedicated to making sense out of something as there is for those exposing wrongdoing. Muckrakers

of the past, such as George Seldes and I.F. Stone, did not produce analysis or stories that merely provided context. Their work contained strong viewpoint. In their day, analysis was something found on the editorial and opinion pages. Also, global context was not a necessary component of their reports because people generally did not have a concept of global environmental impacts. Today, however, a story about global warming may involve fish farming and habitat preservation as much as politics and science.

To date, no one has documented or seemingly observed environment reporting's contribution to investigative reporting. It seems, however, that a new form of investigative reporting may be seen emerging from the environment beat. I call that *integrated investigative reporting*. Environment stories can be covered as events when something occurs, or as enterprise stories when they surface through other means. But they become investigative stories when the report goes beyond opposing viewpoints to reveal not just a secret or wrongdoing, but also the complexity of the web of people, politics, power and events in which they are entrenched.

Based on my reading of the literature and interviews sought to show the current debates heard in barrooms, my synthesis of the literature reveals that investigative reporting on the environment beat could apply any one of six well-defined types of investigative reporting: (1) original investigative reporting, (2) interpretative investigative reporting, (3) reporting on investigations, (4) exposure journalism, (5) immersion journalism, and (6) journalism of assertion. Hence, *integrated investigative reporting*.

A New Arrow in the Quiver

A combination style of investigative reporting can be seen in reporter Mark Schapiro's story about genetically modified (GM) crops, appearing in The Nation on Oct. 28, 2002, under the headline, "Sowing Disaster?" Schapiro, deputy director for the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR), in a personal interview with this author in mid-2003 explained that the traditional model of investigative reporting involves piecing together one's own reporting and interviews and a paper trail indicating evidence leading back to "whoever it was who made the decision to make the bad thing happen" (Schapiro, 2003). But investigative reports involving the environment tend to get behind the complexities of a particular situation, which makes the story more and more interesting and intriguing, he said. "It's a different form of investigative reporting," he said.

Schapiro said,

Although you may not be identifying one particular bad person, there can be great value in an illuminating, gripping story about the complexities of the way we live. As a world of things gets more intertwined, the science intertwined with the politics, and the politics are intertwined with enormous environmental questions of our time, and the nations of the world are more intertwined with each other, I'm beginning to think this type of investigative reporting is of equal or greater value – to illuminate the multiple levels of complexity that shape a particular problem or situation. (Schapiro, 2003)

To provide some background on the story, the teaser on the CIR's Web site reads, "Illegal genetically altered corn has been found growing in Mexico, secret plots of bio-engineered corn are being tended in Iowa, and starving people are being refused genetically modified corn in Africa. Read the latest on this controversial new

technology, why it is showing up in places it shouldn't, and the dangers and hope it poses.”

As Schapiro demonstrates, times have changed and news has changed. Investigative reporting, then, seems to be responding to the evolution by evolving itself. Investigative reporters working on stories involving the environment have been the first to see the need for a new arrow in the quiver.

A Technical Look

Schapiro's story focuses on a particular industry and shows the multiple levels of pressure and interests and motivations involved in the development of agricultural biotechnology. It is a different form of investigative reporting, he explained, because the intention is not necessarily to expose a “bad guy,” but to reveal what propels, in this case, a technology to the public.

In this case, it was valuable to evoke the issue from the points of view of those deeply involved in the developing technology, which Schapiro said helped explain why the United States got engulfed in the technology without really knowing what it was. He discovered the companies who were the primary forces pushing technology, and their reasons for doing so. He learned from American farmers that they were balancing on a high wire of uncertainty and great financial instability and insecurity, looking for anything to diminish the daily risks of their livelihood: farming. They were put in that position, he found, by forces over which the farmers had very little control.

Schapiro went to the scientists next. Many, he said, are doing research on genetically engineered food out of purely scientific fascination, curiosity, and the

dream of perhaps helping to solve serious questions of environmental degradation, particularly in developing worlds. “Then you have other scientists whose credibility is compromised by the support given to universities,” Schapiro explained. “A huge amount of support is given to universities by the biotech industry which is motivated, perhaps, by a mixture of scientific curiosity and to be on the safe side of financial possibility.”

In this respect, investigative reporters delving into an environmental issue use sensibility as their guide and historical context to help them think about what might be the truth, and try to explain what it all seems to mean. Genetic modification, Schapiro pointed out, “is an issue loaded with strongly felt opinions on every side. It’s not hard to get a great quote from a critic about the implications of it, and it’s not that hard to get a quote from a proponent and write about hysterical fomentations.” But to get underneath the surface, Schapiro decided to stay focused on the people who work with the technology, who created it, and those who are impacted by it.

Schapiro’s story about GM seeds does not include a lot of “he said, she said” reporting, although it does include some: a quote from a consumer union representative, and a smattering of quotes from people deep in the agriculture world. Instead, the story displays rich details based on interviews with people working with genetically modified crops. That includes a farmer in Iowa who plants GM seed, and how it actually has improved his life. Schapiro also tries to denigrate the use of GM seed by showing that American and Mexican farmers, although they are part of different agricultural systems, are really on the same tension line when it comes to dealing with this technology.

Maud Beelman, director of the Washington, D.C.-based International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), a division of the Center for Public Integrity, a not-for-profit organization protecting the public interest through “watchdog journalism,” offered another example of investigative reporting not classified by the literature but seeming to incorporate several categories identified in books and articles about investigative reporting. She discussed ICIJ’s investigative reporting series, The Water Barons: How a Few Powerful Companies are Privatizing Your Water (2003), as an analysis of water privatization, one involving database searches, searching through Securities and Exchange Commission filings, corporate reports and more for a 12-year period to see if there was any statistical basis for claiming that large companies around the world were buying up municipal drinking water systems and running them for profit. The allegation was that this was an increasing trend, that it was happening more and more.

Although not part of the six types of investigative reporting outlined in this chapter, *analysis* is a kind of investigative reporting, as Helvarg suggested earlier. Analysis is found in reports about the environment where investigative approaches are applied. Originally, the term “analysis” had a different meaning in journalism than it does today. Beelman explained, “In the journalistic sense, in the world of journalism that I grew up in, an analysis is one shade lighter than an editorial. There were reports, there were analyses, and there were editorials.

“This [Water Barons report] is not an analysis in that sense. We built a grid and a database. Then we had people do in-country reports to give a snapshot of views of what the situation was on the ground. This is an analysis in the sense that we

analyzed information we gathered” (Beelman, 2003). That is the sort of foundation for assertion journalism that gives it a credible name.

In that vein, Nancy Gaarder of the Omaha World-Herald the week of Oct. 7, 2003, reported that a community near the city had such high levels of DDT (see Glossary) in the form of 1,1-dichloroethene and tetrachloroethylene in its well water that people were being told not to shower or wash dishes with the water. An interpretative report based on one’s own original research, scrutinizing prior investigations into water quality in the community, exposing what led to the situation, following the money and the science, and perhaps even asserting why the story didn’t get recognized until now, seems in order. This is another example of integrated investigative reporting. In Appendix B under the entry for Tom Meersman, an example of how interpretation and assertion can bring a story to life and still be objective journalism can be found.

Investigative reports about the environment seem make connections for people that go deeper than the consuming of information. This quality in journalism, wrote Melanie Sill, assistant managing editor for special projects at The News & Observer of Raleigh in 1996, becomes even more valuable when it sorts through comments by experts, who often have personal interests on the line, or long-standing beliefs that color their appraisals. She argues that journalists may not be purely objective, but they can certainly be detached while making connections and sense out of the details. “Rather than simply reporting accusations, claims, and study results, we can take a more active role in helping readers and viewers understand environmental issues as part of broader social and governmental trends” (Sill, 1996, p. 20). In this respect,

investigative reporting about the environment follows traditional journalistic practice but demands more in the way of process, as explained in the following chapters. It also requires greater scope than traditional beats.

Original and Interpretative Investigative Reporting

Kovach and Rosentiel (2001) define original investigative reporting as stories in which the reporters themselves uncover and document activities previously unknown to the public (p. 116). Interpretative investigative reporting, they assert, is reporting “which often involves the same original enterprise skills but takes interpretation to a different level.” MacDougall (1982), who first coined the term “interpretative reporting” in his book of that title in 1938, justifies that arrow in the quiver this way: “[T]here has been increasing recognition that mere reporting of objective facts is not sufficient to serve the informational needs of a self-governing people. The result: interpretative reporting” (p. 206).

This sort goes beyond a reporter’s search for the best opinion available on a subject that is not verifiable on deadline, an effort aimed at giving a news report substance. Interpretative reporting, Kovach and Rosenstiel write, “usually involves more complex issues or sets of facts than a classic exposé. It reveals a new way of looking at something as well as new information about it” (p. 117). Interpretation, as defined by the Random House Dictionary (1978), means to provide a concept of another’s behavior according to one’s understanding and sensitivity, thereby setting forth meaning.

Reporting on Investigations

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) define reporting on investigations as that which “develops from the discovery or leak of information from an official investigation already under way or in preparation by others, usually government agencies. It is a staple of journalism in Washington, a city where the government often talks to itself through the press” (p. 118). The fall 2003 story about a CIA field operative’s name appearing in the syndicated column of political pundit Robert Novak is one example of this type of investigative reporting. A secret was revealed in the news media, and a debate over wrongdoing began.

This time, however, the reporter disclosing the name of the field agent became the center of debate as well as the “top ranking administration official” who disclosed the classified information to Novak. Who passed the information? Is the journalist open to a lawsuit for disclosing classified information? A discussion in the news media about confidentiality and disclosure of sources in journalism, a sacred cow, also ensued. Some called for CIA director George J. Tenet’s resignation, but Novak’s resignation was not also requested.

An investigation into the matter on the government’s side is assured; but the Society of Professional Journalists by early October had not yet suggested a counterpart to determine whether Novak acted in the public interest, in self-interest, or whether a cooperative special interest might be at play. No investigation into whether his action constitutes wrongdoing has been planned at this point. However, an investigation into the government’s disclosure of classified information already was reported to be in the works.

Journalism of Assertion

Anderson, Dardenne, and Killenberg (1996) look at the notion of assertion journalism as a form that assists talk, one that goes beyond “just performing an informational or entertainment function” to serve “a provocative one as well.” They write that journalism

probably will not be able to maintain its current preoccupation with narrow definitions of detachment [and] ...complete objectivity...if it is to take on a rejuvenated role in the democratic dialogue. [J]ournalism can, and must, do much more to provide an interactive forum in which the relative quality of competing public ideas may be tested. (pp. xxi-xxii)

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) reply by codifying the notion of a “journalism of assertion” into the formula for a journalism of verification provided earlier, based on their idea that “a more conscious discipline of verification is the best antidote to the old journalism of verification being overrun by a new journalism of assertion, and it would provide citizens with a basis for relying on journalistic accounts” (p. 77). That formula was intended, in part, to stop a blurring of the genres of journalism and creative nonfiction, the latter of which allows blending fact with invention. Journalism of assertion, Kovach and Rosenstiel write, is “weakening the methodology of verification journalists have developed” (p. 75). This dissertation reveals some valid reasons for that evolution, and demonstrates a process of investigation dating back to Aristotle’s time, a process rooted in theories about truth and wrought with integrity while at the same time adhering to the tenets of a journalism of verification.

To provide a foundation for discussion, a basic definition of assertion is in order. Simply, *assertion*, according to the Random House Dictionary (1978), means “to state positively but often without support or reason.” Any journalism of assertion,

then, produces a culture not based on reality but on stereotypes. Sanford (1999) in the chapter “Dan Quayle Meet Hillary Clinton” beautifully considers the ways assertion journalism that is not rooted in verifiable reality undermines public confidence in the news media.

John Nichols, Washington correspondent for The Nation, associate editor for the Capitol Times in Madison, Wisconsin, and the son of farming parents described the personal significance reporting that asserts values holds for him as a reader and also a journalist. Using the issue of genetically modified (GM) crops as an example, he discussed that value from a public policy standpoint, with a particular focus on agriculture applications in the United States. For Nichols, this story and others like it require an approach with an attitude. In a personal interview with the author in August 2003, he said,

All good investigative reporting has an advocacy to it. That’s what people want. They don’t want us to just quote Monsanto (the maker of most GM seed). They want us to ask questions and find out what’s going on. Once you dig in, the story has a point of view. In the end, it says this is something bad, or good. You’re telling people they ought to care. That doesn’t mean journalists have the right to be unfair, or can say anything without a sense of responsibility. What it does mean is that some of the best investigative journalism has been and continues to be journalism that seeks to accomplish a goal. (Nichols, 2003)

Raising the level of dialogue in the news media on the subject of genetically modified crops and seeds necessarily involves investigative reporting because the stories are not on the surface. Moreover, they can be life-threatening and otherwise dangerous or damaging to one’s health. This author’s experience investigating the fibers of biopiracy (the notion of taking a biological item from one country and patenting it in another country after making some minor change, as in an enzyme, and

not giving any benefit to the country where it was found or the indigenous cultures cultivating the item) led me to sources within organized crime. That trail led to drug importation. My source said it was not in the interests of our health to continue our association.

There are other occupational hazards relating to the biopiracy story. Having been to Europe twice, Africa and to 20 different states in the union working on stories related to GM crops, and also having covered much of the debate within the World Trade Organization regarding free trade and the Americas – what will and will not be allowed, Nichols confirmed that in Third World countries, “there’s a huge zone of illegality going on.” Speaking to one part of that zone, he said,

There’s a sort of a wink and a nod to the folks who are operating outside of legal zones. That’s one of the reasons why the GM crop issue is so intense in Africa. The fear is that GM crops aren’t coming through official routes. That’s true in India, too. A lot of what I’ve heard from UNESCO folks is that the biggest fear is that American companies will experiment on Africa. And that’s why GM crops are a huge deal. (Nichols, 2003)

The sort of complexity and depth required to put this story before the public is one reason why the issue of biopiracy is an environment story that has been treated as Houston, Brusse, and Weinberg (2002) suggest: by singling out one aspect of a larger issue and digging in. The issue simply does not appear in the media in a holistic way, although pieces of it are beginning to appear in mainstream newspapers like The New York Times.

In addition to global implications, this story carries a local political spin that can be covered in standard form or as an integrated investigative report. In North Dakota, an influential incumbent state senator was defeated for re-election in

November 2002 on the issue of GM seed. The challenger contended that much stronger protocols were needed on GM seeds or North Dakota agriculture would be lost. The challenger prevailed, and the incumbent senator, who was chairman of the state's Joint Agriculture Committee, was sent home.

Genetic modification also is pulling scientists in North Dakota into a quiet, global war. This one is over seed pollution, a concept new to all but a few. Nichols spoke of a case where researchers at the University of North Dakota sent regular seeds to Africa that came back corrupted, genetically altered, although they were not to have genetic organisms introduced to them. It is the sort of thing that makes academics cry, Nichols said. Once a seed base is lost, it may never come back. As Nichols pointed out, if seeds do not remain uncorrupted, control of entire crops may be lost. It's the kind of story only investigative reporting produces; and one that lends itself to integrated investigative reporting.

Nichols contends the story about GM crops is one that requires journalists to take a stand against proliferation, just as Edward R. Murrow did in reporting that a United States Air Force pilot accused of being a communist during the McCarthy Era was falsely charged (Levy, 1975, pp.74-86). In both cases the reporters' standpoint is that the only morally correct position is to side against the perceived iniquity and injustice.

As this example shows, the GM crop story seems to demand using a combination of approaches to investigative reporting that together put the essence of the issue in a context that has meaning for each and every society touched by the technology. As is evident, the GM story goes beyond science, beyond politics, beyond

business. Environment stories surrounding this issue include the unbalancing of nature, as in the loss of a seed; the migration of GM seed aided by the wind and birds, thereby feeding into the ecosystem a strain of crops resistant to weeds and insects that control their growth, which could overtake diverse plant populations and replace them with a monoculture; and the potential overtaking of weeds that provide for insects, such as the monarch butterfly, which will only lay its eggs on milkweed. The story is also a health story about the world's systems for distributing medicines, since foods can now be altered to include diuretics, immune boosters, hormones, and more. As such, investigative efforts that stick only to one type – for instance, the exposé – miss entire sets of contexts that give stories about the environment their intrigue, substance, and appeal to action.

Exposure Journalism

Exposure journalism, or exposé, is aimed at disclosing improprieties and in so doing making an impact on public opinion. Such stories are wrapped around societal values, which are based on beliefs, which shape the way we conceive of ideas about right and wrong. Protess et al. (1991) define investigative reporting as “the journalism of outrage...a form of storytelling that probes the boundaries of America's civic conscience,” adding that one of its forms, the exposé, consists of

...published allegations of wrongdoing – political corruption, government inefficiency, corporate abuses – [that] help define public morality in the United States. Journalistic exposés that trigger outrage from the public or policy makers affirm society's standards of misconduct. Societal indifference to investigative disclosures constitutes evidence of morally tolerable, if not ethically acceptable behavior. (p. 5)

Immersion Journalism

Immersion journalism in the investigative reporting genre can be likened to undercover investigation. However, an investigative reporter need not be undercover to be embedded in a story. For instance, one environment reporter who does nothing but investigative reporting, Tom Bayles of the Sarasota Herald-Tribune and a volunteer for this study, became a certified firefighter to learn about what it means to fight raging arsonist-lit forest fires in Florida. He stayed with the squad for months, living as they lived, eating as they ate, exposing himself to the chemicals they got exposed to at the same rate of frequency and intensity, and feeling his heart pound and race with empathy as he lived through, and later described, an episode where a firefight was trying to get the dispatch radio out of the dashboard of a truck on fire that was so hot the man could see the metal melting. Bayles' experience on this story is described in detail by him in the findings section of this writing, a segment pointing to personal narrative as an emerging component of investigative reporting due to the advent of online diaries.

Coalition Journalism

Twelve years ago Protess, et al. perceived that a decline in resources for investigative reporting, especially long-term projects, likely would mean an increase in collaboration among journalists and policy makers. This prediction has been confirmed by many scholars (see Allan, Adam, and Carter, 2000; Neuzil and Kovarik, 1996; Hansen, 1993; Frome, 1998; and Shanahan and McComas, 1999). The authors refer to that collaboration as "coalition journalism." They perceived that public

outrage about important social problems, such as issues concerning the environment, would take a long time to manifest. Until it did, they wrote, investigative reporting would continue to be a catalyst for policy reform without necessarily being a vehicle for mass public mobilization or enlightenment (p. 254).

Cost, Length and Funding for Investigative Reports

Beelman said ICIJ has not had much success getting funding for deep stories with environmental overtones. Quick to say it could be that the funder's portfolio was down because of the current recession in the United States or because the funder did not like the Consortium's approach to the story, ICIJ was, however, successful in getting dollars to do a story with a strong business slant about trade in drinking water. The investigative reporting series, titled, The Water Barons: How a Few Powerful Companies are Privatizing Your Water, was published first online and later as book when several people weary of reading the series online asked for a hard copy. About length online, Beelman said, "It became clear that the reading public is not yet ready to read beyond a certain number of words on the Web. I don't know if they will ever be willing to read beyond a certain number of words on a screen."

ICIJ investigative reports typically run 60,000 to 80,000 words and cost between \$50,000 and \$350,000 to produce, with about \$200,000 the average, Beelman said. By contrast, Helvarg, a long-time freelance reporter, said he has seen good investigative reports done for less than \$50,000, some bearing his byline or broadcast stamp.

For Good Measure

To reduce the chances of being accused of advocacy, Alexander (1982) touts the tried and true approach to journalism: include as part of the body of the story the facts that support one's conclusions and, equally important, those that do not (p. 25). But as the examples provided have shown, that is not enough anymore. Environmental disasters around the globe have given rise to sustained debate among interested claims makers, such as government agencies, industry spokespeople, scientists, citizen action pressure groups, consumer organizations and academics, thereby ensuring that a range of what were often sharp, harsh or bitter disputes featured prominently on the news agenda.

Critical examinations of the pertinent types of news coverage produced during the late 1960s indicate the preferred term, conservation, was gradually being supplanted by new, or at least sharply redefined, ecological concepts explicitly associated with "the environment" as a social problem (Neuzil and Kovarik, 1996).

Further noting the shift, Allan, Adam, and Carter (2000) write,

Emergent forms of environmental discourse typically stretched notions of conservation beyond the earlier emphasis on natural resources so as to encompass the human species as an organism in need of protection in the face of possible extinction. This shift in the rhetorical strategies of claims-makers posed an acute challenge to the seemingly 'commonsensical' division between 'nature' and 'humanity' that had been a recurrent – if largely tacit – feature of news reportage and, as a result, much public debate. (p. 3)

If throughout the 1960s the consequences of industrial pollution, for instance, were broadly accepted as an inevitable price to pay for enjoying the benefits of modern society, it was largely attributed to concerted public relations efforts (Wilson, 1992). While "spin" has been part of journalism since its beginnings, until

environment reporting splintered from conservation writing, there was no concerted effort on the part of special interests to make sure risks involved with pollution were communicated with precision. Prior to public relations, publicity was the order of the day. One wanted good publicity for ego gratification, financial gain and social status. Publicists, then, needed to do more than get favorable articles about their clients written in the newspapers, and heard on the radio and seen on television. They needed to do more than drink at the bar with reporters. They needed to give them information that would persuade them to think about the science behind what the reporters were writing about. They needed to exploit the reporter's weakness. That's what risk communication did in its most sinister form. However, by showing reporters a weakness and exploiting it, they also heightened awareness among reporters of the need to look deeper into sources of information, deeper into context, deeper into the science, and deeper into government agencies such as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and its approval of genetically modified foods as well as growth hormones. Public relations, it appears, was influential in helping investigative reporters see the need for a new genre of their craft.

Degrees of Risk

How good was the best environment reporting in the mid-1980s? Sandman et al. (1987) found it lacked information about degree of risk. When risk was reported, it usually came across as more alarming than reassuring. Although articles were generally accurate, with few errors of fact, problems involved omission of information. The research team found no intentional bias. Flagrant distortions did not

characterize the articles (p. 99-100), indicating a concerted effort on the part of environment reporters to adhere to journalistic ethics and integrity.

As described by Sachsman (1996), perceived bias in environment reporting when no intentional bias exists appears as a reaction by government, industry, and other institutional experts to journalism's tendency toward extremes, its reliance on particular extreme sources (one voice from this environmental group, one voice from industry, one voice from government, etc.) rather than those expressing moderate positions, and its translation of technical jargon into volatile common language. "In short, what scientists and representatives from government, industry, and other groups view as bias may just be the normal tendencies of journalism. Journalists tend to cover environmental affairs when problems and risks are present," wrote Sachsman (p. 249).

In that respect, time and space constraints sometimes prevent reporters from including intermediate degrees of risk in their stories, according to Sandman, et al. in 1987. While the details of intermediate risk may be noteworthy, environment reporters must adhere to the same limitations as their counterparts in the newsroom, and will not be allowed to crowd out other significant stories on other subjects of interest.

Prato (1991) suggests the only way to determine how to communicate the risk is to train reporters properly and give them enough time to analyze an issue, although Sachsman (1996) found otherwise. Prato's effort, aimed at encouraging more coverage of the environment by local television stations, notes that future coverage must be more than a reaction to, for instance, an oil spill or nuclear accident, which might focus immediate attention on a specific environmental problem, but might also distort or exaggerate the problem. TV's coverage of such crises up to the early 1990s did

little to enhance understanding of the overall context of economic tradeoffs surrounding environmental issues, wrote Prato (1991). To “get it right,” journalists must write about fundamentally difficult trade-offs at stake in any environmental controversy, an objective news-gathering approach amounting to “risk assessment management” whereby the scope and potential danger of a problem is measured against the cost and time required for a solution. Nowhere is that point more evident than in current stories about genetically modified crops and organisms.

Simply, the extent to which genetically modified crops and organisms are used is difficult to know. Similarly, what destruction they could hoist upon the world and questions of what the future holds if natural order and balanced are upset as a result of this technological achievement remain unknown.

The artificial insertion of certain DNA traits into seeds – traits including viruses, antibiotics, and pesticides – chills farmers to the freezing point, especially those who have seen their fields intentionally burned to prevent the spread of GM seed. Recorded deaths from GM products raise concerns further about genetic modification for consumption. As reported by Lianne Casten in SEJournal’s Winter, 2001 issue, in 1989 dozens of Americans died and several thousands became ill after eating impurities in the food supplement L-tryptophan, which was made with genetically altered bacteria.

A story about GMOs and GM crops finds threads in neighbors talking across fences, patents on life forms, intellectual property rights, organized crime, global economics, health and medicine, and politics as well as the environment beat, where its treatment includes the effect of GM crops on wildlife, butterflies and other insects,

soil, and more. It is an environmental business story and a habitat story. Daley and O'Neill (1991) consider the consequences of reporting environment news in traditional fashion, particularly in the form of a disaster narrative. Such reporting, they reason, naturalizes the impact of the story, as in the case of reporting about the Exxon Valdez, which "withdrew from discursive consideration both the marine transport system and the prospective pursuit of alternative energy sources" (p. 53). As a result, they contend, important environmental issues were directed "away from the political arena and into the politically inaccessible realm of technological inevitability," thereby reproducing "the political and corporate hegemony of Big Oil" (p. 53).

With the magnitude of environmental concerns hovering over reporters attempting to investigate how such disasters occur, how to report on long-term threats due to their non-event-oriented characteristics became a question investigative reporters writing about the environment had to fathom. To avoid ignoring, trivializing, or marginalizing the larger context, investigative reporters working environment stories have necessarily had to speak to issues of mitigation and prevention. In the past, such perspectives were routinely displaced from journalistic "hierarchies of credibility" (Becker, 1967), prompting more savvy public relations efforts from all sides to adapt their message to the rules of inclusion and exclusion in journalistic reports attempting to present a fair and balanced story about the environment.

The social construction of reality, as explained by Berger and Luckman in 1967, theorizes that there is no such thing as a single "objective" definitive truth; instead, there are various and often competing realities, each held by different groups or cultures. Because the same set of facts has varying meanings to different groups at

different times, each group holds its own consensual reality. This work again shows the emergence of environmentalism as a social problem dependent on societal recognition – and therefore mass media performance. A “public” comes into existence, according to American philosopher John Dewey (1927), because it becomes concerned about a perceived threat to the community. One could say that without a social problem there is no public, and without a public there is no social problem. Dewey’s student, Park (1941), held that a public will disappear if the news media ignore a social problem, and that the news media’s ability to define problems is their true power. Therefore, media access is sought by groups concerned with advancing their causes (Neuzil and Kovarik, 1996, p. xv), whether that special interest comes from industry, environmentalists, or individual stakeholders.

As such, the conversation about the environment has become one about a “crisis of culture,” one which “suffuses our households, our conversations, our economies,” (Wilson, 1992, p. 12). This insight throws into sharp relief a series of questions about the extent to which media representations of nature serve to reaffirm as “common sense” references to “the environment” as a stable, totalized entity against which “the human” is to be measured (Allan, Adam, and Carter, 2000, p. 2).

Wilkins (1990) holds that many environmental problems are not immediately visible, but are the sort that may emerge in the future, introducing a new component to traditional journalism. Traditional journalism, she writes, “has been satisfied with reporting on the here and now.” Wilkins argued that democratic ethics require the news media to adopt a somewhat more future-oriented perspective because of this evolution in journalism. She writes,

What is required is that journalists articulate clearly for both themselves and their readers and viewers that one of the responsibilities of the late 20th century [news media] democracy is to take news about the future – the policy options that will produce it – seriously. (p. 100)

All this seems to suggest that the environment beat has changed journalism in other ways, too. Protess, Cook, Coppelt, et al. (1991) observed that investigative reporters may be becoming less of an elite breed of journalist. They write,

The success of Investigative Reporters and Editors' workshops for different kinds of journalists suggests that the techniques of investigative reporting are being adapted by the professional mainstream. Thus, although separate investigative units have been disbanded, investigative practices have become more widespread. As we concluded in 1986, the IRE survey findings point to the institutionalization of investigative reporting. Rather than bordering on extinction, investigative journalists have merely become less visible as their efforts become more conventional. Today's muckrakers may be more akin to inveterate watchdogs than starving wolves. (p. 38)

Summary: An Innovation

This literature synthesis ties together what has been written about investigative reporting, environment reporting, and advocacy with personal interviews with environment reporters in an effort to make connections between the current conversations in print and on the street, so to speak. In the broadest sense, it looks at investigative reporting about the environment and advocacy in journalism. Overall, this chapter indicates no one has asked what might qualify investigative reporting about the environment as advocacy, a factor giving this work significance.

The framing of this chapter as a literature synthesis rather than a traditional literature review also is significant. It represents an innovation. The approach brought out directions investigative reporting about the environment seems to be taking in the early 21st century. Had I stayed with the literature along and not included the

interviews, too much insight and knowledge would have been sacrificed. I doubt I would have noticed many of the details that have helped give this work substance and intrigue. Consequently, I believe the synthesis approach is more valuable than the standard.

This innovation is worth noting as a result. The approach has not been written about, and does not appear in any of the dissertations or published research I have encountered, nor does it appear in descriptions about how to do a literature review. I have to wonder why that is, because in order to contribute to a conversation one has to grasp as fully as possible what's being discussed. Without balancing professional discussions with academic conversations, much is lost.

Looking Ahead

What has come unbidden from this innovation is a broader picture of what investigative reporting about the environment has contributed to journalism as a whole. Among other things, it has contributed a new method for doing journalistic research. That method mirrors an approach to studying intercultural listening qualitatively that was articulated by Chen and Starosta (1998) in a chapter in their book Foundations of Intercultural Communication entitled, "Listening Between Co-Cultures." To broaden the scope of listening research, they offer a qualitative system of investigation for discovering how people constitute their world. The writing team coupled grounded theory with phenomenological research practice. Both are discussed in detail in the following chapters. To preview, Chen and Starosta's offering is:

- 1) Apply grounded theory.

- 2) Bracket assumptions (the first step in phenomenological research).
- 3) Gather rich detail from experience.
- 4) Conduct regular checks with sources to assure accuracy.
- 5) Constantly do comparisons.
- 6) Perform an ongoing audit of the researcher (looks at the research from within).
- 7) Perform an ongoing external audit (looks at the research from outside).
- 8) Recognize patterns.
- 9) Expect the unexpected.
- 10) Await epiphanies.

Chen and Starosta argue that any interpretative research that does not contain surprises leads the researcher to ask: Why learn what anyone else is thinking? Once answered, the question becomes one of whether the researcher succeeded in accessing the other person's distinctive views. My sense of journalism at this point is that it is evolving toward a research approach that seeks to learn the truth about the significance between cultures, journalism as a function of community, and what I term "intercultural journalism," a journalism that does not identify voices by race, but by what each source has to say. In this respect, this research can contribute to conversations about re-presentation of cultures. However, I have left that discussion for future research.

As such, this effort supports my thinking that delving into questions about advocacy journalism and investigative reporting about the environment is worth talking about. We're going to need new approaches to reporting because little is black and white. The kinds of reporting journalists have done in the past make it hard to say anything but "Get out of Vietnam," or "Get out of the West Bank" or "Get out of Iraq." Similarly, it makes it easy to say, "Marijuana is bad, even if it has medicinal value," "Organic food is expensive, even if it is more nutritious and consequently

satisfies with less,” or “The Superfund law is bad, even though it resulted in cleanup of contaminated land by the parties responsible for the pollution.”

The kind of reporting I’m showcasing here is an example of another way truth emerges that complements the Paul Williams Way and the science of verification approach described by Kovach and Rosenstiel. It focuses on description as a means for bringing truth to the surface, for causing it to emerge and reveal itself. It is a commonly held belief that answers aren’t simplistic. This chapter has demonstrated that by showing some of the pitfalls of simplistic reporting about the environment. The next chapter will discuss phenomenology as a research method, and why it was well-suited for this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research strategy herein and also the methodological considerations surrounding that approach. It also points out the strengths and limitations of the method. As defined by Harding (1987), *research method* refers to a technique for collecting evidence, whereas *methodology* encompasses the theories and analyses of how research should proceed. To clarify, methodology is concerned with how methods are or should be used in the research process (Learn, 1996, p. 37). This section offers insights into both the method and methodology of phenomenology based on my practice with it in this study.

Rationale for Selecting Phenomenology

There are different schools of thought about phenomenology, its use as a research method, and its application as a way of life. As a research method, the approach was suitable for this effort for four main reasons. First, the method addresses questions of meaning thoroughly. Second, it provides rich description of actual experience. Third, the method offers views in the context of how the experience came about and was lived, or “experience as given” (Idhe, 1986). Lastly, the approach takes into account that self-perceptions are holistic human phenomena. In the jargon of this research method, the approach provides a sense of the whole of a set of lived experiences.

That approach matched my goals in a variety of ways. This study delves into the nature of environment reporting, particularly the investigative genre. It is not a study of my perceptions of investigative reporting on the environment. Rather, this research in part seeks to reveal what drives and motivates those who do investigative reporting on environmental subjects even though the participants in this study may not know the answers themselves.

In this dissertation, I aimed to capture with as much authenticity as possible the essence of environment reporting for those doing investigative work, what it means to them, what they get out of it, and whether advocacy is part of their job description. I also sought to discover what boundaries they use to define advocacy journalism, journalism, and investigative reporting.

I asked what this group of reporters experience and how they interpret their world. The analysis provided in this writing seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of investigative reporting on environmental matters based on 18 in-depth interviews conducted with six journalists who described their experiences in three interviews each for this study. Those interviews were conducted according to the standards of rigor described for phenomenological inquiry by Giorgi (1985, 1989), Moustakas (1994), Seidman (1998), Marshall and Rossman (1999), and Patton (2002).

Each interview was conducted in person. Specifically, I interviewed: (1) Paul Rogers in conference rooms at the San Jose Mercury News, where Rogers is the environment reporter; (2) freelance environment reporter David Helvarg in his cubicle in Ralph Nader's suite of offices in Washington, D.C., where Helvarg is establishing the Oceans Awareness Project (in September 2004 at the Society of Environmental

Journalists conference in New Orleans, Helvarg announced he was leaving journalism to establish a not-for-profit aimed at heightening awareness of the state of the world's oceans); (3) Tom Bayles, environment editor and investigative projects reporter for the Sarasota Herald-Tribune in the newspaper's lunchroom, at a local coffee shop, and at Bayles' kitchen table in Sarasota, Fla.; (4) independent environment reporter Dale Willman, president of Field Notes Productions, in his office at Carlton College just outside of Minneapolis, and over dinner at two local restaurants; (5) freelance investigative reporter Charles Pekow in Haynes Johnson's office at the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland in College Park, at La Madeline in Bethesda, Md., and at his dining room table in Bethesda, Md.; and (6) Tom Meersman, natural resources and environment reporter for the Star-Tribune in Minneapolis in a local tavern, a local restaurant, and a conference room off the newsroom.

These reporters volunteered to participate in this research after I posted a request on the SEJ listserv describing the study. I specifically sought members of SEJ because I wanted any findings from this writing to be relatable to the organization. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and two hours depending on the length of the interviewee's response. Audio tape was run for all interviews to help assure accuracy on every level. An interview protocol was created, and appears in Appendix C of this document. As explained later in this chapter, that protocol was abandoned during the research process because it was inhibiting the research. That discovery led me to the theory applied in this research: grounded theory.

Phenomenology as a Method

Phenomenology's mantra is that we can only know what we experience by exploring the perceptions and meanings that make us aware of the experience. Consequently, phenomenological research focuses on how we put together what we experience in order to find the larger meaning. It documents ways humans make sense of the world and, in so doing, develop a world view.

In general terms, phenomenology asks the question: What is the meaning, structure, and essence of this thing for this group of people? Researchers applying this method are less interested in whether something happened, how often it tends to happen, or how an experience is related to the prevalence of other conditions or events.

Phenomenology as Methodology

For some, phenomenology is a way of life. Some researchers find it necessary to live according to their concept of phenomenology for the sake of understanding and purity of application. But it is possible to consider matter from a phenomenological viewpoint without adopting the ways of the movement as a lifestyle.

The term, used since the mid-eighteenth century, was given separate but carefully defined technical meanings by Kant and Hegel, who approached its system of logic from opposite points on a continuum. Simply, Kant approached a step in the logic, known as *imaginative variation*, through elimination. If something did not appeal to his logic about the matter, it was discarded. That is, possibilities would be eliminated based on certain criteria derived during the elimination process. Instead,

Husserl increased the number of possibilities through imaginative variation by adding to or expanding the number of variations identified, and sorting them by their commonalities as a means to locate the essence of the thing, idea, or notion. Therefore, the two had different ways of considering the possibilities, but both agreed that considering the possibilities was one step in the logic.

After considering the possible solutions to the query at hand, both would select one and test it in application. That test is known in phenomenology as a *thought experiment*, also referred to in the research stage as *imaginative variation* (described more fully in the “process” section of this chapter). Once tested, the results would be evaluated to determine its authenticity as an essence. This process of one-by-one selection aimed at decreasing the count of potential essences is a universal step in the process of phenomenological reasoning known as *reduction*.

As Audi (1999) points out, phenomenology in contemporary philosophy is neither a school of thought nor a philosophy clearly defined by a body of teachings. Instead it is a movement that over time has been propelled in many distinct directions. Consequently, the notion means different things to different people (p. 664). Those currents are not homogeneous, though they have a common point of departure, he writes.

As a result, it was difficult to locate a particular standard of phenomenological rigor for this research. After the fact, I realized that in my effort to locate standards of rigor for this method, in my confusion I drew standards from transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, and also Mohanty) and several other brands I can name but whose lines of rigor I cannot specifically delineate. Among them: existential

phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, social phenomenology, and phenomenography, a label applying phenomenological investigation “aimed at a descriptive recording of immediate subjective experience as reported” (Sonnemann, 1954, p. 344, in Patton 2002, p. 482), which seems to me a sophisticated term for a photo essay. With this whirlpool of approaches in my head, I drew from those structures most clearly articulated and applied them in this study. For the most part, then, this research follows the approach for transcendental phenomenology, but its standards of rigor are not exclusive to that form. Those standards are, however, exclusive to phenomenological practice in that all phenomenologists agree on six points, two of which are that the fundamental concern of this process of logic is with meaning, and being. The four other universal components are intentionality, reduction or *epoche*, radical differences between the natural and philosophical attitude, and the use of intuition to locate principles describing the substance of whatever is under investigation.

To elaborate briefly, all phenomenologists subscribe to the doctrine of intentionality, that is, the understanding of the phenomena in question on a conscious level. This is described by each school of thought in a different way. For Heidegger, who articulated a concept of existential phenomenology, intention refers to that which constitutes the reality of being as opposed to that which constitutes reality projected by the imagination in, for instance, the act of imaginative variation, according to Audi.

Also, as mentioned, no phenomenologists doubt the necessity of reduction as a step in the process of locating the root of a thing. In all cases, regardless of the approach, this process is referred to as the *epoche*, a Greek word meaning “to refrain

from judgment, to abstain from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things” (Moustakas, 1994, in Patton, 2002, p. 484). Further, as explained by Audi, most phenomenologists admit a radical difference between the natural and the philosophical attitude. In characterizing this difference, some phenomenologists who agree with Husserl’s school of thought stress only epistemological issues; whereas others, in agreement with Heidegger’s school of thought, focus their attention exclusively on ontological topics (p. 665).

Lastly, Audi provides that all phenomenologists defend the necessity of using intuition in one form or another to locate the principles that may constitute a thing, idea, or notion. Husserl calls this the “principle of all principles.” Intuition is defined by Husserl as “whatever presents itself in primordial form (bodily reality).” He directs phenomenological researchers to simply accept what is given in this step.

As demonstrated here, it is not possible to give a simple definition of what phenomenology is. Therefore, what I had attempted to do is faithfully report what I have experienced of phenomenology through its practice in this study.

Background of Phenomenology and Basic Terminology

Phenomenology, as described by Husserl in Ideen in 1913, referred to the study of how people describe things and ideas and experience them through their senses. As a research method, phenomenology relies on interviews and impartial observation as a means for locating the essence of something.

The concept of an essence was first articulated by Aristotle in his discussion of the notion of essentialism, a metaphysical theory purporting that objects have

identifiable qualities that distinguish them or make them what they are – in other words, essence (Audi, 1999). Aristotle reasoned that there are differences between what an object is, and how it is. For instance, using wood as an example, wood is what the object is, that it floats is a quality leading to the question how, and then to the essence of the object. Based on this logic, Aristotle reasoned there are no individual essence, only collective ones. In other words, the world is connected by essences. Therefore, to create meaning, one can identify commonalities as a way of determining something's essence.

Truth emerges slowly. It is both an individual and communal process in that one finds truth from internal as well as from external experience. The oldest theory of truth, again set forth by Aristotle in an early formulation of Metaphysics and named Correspondence Theory, holds that “to say of what it is that it is, or of what is not that is not, is true.”

It is the same quest participants in this study have spent their lives on in the form of writing short stories about the human condition and about problems they brought to light. The truth, philosophers have contended, is an attribute of beliefs, opinions, theories, doctrines, statements, etc., all of which in one way or another involve making decisions that may lead a person to advocate something for a reason.

The proper contrast to the notion of truth is falsity. While penetrating secrets, the investigative reporters interviewed here have located trickery, fabrications, and other cockeyed versions of truth. They have stood toe to toe with people who will cut a person's heart out for a nickel, so to speak, a phrase that may characterize how some of the study participants feel about individuals who would accuse them of advocating

a position but fail to provide evidence substantiating that claim.

Correspondence Theory essentially says that something is true if it corresponds with something when compared. Another theory of truth, Coherence Theory, produced by rationalist system-building metaphysicians including Hegel, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Bradley as well as positivists Neurath and Hempel (who took mathematics as their model) described what the rationalist school of thought viewed as the system constituting the whole of reality, while the logical positivist view recognized the theory as the system accepted by contemporary scientists. According to Coherence Theory, the truth of a proposition hangs on being part of a comprehensive system (consistent with certain idealist theories) or, conforming to certain positivist theories, is in harmony with every other proposition (Mautner, 1999).

In the 19th century, American philosophers C.S. Pierce and William James articulated Pragmatist Theory, which said an idea – that is, an opinion, belief, or statement – is true if it works, if it brings success (Mautner, 1999), that is, if it *proves* something. The 20th century was more fruitful, producing three theories as art and culture moved from the modern Age to Postmodern times with the term postmodern first appearing in architecture in the 1950s and 1960s, when it was taken up by Jean-François Lyotard, who turned it into an anti-Marxist and poststructuralist critique of science and society (Osborne, 2002). That century introduced, first, Logical Superfluity Theory. Provided by Frege and Ramsey, it holds that to say *such and such is true* is the same as saying *such and such* (Mautner, 1999), a minimalist view of determining the truth. Using wood again as an example, the section in this chapter entitled “Locating Essence” describes how this approach is used in phenomenology.

Tarski's Semantic Theory followed, and stressed equivalence by expressing that "*P* if and only if *P*," where the first *P* is the name of the sentence, and the second *P* is the sentence itself. The third contribution of the 20th century was labeled "non-descriptive" theories, which argue that to say that something is true is not to say anything about the something, but to assess, praise, accept or concede it (Mautner, 1999). Phenomenology's roots in theories of truth, and its standards of rigor requiring detaching from what is believed as true, seemingly helped it take hold as a research method that can be applied when the goal is to deconstruct something with the aim of locating truth. Consequently, it appears to be a useful approach to journalism, and a natural maturing of Lippmann's ideas.

Essence Defined

My working definition of *essence* in this study considers life a collection of experiences that in sequence teach us something. This dissertation offers an example of the phenomenological process for locating truth. It also serves as an example of integrated investigative reporting applied in academic research.

I come to this writing with 17 years of experience as a reporter, 12 of them including environment reporting either full- or part-time, none of them including investigative reporting beyond just good research. Some of my work has appeared in The New York Times, The Chicago Tribune, ABCnews.com, and on Reuters newswire in addition to other news outlets. Before this writing, however, I thought that investigative reporting required special training, and preferably a degree from a prestigious journalism school. The research contained herein, and that you have

already read at this point, proves that thinking wrong. Therefore, experience with a thing lends insight – in that “just good research” can be considered investigative reporting on some level. As demonstrated in this writing, that insight is testable by running it through the processes constituting phenomenological method and methodology.

Locating Essence

Experience gives people insight into the essence of things (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 177). Essence considers what knowledge or information can be expressed by the thing itself despite insight from the observer. It differs from existence in that existence considers only what can be seen, what comes into reality, and therefore discounts insights that might lead to level of essence.

Esence reveals itself on three levels, according to Sokolowski. The first is through typicalness; the second, generalization; and the third, something the thing cannot be without. The first, typicalness, is an establishing of identity based in part on commonalities. Using wood as an example again, Sokolowski writes that given three pieces of wood, a curious individual could set each one by one on the water and discover that each floats. Therefore it can be said that wood typically floats, based on the correspondence theory of truth. It can then be deduced that floating is an essential quality of wood, or an essence of wood based on experience.

The second level through which essence is revealed is through generalization based on experience. On this level, the notion that wood typically floats becomes the idea that *wood floats*, even though the evidence only goes as far as the researcher’s

experience has gone. The generalization remains until some evidence proves it wrong.

The third level comes when the researcher seeks to discover a feature the idea, notion, or thing is dependent upon. That is, something it cannot be without. For some reporters like myself, that is a tape recorder. For others, it is a video camera, DVD recorder, or digital mini-disk recorder that produces radio quality sound. Therefore, it can be reasoned that since the days of the hammer and chisel journalism has typically involved technology.

This locating of general qualities is what phenomenologists refer to as *eidetic intuition*, or insight into an essence. It is a level of reasoning that precedes *imaginative variation*. Imaginative variation is the step in the process holding that locating a conclusion requires the researcher to imagine what qualities or features or elements of journalism might be universal to the thing itself, and therefore components of a general definition. Imaginative variation is a standard phenomenological approach to teasing out observations, and therefore statements about essence based on eidetic intuition.

Phenomenon Defined

The experience of eidetic intuition is a phenomenon. A phenomenon is an occurrence that brings experience to life. In other words, it provokes a response. Intuition in phenomenology is something one nurtures to manifest action out of some sort of *knowing*, some sort of instinct. That *knowing* could be a sense that something is or is not true. The action is based on what the instinct leads the researcher to think. This is part of the process of discovery in phenomenology.

Instinct and phenomenon are connected. To illustrate, imagine that an arrow hits an animal. That phenomenon is based on two factors: (1) the arrow is sprung, and (2) the animal is struck. That is a description based on experience. Experience differs from instinct. Instinct is knowing. Rather than a teacher, it is a guide. A teacher is a person who instructs, whereas a guide is someone or something that shows the way to something else (Random House Dictionary, 1978). Further, a teacher may explain an experience, but a guide walks with the person, directly experiencing everything at the same moment as the person. Instinct is of the moment – a knowing of context, situation, circumstance that motivates action. That action is an outcome. Instinct is a guide through experience rather than the experience itself. It is part of the process of experience rather than the result of it.

These two things – instinct and experience – provide *meaning*. Together, they constitute the process known as *reasoning*, which is an attempt to make sense of an experience or a collection of experiences. This is the process of learning, one conceivably irresistible to all life forms in that even one-celled creatures at least appear to rely on instinct and experience to find the place that best suits them to grow and live. It can be reasoned, then, that all life forms rely on instinct because it appears that all life forms hunt in one way or another.

What you have just read is an example of eidetic intuition, or insight into an essence. To finish my thought: instinct seems to make humans, at least, believe in something for which there is no proof. Like faith, instinct can seem like reason without foundation, and it can persist like hunger. The motivation to relieve the hunger is instinct motivating an experience. Consequently, it can be reasoned that instinct is

illuminating, motivation enough to take seriously the notion of phenomenology.

The Process

It can easily be said that a popular problem-solution format for reasoning used all the time and at every level of education today is based on phenomenological thinking. Today, common logic for finding a solution to a problem is simply this: (1) identify the problem; (2) consider the possible solutions; (3) select one; (4) implement it; (5) evaluate the results. That highly simplified pattern describes the process of logic used in phenomenology, and in integrated investigative reporting.

The Epoche

The epoche is the first step in the phenomenological research approach. It is an emptying of oneself onto the page, so to speak. In this phase, the researcher writes down everything that person knows about the field under inquiry before reading any literature or gathering experience with the thing in question. This is what Husserl called *bracketing*. It is done as a safeguard to help the researcher identify potential points of bias and consequently sensitize the researcher to different cultural practices, different mores – religious, political or otherwise – and different ways of thinking about life, for instance. It is done to help the researcher “walk around the statue” – a figure of speech in phenomenological literature referring to the consideration of an idea or thing from all conceivable directions. As mentioned, the practice aims to bring biases and preconceptions to the surface, where they can be scrutinized and used as fodder for new questions, and new understanding. In so doing, this phase serves as a

way to sort out mental distractions.

In some respects this phase is much like what is known in schools of education as prewriting. *Prewriting* refers to the act of writing down whatever is on one's mind in an effort to clear one's head in preparation for writing something focused and intentional. Initially the term was coined and the practice applied by elementary school English teachers as a technique for helping their students purge themselves of mental distractions. This technique is used widely by writers of various strips to help them focus on the writing task at hand.

Prewriting differs from the epoche in that it is not centered on a specific subject of inquiry. It can be stream-of-consciousness writing, or it can be focused on a single event – whatever is on the person's mind. There are no boundaries. By contrast, the epoche is highly focused on the subject of inquiry, existing to help the researcher get out ideas and shift attitudes so as to look at the experience, that is, the subject of inquiry, differently each time. In this case, I began my research by writing down everything I knew about investigative reporting, and everything I thought about it. I set my preconceived notions in process notes used at the end of my research to help me identify specifically, with examples, what I had learned.

Prewriting yields the best results when done fast, because somehow the speed helps tease out fodder for another story, for a mental checkpoint, for a new thread to follow in research, according to my experience and Donald Murray, journalist and University of New Hampshire English professor, who introduced me to the idea in his book, Write to Learn. About the speed of prewriting, Murray writes, "It is the speed that enables the writer to outrun the censor and write what the writer does not expect;

it is the speed that causes the instructive failures essential to effective writing. Each failure shows what it may be possible to say and how it may be possible to say it. As in scientific discoveries, laboratory errors lead us forward” (1996, p. 118).

Atwell (1987) describes the value of prewriting as a step in the system of discourse. In a writing program she devised at the University of Buffalo in New York State, Atwell, a master teacher specializing in the middle grades, drew her theory and practice heavily from James Moffett’s hierarchy of discourse (1976, in Atwell, 1987). She wrote, “[I]ts basic tenet was that students learn to write by working systematically through an assigned sequence of modes – drama to narrative to idea writing – with extensive pre-and post-writing activities” (p. 6). It seems, then, that it is in the best interests of the researcher to race through the epoche, to write it fast.

Imaginative Variation

In research, the phenomenological process is an effort to isolate variables and hold them still while studying and conceiving them in different lights and from different perspectives. Imaginative variation is one approach to accomplishing this goal. For example, the concept of happiness may vary from culture to culture. Possessing a bushel of money may constitute happiness for most people in one culture, but may carry no emotional weight in a culture that equates happiness with possessing uncontaminated water and natural (rather than genetically modified) food. In other words, the dictates that provide the desired thing direct a way of life and a societal structure. The variable being held still is the value of money. The imaginative variation is how money is perceived by this or that culture. In this case, the value a

society places on something, and the tribe's or reporter's or culture's acceptance of that value appears to be the essence behind the emotional weight granted to what constitutes happiness, and whether that state is of value for that culture and society. The supposition behind the holding still of variables and applying imaginative variation is that considering something from as many different perspectives as possible yields the greatest amount of knowledge and leads to the discovery of essences, or the root of the object of inquiry.

Phenomenological Statements

The *modus operandi* of phenomenology is plain language (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002, p. 488). The system phenomenology outlines relies on a certain kind of statement emerging from the process of logic described. As explained by Sokolowski (2000), phenomenological statements

...tell us what we already know...[E]ven if they do not tell us anything new, they can still be important and illuminating, because we often are very confused about just such trivialities and necessities. (p. 57)

Phenomenological statements are so basic, so unavoidable, that the importance of stating the obvious becomes obvious itself, according to Sokolowski. They are statements describing the things surrounding or constituting the context in which experience was articulated or provided. They are statements about the experience described. They also are hypotheses about the possible essences of the thing under study. Further, and in the end, they are definitions of the thing being researched. Overall, they are non-judgmental observations. They are statements conveying

acceptance of the qualities of the thing under investigation. This step helps to further open the researcher's mind, to possibilities, new ways of thinking, and new ideas.

An adequate phenomenological statement means that the statement is precise, that all vagueness has been purged. It means all the dimensions of the subject or thing, in this case investigative reporting about the environment, have been brought out, all the implications have been drawn (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 58). This comes from considering all dimensions of a question or idea or thing, and taking all considerations into account. A phenomenological statement further clarifies a notion or concept through this process. Consequently, phenomenological statements are necessary although apparently obvious.

An example of non-judgmental observation/phenomenological statements comes from my process notes written immediately after my first interview with David Helvarg, the first of 18 conducted for this study. It illustrates how I attempted to avoid interpreting, explaining, and constructing meaning in my notes – three qualities the literature directs researchers to avoid in their process notes, analyses, and eventually their statements about the thing under scrutiny. From my notes,

David Helvarg's office in the Carnegie Building just off DuPont Circle in Washington, D.C. is a cubical in Ralph Nader's digs partitioned by weighty metal bookshelves and file cabinets. David is ending a strong freelance reporting and producing career to become an activist protecting oceans from pollution and destruction. As such he has established the Oceans Awareness Project, a non-profit organization to educate and inspire legislation that will restore and preserve the world's oceans. In that respect, he is returning to work he did before becoming a journalist working in radio, television, and print. As a war correspondent, he provided reports about urban warfare in Northern Ireland, and later for the Associated Press in Nicaragua during the Sandinista uprising.

The color in his office space comes from covers of the books he's written, articles bearing his byline, and white cardboard storage cases around

black videotapes he has prepared to promote his cause. The one wall, which his metal desk is pushed against, is dirty white and displays rugged ocean location photos too small for the wall.

David is proud of his new Macintosh iBook – a small computer with a center “finger” mouse – centered on the large desk. The computer is as silver as David’s hair, long for these times and cut in a modified shag. He is a short man, nimble and toned. My impression is there is nothing flashy about David except, perhaps, his memory, ability to integrate details, and storytelling skill. I hand David the human subjects release form and leave the cubicle. I return and he hands it to me immediately. He begins talking about his new not-for-profit. I start the tape and hand it to him to speak into. The first thing he speaks into the tape is the date and time of the interview. I later learn he is a private investigator on the side.

In the beginning David provides an introduction by way of his many career stories. I notice that even though I have explained that this first interview will focus on his experience prior to becoming an investigative reporter, he has difficulty thinking in that box. But around the fifth question I reiterate the interview’s priority and he divulges that investigative reports were not generally discussed in his family when he was growing up in Queens and Great Neck, New York, nor did he tend to read them in the newspaper or watch them on TV.

Sorting the Data

As with all methods and methodologies, phenomenology is a process or system designed with a certain aim in mind. Investigative reports, in general, begin the same way. The secret of the process is the confidence that there is always something to be seen and something to be said (Giorgi, 1989). As explained, the standards of rigor for phenomenological inquiry begin with the epoche, followed by the writing of process notes. Data are then gathered through interviews and observations, more notes on the process are recorded, then the data are analyzed. As with all methods, it is essential to keep notes on the process itself throughout the research to learn about the method, what and how it yields results, and shortfalls and strengths of the method for providing the desired yields or insights from this practice.

Prior to analysis, the data are sorted following five steps described by Denzin (1989b, pp. 55-56), which I have added specifics to for clarity, to make it easier to see how this process relates to the topic under investigation in this writing, and also how it applies in the newsroom: (1) locate key statements that speak directly to investigative environment reporting; (2) interpret the possible meanings of those statements in and out of context after all the research is gathered; (3) for the sake of authenticity, confirm the interpretation of the researcher with those interviewed; (4) inspect the meanings of statements common to all interviewees for what they reveal about the essential, recurring features of investigative reporting about the environment; and (5) offer a tentative statement or definition of investigative reporting and advocacy based on findings in Step 4.

Phenomenological Interviewing

Giorgi (1985, 1989) described a three-step process for phenomenological interviewing based on Merleau-Ponty's articulation of the research method. The three steps are: (1) obtain descriptions of the experience (data); (2) sort out the experiences by listening actively and impartially (reduction); and (3) search for essences (analysis). Giorgi (1989) cautions researchers that to obtain a description does not mean to explain or construct (see process notes about David Helvarg under "Phenomenological Statements").

The interviews in this study were conducted following the approach to phenomenological interviewing described by Marshall and Rossman (1999) and devised by Seidman (1998, in Marshall and Rossman, p. 112-113). It prescribes that

interview questions ask the *how* and *what* of the interviewee's experience. No probing questions asking *why* something occurred are to be used, based on the idea that the concern of the study is to describe the thing itself, not explain its cause and effect. In particular, Marshall and Rossman describe a set of three interviews to conduct, each with a precise focus (specifics added for clarity): (1) past experience with investigative reporting and environmental concerns; (2) present experience with investigative reporting and concerns about the environment; and (3) the individual's essential experience with investigative reporting about the environment.

Reflections on the Interview Process

This formulaic approach proved too constraining to provide verisimilitude. And, it broke down communication. First, it created for me an abundance of redundancy. The repetitiveness gave participants the impression I had not listened actively to their responses. As such, it appeared to undermine communication, even with the most patient and tolerant subjects. That resulted in frustration on both ends. The formula also turned the interview into a kind of survey, giving some participants the mistaken impression I had an agenda and was not open to new or unfamiliar ideas and possibilities. The initial interview protocol may be found in Appendix C.

For these reasons I abandoned the approach mid-way in favor of what I have come to understand is a more traditional approach to phenomenological interviewing, yet I did not go back and re-interview the subjects using the new approach. In this respect, the problems presented by a structured interview led me to apply grounded theory in this research, and at this point. That realization showed me the necessity of

connecting the method applied in research to a theory also applied in the research. The notion of grounded theory is elaborated upon in the next chapter.

Returning to interviewing, the older approach has no formula, no prescription, instead letting the interviews inform each other as the researcher moves from subject to subject, just as in grounded theory. In this approach, *why* questions may be asked to probe for understanding, and the interview centers around a handful of questions – maybe five at the most – then relies on what comes from listening, just like in journalism. That process prompts new ideas, thoughts, connections, and thus questions. This is the way subsequent interviews got at the heart of the phenomenon in question. This type of interview approach is not controlled through structure and categorization, rather it lets categories emerge on their own, through the interviewee rather than imposed by the interviewer, the very thing grounded theory was designed to do.

The older approach made the interviewees more comfortable, and me, too. All three interviews with Tom Bayles and Paul Rogers were conducted in this traditional manner. The last of three interviews with David Helvarg followed this approach as well. That occurred because the interviews with Helvarg were scheduled over several months due to travel and other constraints.

When given the latitude to provide their experience as they understood it, using the traditional approach to phenomenological inquiry, responses came out in a holistic manner, full of essence. They not only provided past and present experience in context and their relationship to each other, but also came upon revelations that did not surface with the more structured approach. There was more spontaneity in the responses,

which sometimes stimulated the interviewee to make internal connections that person had not previously made between the experiences relayed, particularly in Bayles' case. Therefore, it can be said that the latitude of the traditional approach allowed the interviewer and interviewee to communicate with greater understanding. The result of the traditional approach appears to be richer research.

The richness of the traditional approach compared to the contemporary approach provided in Marshall and Rossman (1999) is evident in process notes written after my first interview with Paul Rogers:

Phenomenological structure broke the flow of conversation. Information too light. Form too highly structured. Good idea to tap those aspects (past, present, and essential experience with phenomenon) but too difficult for interviewee to separate types of experience – past, present. Shifted to traditional approach at top of first interview. Result: Better. Holistic approach more natural for both parties. More of the essence of the phenomenon under question secured.

To elaborate, it was shortly after the first minutes of the first of three in-depth interviews with Rogers that I shifted gears, seeing how eager he was to speak to the question of whether investigative reporting was advocacy, and whether doing it on the environment beat necessarily constituted advocacy. I say, “necessarily constituted advocacy” because all of the respondents said we are entitled to clean air, clean land, and clean water, which suggests they collectively believe there is no other side to environmental issues, just a debate about how clean is clean, which is dictated by government, corporate and activist influences and the subject of some news reports about the environment.

It stands to reason, then, that an interview approach that is open, flexible, and that relies on active listening works best in the phenomenological paradigm. I learned

from this experience that phenomenological interviews glean essences only when the subject has the latitude to express those essences as understood, not in the sequence the interviewer might seek to hear them. Also, phenomenological interviewing seems to work best when the researcher goes in with only a few questions and an open mind. From there it is a matter of listening actively and with the purpose of keeping the interview on track and within the agreed upon time limit, just like in journalism. Several interviewees' minds wandered far off the subject using the contemporary method, which had them delving into childhood experiences as adults.

For my purposes, I also asked questions about what the person gets out of the experience of doing investigative reporting about the environment, and why that person would or would not want to repeat the experience. I took as my hypothesis the premise that these meanings guide actions and interpretations that lead to answers about the meanings the experience has for the individuals participating in the study.

Limitations of the Method

Phenomenological process has been used widely in business and by government agencies with some success when applied within its limitations. Facilitators often rely on the method. Generalizations derived from phenomenology's logic system tend to hold true when confined to the thing itself and/or the group under study. Attempts to extend descriptions provided by the method beyond the subject of inquiry seem doomed to fail.

For example, when a government agency in 2003 directed one of its advisory committees to use the process to create a standard that would apply to all subsets of a

certain program within the agency, it did not work because each subset operates differently. The story follows, minus certain specifics to respect a confidentiality agreement.

Case Study

A federal government agency sought to identify which factors have the biggest impact on the costs and timing of a thing (Step: eidetic intuition). As goals, they decided to develop a rating system that could eventually be used to relate the things' complexity to cost and timing impacts, and help program personnel project and assess costs and productivity, such as how many of the things could be produced within what period of time and at what cost.

The agency decided to develop a list of factors associated with the complexity of producing the thing (Step: locate key phrases and statements that speak directly to the thing in question). They based those factors on input received during a bi-annual meeting of employees involved in the thing, and earlier "team meeting" summaries, related reports, and other relevant documents (Step: interpret the meaning of those statements). They then forwarded that list to a subcommittee of industry stakeholders for their suggestions (Step: confirm interpretations).

The subcommittee revised the list in two stages. First, it expanded it to cover all the factors they could conceive (Husserl's approach to imaginative variation). Second, they cut it to reduce redundancy (Kant's way of imaginative variation), and to highlight those factors seeming to have the biggest impact. In the end, they came up with a list of 19 factors in four categories that describe the thing in all its complexity.

That list located areas of greatest complexity, but did not offer ways to simplify them.

In an attempt to develop a rating system, which was the second goal the agency sought to achieve, the subcommittee tried to assess how different factors effect the overall complexity of the project, and planned to eventually relate that information to specific cost and time impacts (Step: inspect the meanings of the statements for what they reveal about the essential, recurring features of the thing). To create a rating system, the subcommittee first attempted to develop scales for each of the different factors, and based them on a factor's potential impact on the project's overall complexity (Step: again, imaginative variation).

The attempt to create the rating system using this logic process failed. Factors derived from phenomenological reduction are individualistic and not generalizable across categories. For instance, that which is true for investigative reporting about the environment may offer clues to where to search for comparisons within environment reporting in general, investigative reporting in general, and more broadly, reporting in general; but a statement about investigative reporting about the environment alone cannot be generalized without parallel studies for comparison with investigative reporting on other topics (again, correspondence theory of truth).

The government agency in this story was attempting to create a set of standards that would apply to all of their components in an attempt to do the thing more efficiently. But each component operates differently. Thus, the agency quickly proved that each subset required its own rating system in order to perceive essences accurately and make sound economic decisions for the agency as a result.

As explained in this chapter, lessons gleaned from the phenomenological

interview process initially applied here led me to use grounded theory in this study. The coupling seemed to provide verisimilitude, as demonstrated by the findings located in the following chapter and my conclusions about them.

CHAPTER 4

THEORY

This section describes the process by which this researcher made discoveries about investigative reporting concerning the environment, and how the ideas emerged. What does investigative reporting about the environment tell us about advocacy in journalism today and journalism at the turn of this century? A significant theory about environment reporting and journalism revealed itself through the grounded theory process.

Grounded theory aims to produce a mid-range theory – that is, one preceding a broader and perhaps more significant observation. A mid-range theory can be understood as a step taken to move a concept to into a realm that reveals the notion as part of a greater whole. In other words, locating a mid-range theory may lead to a new robust one.

Grounded Theory Defined

Grounded theory focuses on the process of generating theory, emphasizing steps and procedures for connecting induction and deduction through constant comparison (Patton, 2002, p. 125). Its methods are systematic and specific, and follow two distinct variations: one constructivist, and the other objectivist. Overall, grounded theory, first articulated by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, aims to consider alternative meanings of phenomenon. In that respect, it is compatible with the phenomenological

approach to reasoning. When applied in this research, the two appeared to enhance each other. Like phenomenology, grounded theory emphasizes being systematic and creative at the same time. Its application appears to be especially powerful for considering information gained through interviewing. Grounded theory's structure of analysis is aimed at identifying building blocks that may lead to a holistic theory. The central question grounded theory attempts to answer is "What is happening here?" (Charmaz, 2002, in Gubrium and Holstein, p. 675). The question is phrased slightly differently in phenomenology. Phenomenology asks, "What is the essence of the lived experience as described by those having the experience?" Grounded theory, like phenomenology, relies on first-hand experience with the phenomenon in question.

Components of Grounded Theory

Like phenomenology, grounded theory depends on methods that take the researcher into and close to the real world so that the results and findings are grounded in the empirical world (Patton, 2002, p. 125). That is, the roots of the research are in everyday experience rather than hypotheses and theories. The goal of this approach is to keep the research on-the-ground, so-to-speak, and produce a theory that is relevant, applicable, and significant for understanding the world around us.

Several layers of checks exist to make sure the researcher is providing an accurate and balanced observation of the data collected. The steps are done concurrently while collecting research. In other words, data analysis begins right away. In grounded theory, the researcher adapts interview questions based on what the researcher needs to learn and/or verify at any given point in the research process.

Consequently, the researcher talks with the interviewees as necessary following the initial interviews.

To begin analysis, the researcher transcribes the interviews fully, then applies a two-step process for coding data. The first is called initial coding. It is line-by-line coding. In this part, the researcher considers each line of a story or statement told by an interviewee and reduces each line to key words and phrases that indicate what is happening in the story being told by the interviewee. This is done by creating two columns – one showing the story as told, and the other showing the researcher's coding. The second step in this layer is called focused or selective coding. It is a process of reduction. Again, the researcher looks at the entire story as told, but codes the content only where there are significant shifts or revelations in the story.

The first level is done to force the researcher to begin to make analytic decisions about the data. The second forces the researcher to identify the codes appearing the most frequently and use them to sort, synthesize, and conceptualize large amounts of data. Coding, then, helps researchers capture categories that simultaneously describe and dissect the data. As Charmaz (2002) describes,

In essence, coding is a form of shorthand that distills events and meanings without losing their essential properties. During the coding process, the researcher (a) studies the data before consulting the scholarly literature, (b) engages in line-by line coding, (c) uses active terms to define what is happening in the data, and (d) follows leads in the initial coding through further data gathering. (in Gubrium and Holstein, 2002, p. 684)

In this respect, coding in grounded theory is aligned with reduction in phenomenological research practices.

The second level of rigor in grounded theory is memo writing. Akin to the

researcher's process notes, they define the properties of each category identified in the coding, specifying conditions under which each developed, is maintained, and changes. The memos also note the consequences of each category and its relationships with other categories. In the end, the researcher takes the categories identified and draws examples from these memos to illustrate each category. The aim of this standard of rigor is to connect the researcher's original interpretations with the data and help the researcher avoid forcing data into existing theories.

Charmaz writes that memo writing helps grounded theorists: (1) stop and think about the data; (2) spark ideas to check out in further interviews; (3) discover gaps in earlier interviews; (4) treat qualitative codes as categories to analyze; (5) clarify categories – define them, state their properties, delineate their conditions, consequences, and connections with other categories; and (6) make explicit comparisons – data with data, category with category, concept with concept (p. 687). Like the *epoche* described in the previous chapter as a phenomenological standard of rigor, memos in grounded theory sometimes read like stream-of-consciousness letters, other times like focused analysis. Both the *epoche* and memo tend to increase the researcher's sense of confidence and competence, according to Charmaz (2002).

Another layer, one not pursued for this research, is theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling, as defined by Charmaz (p. 689), is sampling to develop the researcher's theory, not to represent a population. This endows grounded theory studies with their analytic power. In this step, the researcher returns to the field or seeks new cases to develop and expand categories. In this respect, parallels may be drawn between grounded theory and phenomenology concerning expansion. Again, as

described by Charmaz, theoretical sampling helps grounded theorists: (1) gain rich data; (2) fill out theoretical categories; (3) discover variation within theoretical categories; and (4) define gaps within and between categories (p. 689). Theoretical sampling aims to sharpen concepts and deepen analysis to help the work gain clarity and generality that transcends the immediate topic. As evidenced by the latter two theories mentioned earlier, this process can lead to potent yields.

The last phase of rigor in grounded theory is integrating the analysis. It is putting the memos and data together in an order that makes sense to the researcher. In this respect, the researcher creates the order and makes connections for the reader, just like in journalism. In this last phase, an attempt is made to reflect the logic of a participant's experience and provide verisimilitude. The steps to do so vary, but generally include sorting the memos by category title, mapping ways the ideas connect, and choosing an order that works for the analysis and the prospective audience, just like in investigative reporting. And, just as in trend stories in journalism, grounded theory interviews are used to tell a collective story, not an individual tale told in a single interview. The power of grounded theory methods lies in the researcher's piecing together a theoretical narrative that has explanatory and predictive power, just like the new category of investigative reporting seeming to emerge from coverage of the environment.

Approaches to Grounded Theory

There are two camps in grounded theory. One approaches grounded theory from the point of view of constructivism while the other makes its approach from

objectivism. In the most general terms, constructivism refers to the theory that knowledge is not something we *acquire* but something we *produce*. In other words, constructivists hold that the substance of an area of inquiry is not there to be discovered but is invented or constructed (Mautner, 1999, p. 111). The notion of constructivism itself includes many branches, among them ethical constructivism and social constructionism.

Ethical constructivism is the notion that moral facts and truths either are constituted by or dependent on our moral beliefs, reactions, or attitudes. In this view, given equally coherent epistemic conditions, the truth or lack of it in a particular moral belief is predicated on a moral system or code (Audi, 1999, p. 283). Social constructivism holds that knowledge is the product of our social practices and institutions, or of the interactions and negotiations between social groups. In the mildest form of this view, social factors shape interpretations of the world. Stronger versions maintain that the world, or some significant portion of it, somehow is constituted by theories, practices, and institutions. Social constructivism has roots in Kant's idealism, which claims that we cannot know things in themselves and that knowledge of the world is possible only by imposing pre-given categories of thought on otherwise inchoate experience. But where Kant believed that the categories are given a priori, contemporary constructivists believe the relevant concepts and associated practices vary from one group or historical period to another. Since there are no independent standards for evaluating conceptual schemes, social constructivism leads naturally to relativism (Audi, 1999, p. 855).

Charmaz (2002) provides that all variations of grounded theory include six

categories of rigor. They are: (1) simultaneous data collection and analysis; (2) pursuit of emergent themes through early data analysis; (3) discovery of basic social processes within the data; (4) inductive construction of abstract categories that explain and synthesize these processes; (5) sampling to refine the categories through comparative processes; and (6) integration of categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions, and consequences of the studied processes (p. 677).

As explained by Charmaz, the constructivist approach to grounded theory places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from the shared experiences of researcher and participants and the researcher's relationships with participants. In this view, any method is always a means rather than an end in itself. In this view, data analysis is perceived as a construction that not only locates the data in time, place, culture, and context, but also reflects the researcher's thinking (p. 677).

In contrast, objectivist grounded theory assumes that data represent objective facts about a knowable world. This position holds that the data already exist in the world and the researcher's task is to find them. In this view, meaning is in the data and the grounded theorist discovers it. This perspective assumes an external reality awaiting discovery and an unbiased observer who records facts about it (p. 677).

Charmaz also explains that objectivist grounded theorists make four other assumptions: (1) that research participants can and will relate the significant facts about their situations; (2) that the researcher remains separate and distant from research participants and their realities; (3) that the researcher represents the participants and their realities as an external authority; and (4) that the research report

offers participants a useful analysis of their situations. As Charmaz has observed, interviewers who subscribe to these assumptions look for explicit themes, gather findings, and treat their analytic renderings as objective, just like some journalists attempt to do.

The approach Charmaz takes to grounded theory, and the one that makes the most sense to this researcher, is a symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective with constructivist methods. Both symbolic interactionism and constructivism emphasize the study of how action and meaning are constructed. In this approach, the researcher aims to learn the implicit meanings relevant experiences have for study participants and build a conceptual analysis of them. Charmaz's approach to grounded theory hinges on three assumptions: (1) multiple realities exist; (2) data reflect the researcher's and the research participants' mutual constructions; and (3) the researcher, however incompletely, enters and is affected by participants' worlds. This approach explicitly provides an *interpretive* portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it, just like interpretative reporting.

This research was conducted by adhering to objectivist assumptions while also following Charmaz's approach. Together, they seem to have forced to the surface the notion that there is a time and place for constructivism in journalism. It appears another appropriate term for advocacy journalism might be *constructivist journalism*. However, the notion of constructivist journalism could also take in the sort of investigative reporting done by Schapiro in the example cited earlier. In that context, it could be said that this new form mixes constructivism and objectivism together and makes dough out of them. For a long time they have been in the kitchen together on

separate shelves; but together they put a new arrow in the investigative reporting quiver. The findings that follow in the next chapter shed light on what the reporters interviewed are doing that led me to that notion.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

This section considers data that reveal what drives and motivates the six journalists participating in this study to collect and write investigative news reports about the environment. Based on their self-perceptions, the data present what investigative reporting about the environment means to the study participants, what they get out of it, and whether they include what they view as advocacy as part of their job description. Also noted are the boundaries study participants used to define advocacy, journalism, and investigative reporting. A brief profile of each participant can be found in Appendix B along with detailed responses to specific questions intended to elucidate meaning based on their personal experience with investigative reporting on subjects involving the environment.

Responses generally fell into 12 categories: (1) view of investigative reporting; (2) criteria for moving the public; (3) the reporter's investigative reporting procedure; (4) the reporter's attraction to environment reporting; (5) view of advocacy and environment reporting; (6) view of investigative reporting in relation to advocacy journalism; (7) personal lessons learned from environment reporting; (8) personal lessons learned from investigative reporting about the environment; (9) realities of the environment beat; (10) what makes environment reporting meaningful for the reporter interviewed; (11) what makes investigative reporting meaningful for the reporter

interviewed; and (12) the future of environment reporting as perceived by study participants.

Other categories included for some, but not all, participants based on responses are: (1) types of environment reporters; (2) types of investigative reporters; (3) journalistic responsibility; (4) description of journalists in general, and (5) attraction to journalism and investigative reporting. Further, most, but not all, study participants articulated personal lessons gleaned from the experience of reporting about the environment, from investigative reporting about the environment, or from investigative reporting in general. All of the following quotes were taken from the interviews conducted for this research on location between March and May 2003.

View of Investigative Reporting

Specifically, participants were asked in one interview to describe what they knew about investigative reporting before they had any experience with it, and in a second one to compare what they knew prior to their experience with what they know now. Only Pekow, with his extensive experience with Freudian psychotherapy, was able to articulate the two experiences separately. All other participants provided integrated responses.

Also, participants were asked to describe investigative reporting about the environment. In general, participants did so by providing examples illustrating what they do. While each participant gave examples relating to investigative reports about the environment, only two provided a view of investigative reporting concerning the environment.

Chart 3: SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Study Participants	Intro. to I.R.	Medium
Rogers	not indicated	newspaper
Helvarg	Watergate, John Reed, Carleton Beals, Upton Sinclair, "Harvest of Shame" (Murrow)	all
Bayles	"All the President's Men"	NP, TV, online
Willman	Arizona Republic newspaper investigation establishing IRE, "All the President's Men"	radio
Pekow	Watergate, Jack Anderson, Ralph Nader, Mike Royko, Upton Sinclair, "Harvest of Shame" and "See it Now" (Murrow)	magazines
Meersman	not indicated	newspaper

Study Participants	Level of Education	Awards
Rogers	2 Bachelor's – journalism, political science	Pulitzer+
Helvarg	Bachelor's – history	Emmys+
Bayles	Bachelor's – Education Master's – Journalism	Two-time Pulitzer Nominee+
Willman	Master's – Environment & Community (no bachelor's)	Murrow+
Pekow	Bachelor's – Government Master's – Journalism	Nat'l Press Club, Am. Newspaper Assn.+
Meersman	Bachelor's – English Master's – English	John B. Oakes national award for distinguished environmental journalism, National Headliners Award for radio documentary+

All described their perception of investigative reporting as well as their experience with it in ways congruous with the literature. Consistent themes were: (1) time-consuming, (2) labor intensive, (3) hard evidence collection including documents and records required to support claims, (4) quest for truth, (5) watchdog for truth, (6) story reveals and/or stems from wrongdoing, (7) 16-hour days, (8) operating on not enough sleep, (9) working toward something you believe in, (10) requires tenacity, humility, excellent organization skills, (11) requires a sense of justice and injustice, passion for facts, outrage, (12) requires an ability to ask the right question, (13) requires an ability to think fast under pressure, and (14) demands a sense of humor of the reporter. Participants stressed that investigative reports, unlike other kinds, are edited line-by line, word-by-word, and often reviewed by a lawyer prior to publication. A surprise was that newspaper reporters working on an investigative project are removed from their “home” desk in the newsroom to a kind of cloister with other members of the reporting team while working on the project. Two of three newspaper reporters participating in this study described that segregation as unpleasant, but necessary.

In their own words, the participants viewed investigative reporting as:

WILLMAN: “Document work, to me, is in a sense investigative reporting. It means connecting the dots. It’s finding the threads...and the commonality amongst those things.”

PEKOW: “A report covers. An investigative report uncovers. You have to be able to get doors slammed in your face, get people to talk who don’t want to talk, and be able

to spot a needle in a haystack. Investigative reporting requires persistence more than intelligence.”

BAYLES: “An investigative reporter is a master reporter. It’s a person [adept] at making sources into best friends. You may not see your byline for a year while you’re doing [an investigative report]. That’s tough. But it’s really cool to [hear that] you don’t have to file a story for the foreseeable future – just go [pursue a lead]. Not only is it cool to be relieved from the daily grind, but...it’s a heart-warming testament to your boss’ belief in your ability to get the job done and be a self-starter. Not everyone is a self-starter.” He added, “The essence of investigative reporting is truth.”

HELVARG: “Much investigative journalism lacks a kind of writing that connects to people’s lives. You have to take investigative journalism skills and use them to tell stories and impart information in a way that has a personal and visceral connect to the reader.”

MEERSMAN: “Trying to set a good story in context, to broaden it, and make it significant [for more] people. ...Investigative reporting is all part of the same continuity.”

ROGERS: “[Investigative reporting] is exhausting. ...When I was in the middle of [an] investigative report [about cow grazing], I wanted to quit. I was miserable. And I realized, this isn’t just me! It’s a really fun way to make a living.”

Of investigative reporting about the environment, Rogers and Meersman alone offered descriptions:

ROGERS: “The very best investigative stories combine the outrage of some kind of environmental degradation with the outrage of taxpayer rip-off.”

MEERSMAN: “An awful lot of environment reporting is investigative. ...There’s a lot of potential there for stories to be much broader...without having to be major investigations that come up with some big ‘Gotcha!’”

Criteria for Moving the Public

Each participant described how they “hook” their audiences with their investigative stories. Their offerings included everything provided in the literature, such as how many people the story impacts, whether there is a conflict, whether the story is unusual, contrarian, and whether there is an outrage factor for anyone involved in the story. All also said their criteria included presenting information in a balanced way, in context, for public discussion.

Pekow added that he tries to find something that is not obvious and deliver an artful telling of the story. Meersman added the requirements to be curious and care. “Journalism’s way of moving the public is through reporting, not persuasive writing,” he said. Along with Helvarg, Meersman said let the facts lead to the conclusion rather than starting with a conclusion and locating facts to support it, an approach found in academic literature under the heading of objectivist grounded theory. Helvarg phrased it this way: “What is the story the facts are telling?” Bayles added that investigative reports must be written with the voice of authority in order to be effective. “The voice of authority comes by being fair in the way the story gets framed in the newspaper,” he said, explaining the tie between voice and balance. His criteria also includes dedication to bringing clarity to the situation being investigated, in an effort to reveal truth, and establish oneself as an independent thinker.

Helvarg, who has a substantial amount of experience with immersion journalism on location from Antarctica to Ireland, the United States to Eastern Europe to Central America, added four points to the literature addressing ways of capturing audience attention. According to Helvarg, the reporter should: (1) be possessed by the story; (2) examine what the story tells the reporter about him or her self; (3) illustrate the human condition and show how it is changed by circumstances and events; and (4) select the story's components depending on what the reporter perceives is the substance of the story, the nuances that prompted the investigation, and the story's impact on democracy and injustice.

Investigative Reporting Technique

Study participants talked a lot about investigative reporting technique. Meersman begins with writing down a handful of questions prior to doing any research and answer them first. This provides grounding for the story, he said, helping the reporter stay focused on what a regular person might want to know about the story. It also provides a reality check in the research process later on, like bracketing in phenomenological research.

Bayles begins with a Lexis-Nexis search to discover what has been written on the subject and where the holes are in the topic. Then, like Meersman, he writes an outline. The outline follows a five-point storytelling format Bayles created that he uses for every investigative story he writes. But first he puts on paper a sense of where he is going with the story and writes a rough lede. He uses that to sell his editors on the story. When it is time to write, Bayles tells each story in the series following this

format: (1) describe the concept in four or five paragraphs; (2) write the first subhead, followed by paragraphs describing the breadth of the problem and what the report looks into; (3) write the second subhead, followed by paragraphs filled with the “meat” of the report: statistics and arguments; (4) write the third subhead, followed by paragraphs providing a response from all sides; and (5) end with an anecdote, something whimsical.

Willman slotted his technique into three categories: (1) understand what you are investigating; (2) protect your sources – get permission as needed; and (3) talk to everyone involved and address all facets of the story. Pekow provided a similar description of his process, but added that stories about the environment usually have fewer witnesses to a problem and therefore require scientific documentation as well as the usual evidence.

Investigative Reporting Procedure

While all study participants said investigative reporting procedures are individualistic, all six follow the Paul Williams Way – described earlier – in one form or another. The approach is the guide endorsed and taught by Investigative Reporters & Editors (IRE) for producing verifiable and credible investigative reports. Whether freelancer or staff member, regardless of medium, study participants consistently ask or are asked: (1) Is there a story? (2) Is it a go? (3) Is it worth it to do this story? (4) What evidence is in-hand? (5) What evidence is needed? and (6) Where is the story leading? All of those questions constitute the Paul Williams Way described in the literature synthesis.

With near precision, all three newspaper reporters described the Paul Williams Way in detail as the process applied in their newsrooms. The two freelancers (Helvarg and Pekow) and Willman (radio) were less specific with their descriptions but adhered to its tenets in examples they provided.

Discoveries About Process

In describing the process they use from beginning to end when doing an investigative report about the environment, some study participants unknowingly revealed that their approaches add two steps to the Paul Williams Way, outlined in Chapter 2. Those two steps are found in the phenomenological research process. They are bracketing, or the epoche; and the writing of process notes to help sort data. The Paul Williams Way concentrates on sorting the data, the third part of phenomenological research process.

In phenomenology, the 10 questions constituting the method's rigor when it's time to sort data are:

- (1) What is the aim of the investigation?
- (2) What can be seen?
- (3) What can be said?
- (4) What statements speak directly to the subject?
- (5) What ideas and concepts surface when the statements are taken out of context?
- (6) What are the strengths of this investigation?
- (7) What are the shortfalls?

- (8) Double check interpretations with source.
- (9) Inspect the meanings of statements common to all interviewees for what they reveal about the essential, recurring features of the thing under investigation.
- (10) Offer a tentative statement of definition of the thing under investigation.

In contrast, the steps in the Paul Williams Way (1978, p. 14) have been set forth by him as:

- (1) Conception
- (2) Feasibility study
- (3) Go/no-go decision
- (4) Planning and base-building
- (5) Original research
- (6) Re-evaluation
- (7) Go/no-go decision
- (8) Key interviews
- (9) Final evaluation
- (10) Final go/no-go decision
- (11) Writing and publication.

Phenomenological research seeks to answer a question rather than prove something. In that respect, the question is akin to Williams' conception phase, and parallels the phenomenological question: What is the aim of this investigation, a question that also covers the next three stages in Williams' formula. The fifth one, original research, is an ethic not specifically addressed in descriptions of phenomenological research. It is understood as the researcher's responsibility to integrity.

Williams' Step 6, re-evaluation, is embodied in phenomenological research question two, which asks: What can be seen? Similarly, Williams' Step 7, another go/no-go decision, surfaces in phenomenological rigor this way: What can be said?

That is the checkpoint question editors regularly ask investigative reporters on a project to make financial and editorial decisions about whether to proceed with the endeavor.

Next, Williams lists that sorting information pertinent to the aim of the investigation from key interviews follows. Phenomenological research process addresses that step with the questions: What statements speak directly to the subject? What ideas and concepts surface when the statements are taken out of context?

At this point, Williams recommends a final evaluation of the project. Similarly, at this point in the phase in phenomenology governing the sorting of data, standards of rigor ask: What are the strengths of this investigation? What are the shortfalls? Williams follows that assessment with another go/no-go decision. In phenomenology, the researcher at that point double checks his or her interpretations with the source, and inspects the meanings of statements common to all interviewees for what they reveal about the essential, recurring features of the thing under investigation. Once that is done, the researcher completes the study by writing a tentative statement or definition of the thing under investigation, and offering that to an audience. Similarly, Williams' final step is writing and publication; but it does not specifically require the author to make any sort of statement defining the thing under investigation. This is significant, because this seems to be a line that some investigative reporters writing about the environment have crossed: they have made statements defining the thing under investigation, a step beyond merely describing the thing itself. In a 2003 article entitled, "Oil and Water Don't Mix: Is the U.S. prepared for a major oil spill in its

waters,” for Grist Magazine, an online publication providing environmental news and humor, Helvarg rode that line this way:

[The U.S. Department of the Interior’s Mineral Management Service] has long been recognized as a tool of the oil and gas industry. Its mandate to increase production and revenue (both for industry and the government through royalty payments) continues to supercede its obligation to prevent oil-spill disasters in U.S. waters. Decisions such as whether or not to permit drilling off the coast of Florida (where the president’s brother is governor) seems to be made on a political rather than a scientific basis. When asked why MMS has never canceled a lease sale based on its own biologists’ oil-spill risk assessments, Bob LaBelle, chief of MMS’s Environmental Division, responded, “It’s hard to make or break something as big as a lease on one issue.

There are other risks posed to U.S. waters by the oil industry as well, including the security of tanker terminals and coastal refineries, marine hydrocarbon pollution from operational leakages in the Gulf of Mexico, and the impact on sperm whales and deep-ocean ecosystems from acoustic guns used in deep-oil survey work. None of these issues is being adequately addressed. For a long time, there has been insufficient public agency oversight on these matters; now, unfortunately, we also have an administration that seems more concerned with maximizing offshore fossil fuel production than with protecting our nation from an environmental disaster like the Prestige spill. (<http://gristmagazine.com/cgi-bin/printify-2.pl>)

A second contrasting and more mainstream example from Helvarg appeared in Popular Science in 2002 under the headline, “If by Sea.” The second to the last paragraph reads:

Maritime trade is expected to more than double in the next two decades. As long as the United States participates in a global consumer culture in which exotic amenities [such as bottled water]...are commonplace, our maritime transportation system will, by dint of scale, remain vulnerable to disruption, sabotage, or terror. (p. 58-67)

In addition to the process of sorting data just described, which appears to be the focus of the Paul Williams Way but only one of three phases of phenomenological research, study participants described using bracketing (a phenomenological process)

to check their biases and preconceptions before beginning any research. To review, bracketing unfolds this way:

(1) Empty yourself onto the page. Write down everything you know about the thing under investigation prior to doing any research.

(2) “Walk around the statue,” looking at it from different perspectives, shifting attitudes, looking at the subject differently each time, getting ideas out.

(3) Identify potential points of bias and preconceptions.

(4) Scrutinize.

(5) Generate new questions, new understanding.

(6) Write statements describing the context of the experience provided.

(7) Write statements about the experience described, including hypotheses about the possible essences of the thing under study. These are definitions of the thing being investigative. They are nonjudgmental observations. An adequate phenomenological statement is precise: all vagueness has been purged. All the dimensions of the subject or thing have been drawn.

The concept or notion of the thing under investigation is clarified through this process, making these statements necessary although apparently obvious. Meersman described his approach to bracketing this way:

...You don't have a preconceived notion of the story, you investigate, you let the facts lay themselves out for you, and that's what the story is.... [objectivist grounded theory]

Before I get into a project, I try to write down a handful of questions that I want to answer, so that I don't learn too much and forget about what a regular person might want to know about this. And maybe some of the questions might be pertinent as I learn more. [This step] provides me [with] a reality check to go back to. [It gives me a marker for saying] these are questions at that point that I thought a regular person would want to know in

terms of information. You can't neglect these things. You can go deeper if you want to, but you have to get these things first because these are the things that would come to any reasonable person's mind when you bring up the topic.

So when I've answered all those questions, and taken it further and found new things...sometimes [my editor will] raise the question of whether it might be time to start writing. (Appendix B, Tom Meersman)

Helvarg described "walking around the statue," looking at it from different perspectives. He simply said, "Study your interviewee in advance." Bayles walks around the statue by beginning with a Lexis-Nexis search. "[That] not only gives me a knowledge base, because I trust what other papers write, but it shows me where the holes are in the [current discussion]," he said. Bayles then outlines the story he's going to go after, "because at that point I have a pretty good sense of where I'm going." Bayles' rule to end with an anecdote, perhaps something whimsical, seems to correlate with the notion that such statements are necessary for perspective and context, although apparently obvious.

Helvarg was the only study participant to describe in discernible terms the concept of taking notes on the investigation process, and even his description is sketchy. What he recommends is that reporters – of all stripes, not just investigative reporters, or those covering the environment – transcribe their tapes immediately, while they can still decipher their notes. This suggests that the reporter transcribing tapes without delay can fill in blanks about the subject under inquiry that may not have been obvious before, and raise questions about what is and is not working in the investigative reporting process.

Why Environment Reporting?

All but one reporter cited the perks of environment reporting – for instance, getting paid to go to Yosemite National Park or to be on a boat out in the ocean chasing a story inaccessible any other way – as their first attraction to covering the environment. After that, many of the reasons given fell into general categories shared by all study participants. They are: (1) it is challenging; (2) it is intriguing; (3) everyday it is something completely different (e.g., water pollution one day, conservation the next, land use the next; etc.); (4) the stories make a big difference in people's lives; (5) the learning curve is continuous; (6) it is never boring; (7) environmental issues are complex and cover many disciplines, including architecture, macrobiology, and ethnobotany; and (8) it covers the welfare of wildlife and ecology as well as human welfare.

Both Meersman and Helvarg also said they saw a reporting niche that needed filling. They saw environmental problems that were not getting resolved, many of them overlooked completely, and wanted those problems to get their due attention. Helvarg specifically said the beat had low prestige initially, that reporters who wrote about science or nature were not considered serious by their peers who wrote about politics, war, economics, business, crime, or public affairs. The investigative reporting possibilities Helvarg saw when it came to the environment were too much to resist, he explained. "I saw many investigative reporting opportunities to help inform, broaden, and democratize the crucial environmental debates taking place today," he said.

Advocacy and Environment Reporting

The study participants all believe the Earth and its inhabitants are entitled to clean air, clean land, and clean water. Only one was able to talk about advocacy *in* environment reporting. All others relied on defining or giving a description of advocacy in general as they perceive it, and journalism as they perceive it. All indicated the standards that define journalism in general hold for anything calling itself journalism, which is fairly consistent with the literature. Those standards are “fairness,” “accuracy,” “balance,” “fact-based,” “verifiable,” and backed by evidence supporting the report.

“You gotta prove what you say,” Bayles said. Pekow said, “As long as it is written based on facts, it [can be called] advocacy journalism.” Advocacy, he said, should be labeled as such. “Advocacy is a point of view. Slant is not being fair to one side, leaving out part of the story but making it appear otherwise,” Pekow said. Slant is never journalism, Pekow said.

Meersman said, “To be journalism, it has to be balanced. That is legitimate journalism. Anything is fair game as far as topics.” Rogers said, “The value of the conversation, the very integrity of the democratic process, depends on you as a reporter holding all sides accountable. Nobody has a monopoly on the truth,” Rogers said. “Your credibility depends on asking difficult questions of all sides.”

Helvarg, who came to journalism after being an activist for many years, stepped back from definitions and looked at environment reporters and their work. When he began to meet other investigative reporters covering the environment, he observed, “There was this self-flagellation I found with environment reporters that I

never found with other investigative reporters looking at political corruption or national defense issues and AIDS. In the last 30 years, environmentalism has become a social ethic. Considering yourself an environmentalist and reporting on the environment – if you’re a good journalist [i.e., one who does not slant facts and other information] – is not different than a national defense reporter considering himself or herself a patriot. We have shared values as a society and environmental protection is one of them.”

One cannot be both activist and reporter, Helvarg said. He is speaking as a war correspondent now. “I saw the limits of advocacy reporting in a war zone, where truth really is the first casualty,” he said. A journalist is obligated “to provide a fair and honest presentation of the truth” as it is perceived at that moment or risk becoming a propagandist, being manipulated, becoming a dupe, Helvarg said. “We all have a point of view, but we can’t – or we shouldn’t – cheat with it,” he said, echoing Meersman’s words that advocacy journalism could mean someone who lets their feelings get in the way of getting as close to the truth as possible.

Investigative Reporting and Advocacy Journalism

Returning to the literature synthesis under the heading of “Attraction to Environment Reporting: Advocacy?” beginning in the 1960s, the ideal of objectivity was increasingly questioned by scholars and journalists. All participants in this study hold there is no such thing as true objectivity, only balance. They collectively said the public entrusts journalists to be balanced and fair. Also, they defined journalism in the United States as a public forum where information is exchanged so the collective

community, based on generally accepted values, can decide what is right for their society. Study participants also all said the ordering of the facts can and does introduce a persuasive element to the writing, particularly in an investigative report. Consequently, there is no such thing as true objectivity; but there is balance, all study participants stressed.

Bayles added to the literature about advocacy by identifying two types of advocacy: (1) self motive, which is equal to lobbying; and (2) advocating on behalf of another person. He said it is a news outlet's responsibility to advocate in some cases. For instance, giving an example of his news judgment, Bayles would not endorse wife-beating or raping children, and does not think the newspaper he writes for should either. Bayles said if he went to a prison to interview a man who had raped a child and the man said, yeah, everyone should rape children because it is a great emotional release, he would not use that quote because he does not agree with the prisoner's perspective, does not think that raping children is good for society. Bayles said, "There are moral imperatives that come before journalistic goals. My duty is to stop these things [wife beating, child rape] from happening. Your duty as a citizen outweighs your oath as a journalist in most cases. ...You can act the proper way journalistically and also do your duty as a citizen."

Similarly, he said, if a two-year-old child in the community needed a liver transplant but the parents could not afford it, the news outlet could write a profile of the family and its struggle, a story depicting the human condition. If that story brings in contributions for the child, that is fine, Bayles said. Just by telling the story, the news outlet is not advocating for or against transplants, but is displaying compassion,

which is in concert with generally accepted values in the United States. Supporting the literature, he said, “Voice, framing, and point-of-view are the factors that, depending on how they are handled, determine whether a piece of writing is advocacy or investigative reporting.”

Study participants supported the literature by categorizing advocacy “journalism” as traditional persuasive writing. The difference is that to carry the moniker of journalism, writing with a viewpoint must also be fair and balanced, or else it is not journalism, and therefore cannot be called *advocacy journalism*, they generally said. It cannot be an article with spin, they said. For instance, Meersman said, “Both [investigative reporting and advocacy journalism] are the same in that they raise issues of legitimate concern. The purpose of raising issues is to get them into public discussion. They could lead to action. ...But the approach is different. Journalism doesn’t take a side.”

The current debate about advocacy in environment reporting includes these questions: Is the environment reporter in it because he or she is an environmentalist? Should environment reporters be advocates because of the seriousness of the threat of environmental degradation? Are they advocates, regardless of personal belief, simply by virtue of placing environmental issues on the nation’s political agenda? When should a reporter simply present opposing arguments, and when should he or she feel confident enough to take a step further to suggest which of the claims seems to have merit?

Rogers added to that debate with the question, “Why are you doing this?” a question investigative reporters looking into an environmental concern must ask, he

said. If the answer is because the reporter has an allegiance to the truth, then it is investigative reporting, Rogers said. If it is to communicate key issues the reporter thinks need reform, it is not journalism, he said. That view seemingly discounts Helvarg's War Against the Greens as journalism (see Appendix B, David Helvarg, this question – Helvarg considers his books, Blue Frontier and War Against the Greens his “best investigative work.”).

Helvarg without a doubt demonstrates an allegiance to the truth in both books. In both cases he writes from the perspective of a protector, pointing out actions that have shaped the reality we know and have assigned meaning to, but that may be difficult to understand without seeing those actions gathered under one banner for a closer look. In both cases he presents a detailed discussion collecting many components – views, documentation, dramatic action, and peer reviewed science, for instance – leading him to the observations he has set forth. Although his work is investigative, Rogers might stop short of calling it journalism, while Pekow might not. On this point, Rogers did not address whether an investigative report with allegiance to the truth and that includes a conclusion qualifies that report as journalism and therefore advocacy journalism, or strictly advocacy writing.

Drawn out of the literature synthesis, in 1990, Meersman lauded the alternative press and advocacy journalists for ventilating issues in a way that forced the major press to consider them. He also said some stories warrant a conclusion while others do not, stressing that a more important element is what stories are chosen. His views have not changed as of this study.

Study participants almost universally described investigative reporting as an

attempt to give the public as much information as possible to help “consumers” develop their thinking about an issue and make decisions for themselves, supporting the literature about investigative reporting. Pekow stressed that it is possible to for a report to advocate without being investigative, but that there could be a merger between the two, supporting Teya Ryan’s position discussed in the literature synthesis.

Willman cited early muckraking as a kind of advocacy journalism, directly saying, “Muckrakers were advocates. Izzy Stone dug out a lot of important stories. I don’t see much of a difference between investigative reporting and muckraking in that sense. Good muckraking to me is just good investigative reporting.” Offering an example Willman said, “With what we know today, it’s not fair to say that humans aren’t at least partly responsible for global climate change.”

Personal Lessons From Environment Reporting

Three of six study participants described personal growth as a reward of covering the environment. Another described environment reporting as providing a deeper sense of purpose for him because the environment is “closer to ultimate truth.” Another said environment reporting reinforced his love of learning, and one other said it reaffirmed for him that life is what we make it.

Describing the personal impact environment reporting had on him, Rogers described a revelation. “It made me less of an environmentalist than before,” he said (see Appendix B, Rogers, this question for details). Rogers said he learned from covering the environment that activists for the environment “will lie to you as much as

government officials will.” He also learned he did not want to be an editor. “This is too much fun,” he said. And perhaps the biggest surprise of all for Rogers, a self-described political junkie, was this awakening: “I’d rather do this than cover the White House.”

Willman said covering the environment gave him a clarity of identity he did not have before. Among other things, he learned he was an environmentalist, he said. For Helvarg, writing about issues concerning the environment helped refresh his commitment to the craft of journalism. “Seeing the level of passion and commitment that many environment reporters, particularly those working outside the United States, brought to the beat [was inspiring]. While still critical thinkers, they tend not to fall into the traps of cynicism or careerism that many other reporters have. It reminded me of the reasons I first got into journalism,” Helvarg said.

Personal Lessons from Investigative Reporting About the Environment

Four of six study participants offered responses that fell into this category. They are too varied to draw any generalization. While Helvarg and Rogers talked about the process of investigative reporting as the root of their lessons, they came from different points on the circle, so-to-speak. Helvarg spoke directly to a connection between investigative reporting specifically about the environment, what he learned about himself, and what he learned about society, while Rogers spoke about what he learned about himself from the process of investigative reporting in general.

Helvarg said he feels that “too little investigative journalism is focused on the economic and political interests driving how people use and abuse critical

ecosystems.” As a result, while continuing to “follow the money,” he began encouraging colleagues in IRE and other journalism groups to see the environment as an opportunity for new kinds of storytelling. “We’re at a critical point,” he said. “A year ago I thought about returning to war reporting in Iraq or becoming an advocate for ocean protection, exploration and restoration. In part I decided that while we’ll probably always have wars, we may not always have wild fish.” Part of the action he plans to take as an advocate is to establish a fellowship for investigative reporting about the seas.

Just as covering the environment give Willman a clarity of identity, so does investigative reporting in general give Rogers a clarity of identity he did not have before, Rogers said. “Investigative reporting is harder than I imagined. There’s very, very little about the process of investigative reporting that’s rewarding. It’s one of the most stressful, miserable things I’ve seen. You run down hundreds of blind alleys, you spend many days in the newsroom until midnight going through thousands of statistics. You’re threatened with lawsuits all the time. It’s a very, very unpleasant craft.

“Sometimes you just throw your hands up. ...But usually you come out of the nadir and write something you’re proud of, that either does a great job of explaining a complex facet of society to the public– which is your job in a democracy – or you expose some level of corruption, or some level of unfairness in society that the public sees and grows from. In the end there’s a change based on your reporting. That’s what the benefit is. ...It’s the highest and best use of your journalism career, but it’s really difficult. I didn’t realize that when I got into it,” he said.

Willman said investigative reporting about the environment led him to the essence of who he is as a reporter. “Am I an environmentalist? Yeah, I am. But do I try to advocates in my pieces? No,” he said. For Pekow, the personal reward was, “I learned I could handle the reporting without the science background.”

Realities of the Environment Beat

In one way or another, all study participants said there are so many stories to write about the environment that (a) it is overwhelming, and (b) the beat is new all the time. They also concurred that one cannot effectively cover the environment from a desk because seeing what people are talking about might change your perspective, and that the breadth of knowledge needed for environment reporting sets it apart from all other kinds.

Meersman said that wherever the reporter lives, there is always an interesting environmental topic. Also that there is not a story surfacing everyday like on the crime beat. Willman also said environment stories are slow to develop. As well, Meersman pointed out that in addition to the diversity of topics an environment reporter covers, the beat requires the reporter to write different kinds of journalism: daily, enterprise, investigative, and explanatory. To that, Pekow added that environment stories without exception must be humanized.

Adding to the literature, Willman said, “The environment beat is one of the most polarized beats. The language has been hijacked to a great extent so that it’s hard to do a story without being accused of being an advocate or zealot for one side or the other.”

What Makes Environment Reporting Meaningful for You?

Of the study participants, five out of six expressed a clear indication of a deep, personal connection to the environment, including both atheists. The exception, Rogers, spoke only about the gratification he gets from the beat in terms of fulfilling his social responsibility, his obligation to society, the personal recognition it provides in part because “so few people cover it all the time,” and the pride he feels from rising to the challenges the beat presents. “The level of expertise required is so high that you write with authority,” Rogers said. “You’re much more likely to influence policy, write something that will get noticed, shine a light on some problem, or expose some taxpayer rip-off. Environment stories seem more likely than others to have people act on them.” That revealed, Rogers, who calls himself a conservative democrat, stops short of saying that he seeks to inspire people to take action to keep the environment clean, or to preserve open space.

The other study participants do not. Each clearly indicated a desire to protect the environment – whether registered republican or democrat. The meaning they derive from their work includes everything Rogers described that speaks to social responsibility. In addition, however, they describe their sense of personal connection to the planet and the life it sustains.

Specifically, they said:

MEERSMAN: The fact that he is a father gives him a strong desire to pass on a healthy and thriving planet to his children, Meersman said. The former teacher said, “Those are my values. You have to behave in a responsible way. You don’t take an action that will spoil things for the future. There needs to be respect.” Staking his

claim on the environment beat let him “do stories that educate people about nature,” he said.

PEKOW: “A good story is a good story, but the environment is something of a tremendous concern for me. This is one way I have of protecting the environment outside of doing the normal things of living an environmentally sound life. What right do humans have to despoil the Earth for humans or other beings or for the Earth itself? The environment is everything. It’s where we live. If we don’t keep our environment in order, our lives will eventually become unpleasant. The environment beat is the most important because it transcends mankind, transcends everything we do. It’s where we came from. Also, environment reports [are] more likely to affect me personally.”

WILLMAN: “The clearest indication of a greater power is to be outside in the environment,” Willman said. Reporting about the environment deepens his connection to the environment as well as its meaning for him, he said.

BAYLES: “It’s really important that someone outside the government and special interests is watching what’s going on with our environment. Just like if we screw up our schools, we screw up a whole generation of our children. If we screw up the environment, we screw up our planet. If we’re not paying attention, we could all die. The planet could become uninhabitable. I’m going a bit far, but it’s important that we in the media keep watch. That’s right on, and key to how I feel about my job,” Bayles said.

HELVARG: Covering the environment allows him to have adventures and encounters with people, animals, and habitats that challenge and excite him, Helvarg said. “It’s

symbiotic if I can go on great dive adventures that also become the basis for radio reports, articles, TV segments, and books that help inform the public on the risky state of the world's coral reefs for example, and inspire them to take corrective action," Helvarg said. His best reporting, he said, are his articles written from first person perspective.

What Makes Investigative Reporting Meaningful for You?

All study participants said investigative reporting feeds their sense of social purpose. It not only feels meaningful, but it is something that each one would do because it is the right thing to do, they said. It is the right thing to do because it is an effort to reveal truth, injustice, and abuse by the powerful, among other things, they all said. Without exception, they said they are delighted to get paid for doing something they would do on their own time. Investigative reporting is what a journalist is supposed to do, they all said in their own way.

"It's righting wrongs," Willman said. "It's this sense of anger and injustice that really pushed me to want to do investigative reporting. The other element is that I also think investigative reporting is just really good reporting." Rogers said he gets more satisfaction from investigative reporting than plain environment reporting because he gets "paid to learn," "paid to become an expert," and "paid to influence society." "It doesn't feel like a frivolous pursuit. It doesn't feel like you've wasted your time," Rogers said.

Helvarg said investigative reporting gave him a deeper personal sense of satisfaction about his craft. It happened at a time when "easy satisfactions were few

and the inquiries I was making were putting lives – my own and others – at risk,” he said, reflecting on his years as a war correspondent, the roots of his investigative reporting career.

Pekow and Bayles spoke along similar lines. Pekow said investigative reporting “confirmed that I could do what I hoped to do. I got into journalism and investigative reporting because I wanted to find truth. ...[Investigative reporting is] not a very lucrative way of making a living, but it’s a way to be a good citizen. It’s a way of using my ability to help improve the world. I get a little money, but more importantly I get the satisfaction of knowing I made some contribution, and I hope it’s for a better, more livable world for me, too.”

Bayles said, “If there are enough [people] out there who are inspired by this [investigative report] and we put some better rules in place to make...it a little bit easier for humans and animals to co-exist, from both points of view, then there you go! That’s as great a legacy as anybody can have – where I come from! With investigative reporting, you can pour your heart and soul into it and definitely have some positive outcomes: if not changing laws, then you’re alerting society to potential problems that could be fixed.”

What a journalist is supposed to do, Meersman said, is be critical and thoughtful, pick important questions, and educate people about them. In addition to educating people, with “investigative reporting you get something extra special, which is shelf life. In my case, where you really take a look at something, [the report] has made significant changes in terms of bringing about discussion and changing policies.

So occasionally your work can actually change things in a way that you can see, in addition to educating.”

The Future of Environment Reporting

The three newspaper reporters participating in this study said newspapers have a special responsibility to do investigative reporting in part because its format is well-suited to the in-depth genre. But, adding to the literature about online reporting, Bayles talked about the emergence of a new dimension in investigative reporting: online diary reports as a component the journalist is expected to produce while working on an immersion report, for instance. For one series of investigative reports about firefighters, which included the search for an arsonist (Bayles became a firefighter for the story), Bayles wrote daily personal narratives and reflections on his experiences while the story unfolded. Contributing to the literature about dissemination of information by the media, Bayles said with the advent of newspapers owning cable stations, new questions are presenting themselves not about content but about how to use the mediums in complementary ways.

Newspapers that own cable stations are producing whole television news reports that tease the newspaper version of the story, which is what the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, owned by The New York Times Company, is doing, he said. Editors and cable reporters there are struggling to answer five basic questions: (1) How do you do a story on television that you are also doing in print? (2) How long can a television piece be that backs up a newspaper report? Two minutes? Three minutes? Five minutes? Eight minutes? Ten minutes? (3) What, if any, are the reasons we could not

keep a topic interesting for 10 minutes, especially if it is something as multi-faceted as an environment story? (4) Should there be a cable tease the day before the story runs in the paper as well as the day it runs? (5) Should the television report contain different information? Should it be more substantial than just a tease?

Further, Bayles said that, “Sometimes the environment reporter for a newspaper now is interviewed as an authority,” particularly for a television report, pointing to a shift in the role of the newspaper journalist and returning to Rogers’ point about the investigative reporter as an authority, a slightly different take from Bayles’ position that an investigative reporter must *write* with authority, as discussed earlier.

With the exception of Pekow, all participants saw the environment as a mainstream value now, which Rogers said is making it easier for editors to accept that “a separate person is needed to cover the environment.” The five also noted increases in environment reporting across mediums as a result. Pekow, however, said he continues to see a smaller quantity of reporting about the environment in the mainstream press, and projected the beat would continue to be fractured in the sense that a lot of in-depth reporting about the environment would continue to be done by specialty publications rather than the mainstream press. He said consolidations in media ownership will bring into question the credibility of a news report about the environment because the station owners have a special interest stake in the stories. “Is ABC going to want to cover a land use story [fairly] when Disney, which owns ABC, wants to knock down trees and open a theme park? Synergy will definitely become a

problem. Also, General Electric owns NBC as well as energy and engineering businesses that affect the environment,” Pekow said.

With one exception, the general feeling was that the content of environment reports would not change much, although two of four said more stories about global disease and global climate change might appear. Adding to the literature, Meersman noted that coverage of the environment is “no longer just parks and pollution. It’s also sustainability.” Elaborating and illustrating, Helvarg predicted another change in content. “There’s a collapse of the natural systems that sustain us, so look for more investigative reporting in this area,” he said. “Conditions allowing the ability of ecosystems to sustain themselves in the face of growing environmental abuses will keep the environment beat alive for along time to come.” Another story that may begin to get wider play is pollution insurance, Meersman said. “How do we deal with the legacy of the past?” he said.

Rogers sees a need for more international coverage, which is not an addition to the literature. “If most things are getting better in the United States and they are not getting better in the rest of the world, why aren’t we reporting how bad it is in the rest of the world? It gets down to convincing editors that this stuff is relevant,” he said, noting money and open-mindedness are also required. Mostly, though, he said it takes “people challenging the status quo.”

The subjects just mentioned are in addition to current staples of the environment beat, including public health concerns about food and its safety, agricultural issues including ground water quality and quantity and water shortages (How much is used? Who gets to use it?), land use, particularly in terms of

brownfields and greenfields, the design of roads and policies concerning fuels and vehicle emissions (air pollution), and how we produce electricity, for example.

“So the environment is more a theme than a beat,” Meersman said. “It crosses many beats.” With that in mind the beat is safe, Meersman said, indicating it would not go the way of the labor beat. What environment stories will increasingly address are the questions: What does this mean? Is this a matter of concern? Meersman said, echoing a point made by Rogers (see Appendix B, Rogers, this question) that current arguments about how clean is clean sometimes revolve around the difference between 2 parts per billion (ppb) and 3 ppb. Is that difference a concern, Rogers posits.

Frequently, this researcher has heard it said in journalism circles that the Internet is going to change everything when it comes to reporting and investigative reporting in particular. But it does not, Bayles said. “You still have to double check it. [The Internet] is just another way for people to put their views out there. Or their spins. Which is fine. But you still have to get the original document in your hands. You still have to talk to the mayor,” he said. Bayles stopped short of saying the reporter also has to know how to evaluate the credibility of a Web site, and be able to determine the source disseminating the information.

That investigative reporters covering the environment seem to be applying phenomenological process in their work is an especially exciting finding reported in this chapter. The significance of that finding and others revealed in this writing follow in the next chapter, which offers my conclusions.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

This work sought to locate and tell a story that has not been told. In that it has succeeded. Among other things, it is a story about how environment reporting has evolved, and how journalists working environment stories have expanded the craft of investigative reporting. That fact came unbidden when I sought to learn what might qualify investigative reporting about the environment as advocacy.

Paul Williams Way

Early in the research phase, I wondered if members of SEJ interviewed for this study applied the Paul Williams Way or did something entirely different. I found they not only applied the Paul Williams Way in all cases, seemingly by instinct for some, but also embellished upon it, using phenomenological approaches including bracketing and process notes. With that in mind, I have concluded that the Paul Williams Way by itself falls short when it comes to investigative reporting about the environment. The 34 years of scrutiny environment reporters have been put through by their editors, sources, and audiences seems to have forced into practice the two additional phases of research identified.

Advocacy

Findings presented in the previous chapters seem to show that the

phenomenological research approach does not constitute advocacy but investigation and definition. This conclusion is based on evidence that the phenomenological research process defines something by clarifying its components. It also checks bias by applying a prescribed system of practice and questioning to get at the truth. In this way, point of view is checked and the story produced is grounded in a classic way of researching and reporting dating back to Aristotle. The phenomenological research approach seems to complement ideas espoused by Lippmann. It appears to do so by articulating a process for including point of view in journalism that does not appear to hinder credibility, but rather boost it.

Constructing Meaning, and Related Essences

The use of phenomenological process in news reporting seems to point to a constructivist approach taking hold in journalism today. That approach is based on the creation of knowledge (integrated investigative reporting). That knowledge is created through a construction of reality derived from primary and secondary sources. In that respect, the reporting may be viewed as a kind of social construction filtered through the reporter's experience and framed by it as well. That construction, when derived through the sense-making system of phenomenology described, does not appear to be persuasive writing, and therefore not advocacy as defined in this writing.

One way to consider the movement of constructivism into journalism is through a timeline. As delineated in this work, environment reporting took a turn around 1970, branching off from parks and conservation into pollution and natural resources. The literature synthesis and findings section provided here seem to indicate

that environment reporters gradually learned they had to explain more on this beat than they did on any other to provide the facts fairly and in context. Beyond basic definitions of terminology not in everyday use, they needed to define the thing itself. Beyond attempting to simplify complex stories to make them accessible to a broad audience, and to use plain language to describe what they discover, the literature and interviews contained herein support the idea that journalists covering the environment had to begin interpreting, explicating, clarifying, and illustrating the facts in their stories to account for what they witnessed, heard, experienced, learned, and discovered in order to reflect, with verisimilitude, who we are as people. In other words, environment reporters gradually found themselves constructing meaning out of necessity. The reporters had to explain the story to themselves and then their audiences. This is the essence of what a complex story demands of a reporter. Environment stories required the reporters to make sense of the facts by conveying the story's significance on a personal level as well as a societal one.

Study participants indicated they construct meaning for themselves first, that is, they write to explain discoveries to themselves, which they then seek to share with a wider audience. The important thing, they said, is to discover truth, and then spread the word.

That appears to be the essence of investigative reporting about the environment for the six journalists interviewed. However, they also seem to know that the acuteness of their perceptions will sell a story and give it substance in the form of social significance. The acuteness of their perceptions, the artfulness of the telling, and their word choices seem part of what they mean by "writing with authority." The reporters

interviewed for this study seem to gain that authority by applying the phenomenological research approach.

In 1971 the first Pulitzer Prize was awarded to a report about the environment in the category of public service. Fifteen years later the first Pulitzer Prize was awarded for explanatory journalism, to Jon Franklin, for an article involving deep science about brain function. It appears the need to explain science involved in reporting about pollution may have helped demonstrate the need to create a new category to recognize this emerging form of journalism that I call integrated investigative reporting.

Bridges

The investigative reporting process demonstrated here has a deeply rooted academic base ignored in the current literature about investigative reporting, and also about journalism in general. Consequently, this dissertation bridges one gap between professional approaches to journalistic research and academic practices for researching journalism.

Without balancing professional discussion with academic conversations, much is lost. The innovative approach to a literature review applied here – which I call a literature synthesis – demonstrates where the lines are between two concurrent discussions about the same things. It illustrates what comes unbidden when conversations in academic circles and discussions professionals are having on the same subject are woven together. Simply, it is necessary to do that to make the work grounded.

This study also showed that personal narrative is fast becoming a component of investigative reporting. Long relegated as creative nonfiction or at best (from a journalistic perspective) the domain of columnists, personal narrative is surfacing in the form of online diaries written as part of the process of investigation in an immersion report, for instance. The first-person telling of a story with social significance – which it can be argued is the deepest root of news dissemination – reveals the news from a personal perspective showing how it caused the individual to grow, to come to terms with change, and to understand place.

This dissertation also locates a bridge between academic theory and journalistic reporting practices. It appears that study participants out of necessity stumbled upon a symbiotic relationship between objectivist grounded theory and Charmaz's interactionist approach to grounded theory. When combined by the reporters interviewed, they seem to result in a kind of meaning construction based on the reporter's interpretation of findings for the self, the self in relation to society, and what those findings seem to reveal about the world we live in on a small scale as well as a grand one. This theoretical approach, whose components have been verified in the literature, seem to allow the truth to emerge from the reporting rather than supposing what that truth might be and then seeking proof for that hypothesis. Embedded in this theoretical approach is a process for deconstructing interviews, for instance. In that respect, when the theory is used it hammers into the journalist a procedure that prizes transparency, in fact relies on it as a means for locating truth. That transparency seems to be a channel between objectivist and interactionist approaches to grounded theory.

Opposing Viewpoints

The literature discussed here provides that training investigative reporters in how to work an environment story requires that more attention be paid to the scope of the story than the process of story collection. This dissertation refutes that idea by delineating two steps investigative reporters interviewed for this study take beyond standard investigative reporting practices to tease out scope. Further, as a whole, this dissertation demonstrates the kind of depth those additional steps provide in a timely manner.

Lippmann's notion that journalism ought to be based on direct observation rather than hearsay also is challenged here. I have heard, for instance, that Einstein's Theory of Relativity is valid, but I have not read the theory. As this study demonstrates, description of lived experience gathered in the phenomenological way provides another view of truth different, perhaps, than that provided by direct observation but no less valid. That approach has integrity, particularly for assuring verisimilitude in all reports emerging from that process. Consequently, Lippman's view that "there is but one kind of writing possible in a world as diverse as ours. It is a unity of method..." is bifurcating, a point of grave concern for Kovach and Rosenstiel, but a positive evolution in this author's eyes. It appears that investigative reporting about the environment is leading this evolution out of necessity. In that respect Kovach and Rosenstiel seem short-sighted when they say that journalism of assertion is weakening the methodology of verification journalists have developed.

Integrated Investigative Reporting

This dissertation locates what appears to be a new kind of investigative reporting. That sort, which this writing terms *integrated investigative reporting*, does not center on finding and exposing a predator. Instead, it seeks to locate and assemble into a big picture the pieces of a puzzle.

In the past, investigative reports normally revolved around obtaining government or secret or obscure documents to reveal wrongdoing. However, although those remain staples of integrated investigative reporting, as the discussion of Schapiro's story about genetically modified crops contained herein demonstrates, investigative reports about the environment today do not have to pivot on wrongdoing to capture an editor's and the audience's attention. Based on this research, the goal of the investigation can, as said, simply be to locate the pieces of a huge picture to see how they fit together. This form of investigative reporting helps people see how the pieces fit together according to the reporter's logic, allowing audiences to begin to interpret their meaning in *relation* to each other and ourselves.

It is an integrated form of reporting about an investigation. The window it cuts seems aimed at showing how we are all connected. At the moment, this sort of reporting is clearly associated with environmental issues. This study does not look at other news topics for comparison. Integrated investigative reporting begins with the goal of contributing to understanding rather than to point a finger of blame. In this writing, I have modeled my concept of integrated investigative reporting.

Essences

If integrated investigative reporting is viewed as a form of explanatory journalism, then it appears that the essence of explanatory journalism can be described as constructing meaning, which can be argued as a form of advocacy. As elucidated earlier, the environment angle on a story about genetic modification or global climate change is not obvious; rather, it requires investigation to identify the pieces, and an explanation to show how they fit together. In this view, explanatory journalism is not advocacy, but merely a description leading to a definition of the thing in question.

The surfacing of integrated investigative reporting seems to point to a constructivist trend in journalism. With this in mind, it seems the essence of investigative reporting about the environment during the 20th century is truth-seeking. At this point in the 21st century, however, another essence of investigative reporting about the environment seems to be emerging. Whether consciously or not, there appears to be a possibly unconscious striving on the part of study participants to show relationships and associations that not only educate people but also remind them that they are part of a greater whole. This is a consistent message seemingly set between the lines of all environment reports reviewed for this writing. Even though we may not be able to prove scientifically that all life is interdependent, there is a logic to it set forth by philosophers over time in the form of theories about truth.

As described, the respondents appear to go in as seekers, without a clear idea of what they will find. The motivation for these reporters seems to involve *being* as much as *doing*. The desire to be of service appears very strong in these reporters. Perhaps that is the manifestation of their application of the metaphysical element of

phenomenology, which is described in the literature as connecting ways of knowing that are not officially recognized. Seemingly their quest for truth ties into the human fear of dying without having lived a life that mattered. That appears to be the reality behind their truth-seeking, and the essence of investigative reporting about the environment at the turn of this century.

Metaphysical Element

Overall, study participants spoke about a strong, mystical connection to the Earth that drives and motivates their work (see Findings chapter and Appendix B). That is significant for two reasons. First, it indicates that it might be possible to categorize the study participants as existential journalists, as described by Merrill in his 1977 classic, Existential Journalism. This is interesting because it indicates the possibility that, for the first time, a specific category of reporters may be identified who fit Merrill's description.

Second, all study participants described themselves as either atheists or agnostics except for one, who declined to disclose because he viewed the information as irrelevant to this research. This author recognizes that much can seem unrealistic in the idea stage. The statistics mentioned are at the very least curious; and at the very most significant because, in the broadest terms, they indicate a universal feel and high value for keeping the environment clean, regardless of culture, location, or faith practice. Viewed from a spiritual perspective, this seeming tidbit appears to point to an underlying, as yet undocumented, reason supporting a statement made by Rogers in the 2002 Neiman Report.

In that writing Rogers offered his observation that concern for the environment is accepted as a mainstream value now, thereby giving what appears to be a new set of measures to the question of what might constitute advocacy in investigative reporting about the environment. It can be argued that the way spirituality is perceived changed during what has been termed The New Age, the beginning of which corresponds to the last 20 years of the 20th century. Coincidentally an increase in concern for the environment was seen during that time, a time when environmental awareness appears to have shifted to a mainstream value.

Future Research

There is more to discover, more to explore. This study has its limits. First, the sample is quite small. Consequently, enlarging the number of participants in a subsequent study would help to validate or indicate the boundaries of the conclusions presented. Also, the data hint at a quality of investigative reporters covering the environment that is not provided here. As mentioned earlier, they all appear to display characteristics falling into Merrill's definition of an existential journalist. Briefly, the existential journalist, he wrote, is committed to personal standards that rebel against anything dehumanizing. That reporter's stance tends to be toward involvement rather than aloofness (Merrill, 1996). Studying the existential question further also may reveal more reasons indicating how and why constructivism appears to be taking hold in journalism in the early 21st century. For instance, philosophical problems seem to exist for the reporters interviewed when it comes to the notion of what constitutes progress.

Seemingly, it can be said that there is a culture around environmental issues. When it comes to investigative reporting about the environment, an unspoken identity seems to unite those who do it. It appears to be a quality they recognize in each other, rather than a culture they build to attract each other. Nowhere is this more evident than at an IRE conference. It appears to be a knowing, something beyond camaraderie that unifies reporters who have written about the environment. Future research into the notion of existential journalism may bear out this line of thinking.

The research presented here also does not go into new obstacles to obtaining critical information about water quality or hazardous waste transportation and storage, for instance, due to the advent of homeland security on environment reporting. A current discussion about the impact of the Patriot Act on environment reporting could be found at the SEJ website at www.sej.org as of this writing.

Studying how investigative reporters covering the environment build community among themselves may also yield some significant findings. Especially interesting might be research revolving around whether the reporters doing investigative reports about the environment struggle to build a third culture in their articles (see Adler, P., August 1974, pp. 23-40; also in Weaver, 2000, pp. 240-255; and Finn Jordan, 2000, pp. 232-239 in Weaver, 2000) when trying to impart understanding and meaning. Such research might inform discussion about intercultural communication in relation to globalization.

Future research also might include conducting a study looking at parallels between environment reporters' struggle for newsroom acceptance and that of black reporters. The literature synthesis in this dissertation pointed to that as well. In

addition, a survey could be conducted to learn about how personal narrative is becoming part of investigative reporting and what purpose it serves journalism.

APPENDIX A

To illustrate, Lynch and Dorn Steele lead with the money:

Hanford is infamous for the witches' brew of lethal nuclear wastes dumped in the ground and stowed in tanks during four decades of bomb-making.

Now there's a new waste problem – the waste of millions of taxpayer dollars.

Your money is supposed to be cleaning up the scary mess on the fenced-off nuclear reservation in Central Washington.

But five years and \$7.5 billion into the project, little has been cleaned up. On in three dollars may be wasted.

Your money goes for..." (Landers, p. 22).

Cone also set the scene, then led to the science:

Death came abruptly to the plump seals basking on the tiny Danish isle of Anholt.

First the pups, then the adults could barely swim and refused to eat. Lungs clogged with fluid, skin became mottled with ulcerous sores, and fevers soared.

Within three days, almost 300 carcasses piled up along the shore of this sparsely populated retreat in an arm of the North Sea. With the virulence of a hurricane, the mysterious killer jumped south, then north, then west, until it had ambushed nearly every seal colony of Northern Europe. When the outbreak ended six months later, in the fall of 1988, 20,000 harbor seals had perished – more than half the continent's population.

...[S]cientists now suspect that this traditional and simplistic explanation for mass epidemics that periodically plague the world's animals masks an underlying man-made cause: immune-altering pollution.

Immune systems are under global assault from chronic buildup of chemical pollution. And experts in this emerging science are amassing compelling new evidence that wildlife, especially sea mammals, that feed in contaminated waters have weakened defenses that leave them easy victims of deadly disease... (Landers, pp. 7-8)

APPENDIX B

This section provides relevant excerpts from full transcriptions of interviews with each participant. Shown here are the categories of classification produced through grounded theory. A brief profile of each study participant is included.

PAUL ROGERS

Background

Paul Rogers, born in England of British parents in 1960, moved to New York City at age 2, but reared in Ohio, holds two bachelor's degrees from Indiana University – one in journalism and another in political science, green card holder until 1993 when he became a United States citizen, is presently natural resources and environment reporter for the San Jose Mercury News in California's San Francisco Bay area, where he covers regional and state environmental concerns, and occasionally national ones. Known to his colleagues as a staunch watchdog of environment reporting, and called "Slick" behind his back by many of them, Rogers has been covering the environment for the newspaper since 1995, although covered coastal issue from its Santa Cruz bureau before moving into that position. He was Hewett Teaching Fellow in environmental journalism at the University of California-Berkeley in 1999 and 2002, lecturer in the science communication program at the University of California-Santa Cruz since 2000, was part of the San Jose Mercury News team awarded the Pulitzer Prize for coverage of the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1990 for general news reporting (an explanatory report). He also received the Sierra Club's David R. Brower Award for environmental journalism in 2003. Rogers'

investigative reports about the environment often involve politics and injustice. For Rogers, environment reporting is fun and investigative reporting is a drag, evidenced by these statements he made while describing his experience with journalism, and also investigative reporting:

“I really enjoy being a journalist in general.”

“I don’t want to be an editor.”

“[Investigative reporting] is exhausting.”

“When I was in the middle of the investigative report [about cow grazing], I wanted to quit. I was miserable. And I realize this just isn’t me.”

“There comes that awful moment when you have to sit down and write. And the more you’ve collected, the higher the drop is going to be. And you’re miserable.”

“It’s a really fun way to make a living.”

For the change it prompts, Rogers endures investigative reporting’s tedium, but not gladly.

View of Investigative Reporting About the Environment

When Rogers became a journalist, he developed a love-hate relationship with investigative reporting while covering the environment for the *San Jose Mercury News*. The detecting and discerning process made him miserable, but the action resulting from his efforts made him proud and gave him a sense of accomplishment. Rogers comes to investigative reporting with little prior influence about what it should accomplish. Growing up, he did not read investigative reports or watch them on television, nor were they discussed over dinner or at any other time in the household.

Rattling off historical case examples and statistics, he demonstrates his passion for facts as a means for criticizing public policy and illustrating injustice. He says it is how a responsible journalist locates and reveals truth. Investigative reporting, Rogers says, must cause outrage in its audience to be worth anything. “The very best investigative stories combine the outrage of some kind of environmental degradation with the outrage of taxpayer rip-off. There’s nothing more fun to me than to watch lefties and righties get together on an issue, to see people from two ultra conservative political policy think tanks - the Cato Institute and the American Enterprise Institute – agreeing with the Sierra Club and the Natural Resources Defense Council. And it happens. It happens more than you think. Those are the best environment stories,” Rogers said.

In the beginning of each year, Rogers makes a list of projects he would like to do so he does not end up doing 100 15-inch stories and never do anything with depth that year.

Criteria for Moving the Public

The outrage factor is only one of five criteria Rogers uses to determine whether an investigative report about the environment will move the public. Together, they are: (1) How many people does it impact? (2) Is there a conflict there? (3) Is it unusual? (4) Is it contrarian? (5) Is there some outrage factor, regardless of who would be outraged? After a story passes muster, Rogers said, “You either end up with egg on your face and you lose your job, or you get sued if you screw up, but there are lots of well-written stories where you don’t end up with egg on your face or sued.”

Investigative Reporting Procedure at the *San Jose Mercury News*
for Environment Stories

At the San Jose Mercury News, the formal process for going about doing an investigative report involving the environment is nine-fold:

- (1) Propose the story at the beginning of the year to the science editor, who is in charge of a 5-person team of reporters, including specialists in the environment, biotechnology, science, and a couple of medical reporters.
- (2) The science editor pitches story ideas to the projects editor, who gives them a thumbs up or down.
- (3) If accepted, the team budgets how much time they'll need, if the story is going to pull Rogers off his beat entirely, if its going to involve lawsuits for public records, database searches, and what kinds of resources the team will need, including travel.
- (4) Once that is approved, the team sketches a thesis to try to prove. Rogers does that with his editor, and then begins exhaustive background research, making a list of main themes and ideas, potential sources, potential questions, trying out the thesis as he goes.
- (5) During the process there is clear and regular oversight from editors. This is because its easy to sit in a cubicle and collect information forever. "It's always fun to collect it," Rogers says. "It's no fun to write it. It's pain. It's agony. You're opening your veins when you have to suddenly take stacks and stacks of notebooks that you spent months and months

collecting information on. Hundreds of screens of database information. And start writing it and organizing it. That is agony. It doesn't matter how long you do it. It's hard. It takes a lot out of you. And so you need editors to hold your hand and ask you all along the way, what is this story about? What is this story about? What do we have? What don't we know? What do we have to get now? Why does my grandmother care? Why is this relevant to the public? It helps keep the reporter focused."

(6) Write a first draft and turn it into the science editor, who carves it up.

(7) Rewrite until the science editor passes it on to the special projects editor for carving.

(8) Rewrite.

"Then, after much yelling and screaming and pain, it gets in the paper, and sort of makes the world a better place," Rogers smiled and said.

Why Environment Reporting?

Rogers became interested in environment reporting because he wanted a job where he would get paid to go to Yosemite National Park. "There are a lot of other jobs I could have done here in the last few years but that I've turned down," he said. "I could have been our main Washington, D.C. correspondent. I could have been in our Vietnam bureau. I could have been in our Sacramento bureau covering state politics. I could have covered the governor's race. The presidential race. You name it. I gave up a job where I was covering Monterey Bay and Santa Cruz and Pebble Beach and Big

Sur and Carmel [as municipal beats]. People go on vacation there all the time! There are a lot of other folks I know who would like to do that.

“But one of the things about the environment beat that’s so wonderful is it’s challenging, it’s intriguing, everyday is something completely different. You get paid to go to all these interesting places, unlike the White House, where you’re basically a stenographer following people around and regurgitating into a computer. [On this beat,] the stories you write make a big difference, because there aren’t that many people on this beat. So, if I suddenly decide it’s very important to start doing stories about invasive species in San Francisco Bay and all over the place, that becomes an issue and legislators will introduce bills. Or if a decision is made that we’re going to do stories about how the San Joaquin River and Sacramento River are polluted from farm run-off, advocacy campaigns are going to spring up around those from environmental groups, and lawsuits will be introduced, and things like that will happen,” Rogers said. “I could do this for another 30 years and it wouldn’t bother me. There’s such a learning curve on this beat.

“That’s one of the satisfactions that comes from doing this beat. The longer you do it the more you can understand and the deeper you can bore into it, the better the stories you can write, and the more impact you have. [I] love the give and take, the ebb and flow of the democratic process. And the democratic conversations. It’s nice to be an integral part of that, by putting issues on the table to discuss and fight about.”

Advocacy and Environment Reporting

A member of the Sierra Club when in college and later a member of the

Nature Conservancy, Rogers dropped his memberships deciding, as a newspaper reporter covering the environment, that his allegiance is to the truth. He explained, “As long as you’re hanging out the shingle that you’re a newspaper reporter, you’re not working for the Sierra Club. They have plenty of P.R. people.

“If you’re a journalist and not an advocate, you should be asking the same questions of the environmentalists as the polluters, and keep the whole thing honest. If you’re going to do fair journalism, you have to at least try to be objective, to show balance. Your credibility depends on asking difficult questions to all sides, and the value of the conversation, the very integrity of the democratic process depends on you as a reporter holding all sides accountable. Nobody has a monopoly on the truth.

“If I come in here with a Sierra Club t-shirt on, all of my stories are going to be buried. I want people to think that what I’m doing is serious journalism, and fair journalism, and that I am not a player on the stage. That like other journalists, I am a participant and a chronicler of what’s happening on stage. Then the editors and readers trust me and will devote resources to do it more.

“In a democratic society, we have this wonderful marketplace of ideas where everybody gets to throw in their opinion. It’s my job to give those opinions a bullhorn, to let the public hear those opinions evenly and fairly, and let the public decide. Information cannot be withheld when it disproves a point. You haven’t given folks context unless you show folks basic numbers. As long as you include context, then you’re providing a service to readers.”

Investigative Reporting and Advocacy Journalism

There is a difference, Rogers said, between investigative reporting and advocacy journalism. “Investigative journalism is journalism with depth, context, and most importantly a foundation of factual, provable, empirical evidence. Advocacy is journalism trying to convince people of a viewpoint without those things. To me, advocacy is public relations. It’s central function is to convince people of something, regardless of whether the facts back it up.”

Rogers emphasized that environment reporters have to ask themselves a few basic questions with every story: Why are you doing this? Is it because you see yourself as part of the environmental movement communicating to the public key issues that you think need reform? Or is your allegiance not to any movement but to the truth, even when it makes environmentalists look bad? Are you a journalist first? Advocacy journalists are the former, Rogers said, while he is the latter.

“I have an opinion about every story I write,” Rogers said. “I ask who seems like they are carrying the weight of the evidence in this argument. So when I sit down to write, I ask myself: Who do I feel more sympathetic to? I might do 55 to 60 percent to the side I disagree with, just to make sure that in a story I’m not actually coloring it, or showing some bias. I also choose the most powerful, plain-spoken quote I can find.”

Personal Lessons from Environment Reporting

Environment reporting has made Rogers less of an environmentalist than before he started on the beat, he said. “I used to assume that environmentalists always

have the best interest of society at heart, and they never lie to you, and they were always the good guys. And I found that environmentalists mislead, obfuscate, and lie as much as government or industry does. I have learned to look at these issues with much more of a healthy skepticism.

“This beat also made me realize I don’t want to be an editor. I like doing this too much. It’s fun. I’ve climbed down the side of an oil tanker outside the Golden Gate Bridge on a rope ladder at midnight with 10-foot waves crashing against my feet. I’ve seen grizzly bears in the wild in Alaska. I’ve hiked through the Amazon rainforest with some of the best tropical biologists in the world. I’ve gone out on cattle pastures with Mormon ranchers in Utah. I’ve talked with tree sitters and squid fishermen and strawberry farmers and all sorts of interesting characters. It’s a really fun way to make a living!

“The environment beat is among the most fascinating. I’m a political junkie. I love politics. I have a degree in political science. And I would rather do this than cover the White House.”

Personal Lessons from Investigative Reporting About the Environment

Investigative reporting is different than Rogers imagined. “It’s harder,” he said. “Many reporters begin with a theory and end up with nothing. There’s very, very little about the process of investigative reporting that’s rewarding. It’s one of the most stressful, miserable things that I’ve ever seen. You run down hundreds of blind alleys, you spend many days in the newsroom until midnight going through thousands of

statistics. You're threatened with lawsuits all the time. It's a very, very unpleasant craft, I think.

"Sometimes you just throw your hands up. But usually you come out of the nadir and write something you're proud of, that either does a great job of explaining a complex facet of society to the public – which is your job in a democracy – or you expose some level of corruption, or some level of unfairness in society that the public sees and grows from. In the end there's a change based on your reporting. That's what the benefit is. It's the kind of thing that a lot of people aren't cut out for. It's the highest and best use of your journalism career, but it's really difficult. I didn't realize that when I got into it."

"I was miserable," he smiles and says, recalling a particular investigative report about the environment. "I had to move my desk to another part of the room to get away from distractions. And I realized that this just isn't me. I didn't realize that until I was deep into a project."

Realities of the Environment Beat

"There are so many things on the beat to write, it's overwhelming," Rogers says. "I get more than 200 e-mails per day. I get stacks of faxes – at least 100 per day. I get at least 30 to 40 phone calls a day. My mail is delivered in those big plastic bins that the Post Office uses. I have 246 story ideas on my to-do list right now, so the world could stop turning and I could fill the paper with environment stories. There is this fire hose of stories that come, and trying to figure out which one to take a drink off of..." Rogers sighs.

A few reporters, he said, get a similar quantity of mail but most do not. “It’s because this beat is so broad. That mail is not people writing necessarily, it’s the vast number of catalogs and magazines and reports and newsletters and things like that you have get on this beat. I get everything. I get everything from the Wilderness Society magazine to the Natural Resources Defense Council magazine. I get *Mining Voice*. I get cattle grazing magazines. I get the newspaper that goes to the Department of Interior employees, because if I’m going to try to understand what the main stories are from all viewpoints, I have to read all viewpoints. And so there’s an immense amount of information that can be overwhelming. So I don’t have a lot of time usually to do national stories unless there’s some effect directly on the Bay Area.”

Rogers also emphasized that environment reporting cannot be done well from a desk, that to understand the conversations the reporter must go out and see the controversy, and talk to the people in the landscape. “It might change the theory you had in the beginning,” Rogers said, describing his initial attitude when former President Clinton declared part of Southern Utah a national monument without even going there to do it. The declaration meant economic development in the form of a coal mine could not be located there.

Rogers recalls, “At first I was agreeing and sympathizing with the cowboys – saying it was a shameless political act, that he didn’t even go to Utah to do it, he went to Arizona because he knew there would be huge protests where they were hoping to have a coal mine and other jobs in this poor area of Southern Utah where people have to drive 100 miles in each direction to go work at a motel. It’s tough. And I thought, this is really low rent. This is tacky. He’s playing to people in Hollywood, he can’t

even defend his own actions, and he's doing it by fiat because he knows Congress won't approve it. And I went out there, and I was standing at Escalante, Utah at sunset on the top of this mesa looking over this vast area that was the last place to get telephone service in the lower 48, and I said, well, they can't put a coal mine here. And I thought, tough s---- about those cattle ranchers because there are some values sometimes that trump local economic values."

What Makes the Environment Beat Meaningful for You?

"There are so few people who cover this beat all the time," Rogers said. "The level of expertise is so high that you write with authority. You're much more likely, when you write a story on this beat, to influence policy, to write something that will get noticed, that will go out on the wires and have millions of people read it, that will shine a light on some problem, or expose some taxpayer rip-off. Environmental stories seem more likely than others to have people act on them. To get results. If you just write the truth, there are plenty of activist groups that will embrace whatever cause is in the story. You don't have to do their work for them. Just shine the light."

What Makes Investigative Reporting Meaningful for You?

Rogers struggled to find words to describe the tension between tedium and the social obligation he feels as a reporter that gives meaning to the depressing dread brought on by an investigative assignment. "It's something that feels meaningful, it's something where if you're an idealist you feel like you're not just making money for money's sake. You're not just screwing the tops on toothpaste tubes as they go by you

on an assembly line all day. It's not a frivolous pursuit. It's not something where you feel you've wasted your time. Good investigative reporting creates bodies of new, original research. It turns out things that you can't find in any other report, that you can't get anywhere else," Rogers said.

Rogers gets something out of investigative reporting that environment reporting alone does not provide. "I get the same satisfaction, but more so. If you like to get paid to learn, you're getting paid to become a real expert. If you like to get paid to influence society, hard-hitting investigative pieces really influence society. If you like to get to do a job where you can see the results of your work, it's likely that at the end of an investigation someone is going to introduce legislation or do something to make the change." Rogers described investigative reporting as regular daily journalism with extra stresses and rewards.

Types of Environment Reporters

Rogers notices two types of environment reporters: the one who likes to write about why things happen, and the type who likes to write about how things happen. "How" people are interested in the mysteries of nature and science and how things work. They love to go out on boats with scientists and look at test tubes and ask what the levels are of pollutants, Rogers said. "If they go into a forest and write a story, they'll say what the natural processes are there and how well they are working. They do a lot of explanatory journalism, and tend to be a little more scientific-minded," he said. Los Angeles Times reporter Marla Cone is Rogers' favorite in this category.

“Why” reporters like to explain why things are the way they are. “Instead of going out on the boat with scientists and looking at test tubes,” Rogers said, “they would write why all those invasive species are out here. And why that pollution is there. Well, it’s there, maybe, because this oil refinery gave a campaign contribution to the governor. They’re less interested in the science.

“While the beat is a mix of politics and science, the ‘how’ writers are two-thirds science and one-third politics, and the ‘why’ writers are two-thirds politics and one-third science. ‘Why’ writers love the skullduggery of whose giving what money to whom.”

Types of Investigative Reporters

There are two types of investigative reporters, Rogers says: deep divers and grazers. Deep divers like to find one interesting issue or piece of scholarship and dig in like scientists. Grazers prefer to sample everything. Rogers is a grazer. Putting him in a cubicle for six months to study a database breaks his stride.

“I’m glad I did it,” Rogers says of investigative reporting, “but when I was in the middle of [one] investigative report, I wanted to quit. Some reporters descend into an absolute funk while they’re doing one project. They get sick of the topic. After about three weeks you normally don’t want to ever see the topic again that you’re writing about. It’s so exhausting.”

A Description of Journalists in General

Overall, Rogers said, journalists are misperceived. “A lot of reporters are

iconoclasts. As the world changes around them, sometimes they don't change so well. But in the end, they are proud of the career choice they took.

“Also, journalists aren't cynics. They're actually idealists. They are people who believe in the power of the printed word, who believe in the power of ideas, who believe that if you present the public with all the facts, the public will make the right decision. And there's something wonderfully idealistic about that.

“It's the idea the whole country is premised on. People forget that. I have faith that common people without perhaps a level of wealth or education can better decide in a more even-handed or free and just and compassionate way their own affairs. Journalists, deep down at their core, have a lot of faith in regular people. If you shine a light on certain things in a decent way to people, at their core people will want to do the right thing. And that's a very idealistic world view. Journalists also believe in the validity of institutions. If something gets screwed up, then they'll fix it. They believe that the free exchange of information makes people freer, and makes them richer, too.”

The Future of Environment Reporting

Rogers is optimistic about the future of environment reporting for several reasons. First, editors now accept that a separate person is needed to cover the environment. The beat is no longer considered frivolous or a novelty like it was in the beginning. Second, environmental journalism has matured. “If you look at the early coverage, a lot of it was very activist. It was reprinting what the Sierra Club said without a lot of critical vetting. And in part because the problems were worse. When there was no Clean Water Act in 1969 and the Cuyahoga River caught on fire, it was

pretty obvious what the problem was there. But when you're fighting about whether there should be 3 ppb or 1 ppb of something in a river full of fish and people swimming, it's a different story. The maturing of the beat has taken a generation, and has brought the same kind of healthy skepticism to this beat that is brought to all beats, and that's good for it," Rogers said.

Also important for the beat is that concern for the environment is accepted as a mainstream value now, Rogers said. Industry also is recognizing environmental journalism as a serious and important pursuit, he said. Lastly, Rogers is encouraged by what computer-assisted reporting has done for investigative reporting about the environment. "People are doing a lot more sophisticated journalism than was done before. The amount of information that's out there online and the ability to crunch it is making environmental journalism much more sophisticated."

"To expand and nurture this kind of coverage, environmental journalists need to continue to increase their interaction with each other. That's first. It's a very lonely, difficult beat. It's a beat where it takes you a long time to learn the issues. You can spend your whole lifetime studying these issues and still not feel like you understand them. And it's a beat where a lot of people get mad at you no matter what you write. Therefore, it's a beat that has potentially high levels of burn-out, too. And it's a beat that – it's a kind of beat that lends itself nicely to having vetting sessions between reporters, where they can talk to each other about the trials and tribulations, about the things that work. They can see each other's work on e-mail listservs, and they can have quick conversations with each other via e-mail and other forums. It helps keep people encouraged. It helps teach people. It helps people feel good about what they do

and feel that they're not alone out there. We have to keep emphasizing that it's hard, and you're going to get yelled at a lot, but it's worth it.

“But I think there still needs to be a very tough conversation about some of the underlying assumptions that environmental journalists have, and whether those are still valid. We need to have a conversation about what is the best way to clean the air? What is the best way to clean the water? How bad or good are things in the U.S.? Society has assumed, and reporters have assumed, that the government command and control model is always the best no matter what. But there are some examples where that's not true. You can say at a factory that we want you to reduce your output of smog by 50 percent and we're going to tell you how to do it. And most reporters say that's good environmentalism. And it's worked pretty well. The air quality has improved dramatically. But there's another model. There's *We're going to tell you as a factory that we want smog reduced by 50 percent. We don't care how you get there. And by the way, anything additional that you do, we're going to allow you to sell those credits to someone else.* So suddenly you unleash the creativity of those plants. You can do better than 50 percent because there's a reward for them.

“I'd also like to see more international coverage. We don't have pipes with red gunk running into streams any more. That's a good example where laws, environmentalism and activism have helped clean up America's waterways. We need, as journalists, to say, alright, let's not only make sure we write about the failures but also the successes. If most things are getting better in the U.S. and they are not getting better in the rest of the world, why aren't we reporting how bad they are in the rest of the world? It gets down to convincing editors that this stuff is relevant. You can write

about loss of biodiversity, smog, clean water, fresh water, there are so many – fisheries, that’s where the real downward trends and disasters are happening.

“I’d like to see us do all those things, but those things take money. They take open-mindedness. Those things take people challenging the status quo.”

Rogers also notices another concern environment reporters will continue to confront in their work. Addressing the “How clean is clean?” question discussed earlier, he said, “Government is about the allocation of finite resources. If we spend an extra \$500 million going from 2 parts per billion (ppb) to 1 ppb of arsenic, how many lives have we saved? How many cancers have we stopped? The general public doesn’t want to ask that question, but it’s because they don’t necessarily understand risk factors.”

DAVID HELVARG

Background

David Helvarg, a 30-year independent multimedia journalist with an international reputation who used his reporting background to get a California private investigator's license, is a historian by degree, a New Yorker by birth, the son of war refugees and spies (father from Ukraine, mother escaped Nazi Germany), former Associated Press correspondent in Central America deported from El Salvador in 1983 while reporting on a massacre of civilians, former freelance urban combat radio reporter in Northern Ireland covering the British-Irish Revolutionary Army conflict in 1973, author of Blue Frontier: Saving America's Living Seas and The War Against the Greens, television news and documentary producer concentrating on environmental issues concerning oceans, investigative reporting trainer for the International Center For Journalists in the United States and Europe, Emmy Award winner, and an accessible nonconformist with a searing sense of humor and precise pen.

An avid scuba diver and body surfer living on San Diego's beach in 1977, Helvarg began reporting about the environment that year with a story about the liability of mining the oceans for minerals, and later created programs about the environment for PBS, Discovery, and other television venues. His viewpoint currently is heard on Marketplace radio and read on Slate.com, with his reports appearing in The Nation, Earth Island Journal, International Geology Review, Popular Science, and Multinational Monitor, a publication founded by consumer advocate and former Green

Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader, for which Helvarg is currently managing editor.

Cited as one of the top environmental journalists of the 1990s by author Michael Frome in Green Ink, in 2003 Helvarg declared victory and moved on to establish and head the Oceans Awareness Project, a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit organization dedicated to restoring the world's waterways through education and legislation, a return to his activist roots. Helvarg's instincts have been to follow environmental issues by following the money, looking at how contending political and economic forces respond to changing science and policy.

View of Investigative Reporting

Although Helvarg is a war reporter when he is being shot at in combat zones, he has always thought of himself as an investigative reporter. "It's about finding the truth, where the truth is often up for grabs. It's often being, you know, information is a weapon in conflict. And the truth may not conform to one side of the other. You may find a lot of sleazy journalism – the kind of he said, she said reporting that you see more and more, particularly in broadcast journalism. Sleazy because neither side may be right. And the truth isn't always in the center, either."

Woodward and Bernstein's reports about the Watergate break-in captivated Helvarg, and he cites that political episode as his introduction to investigative reporting. On closer examination, however, it is really underground news in the 60s and 70s, and early 20th century renegade reporters that inspired Helvarg to become an investigative reporter. His college readings in American history led him to identify

“with the participatory journalism practiced by John Reed, Carleton Beals, and Upton Sinclair. I discovered a contemporary resonance in the boisterous, often insightful and occasionally libelous voice of the underground press.” But it was Reed he most wanted to emulate.

Helvarg’s first exposure to investigative reporting was the now-legendary CBS documentary series “Harvest of Shame” reported by Edward R. Murrow and influenced by John Steinbeck’s October 1936 reports in the San Francisco News about the plight of California migrant farm workers. Helvarg later found the early CBS-TV show, “60 Minutes,” inspiring, but added the nightly news didn’t teach him about investigative reporting. “There was a huge underground press I read avidly,” he said. “It traveled an interesting line between exposé and libel: very outrageous, very challenging, and I think it was a training ground.” It was as a stringer for an underground press syndicate that he traveled to Northern Ireland in the early 1970s.

Much investigative journalism, he says, “lacks a kind of writing that connects to people’s lives. You have to take investigative journalism skills and use them to tell stories and impart information in a way that has a personal and visceral connect to the reader.”

Criteria for Moving the Public

Above all, Helvarg is a dramatic storyteller. He is after the story, not just the facts. The details gained from investigation become the pieces of the tale he chooses to tell with aplomb. Helvarg possesses the story he tells. In that respect, every story he writes seems to tell Helvarg something about himself. Each story seems a part of him

as a result. Considered in that light, Helvarg's criteria for moving the public through investigative reports seems to be the components that make it a personal experience story: the elements that illustrate the human condition and show how it is changed by circumstances and events – by history as it happens. Those components appear to be selected subjectively, depending on what he perceives as the substance of the report, the nuances of the stories that prompted the investigation, and the report's impact on democracy and injustice. "I think I got to be a good writer being immersed as a participant observer – first in Northern Ireland, and later when I moved to San Diego where I edited a weekly muckraking investigative paper in a town that had a happy news reputation," he said.

Investigative Reporting Procedure in General

When teaching the basics of investigative reporting, Helvarg stresses doing background searches of news clippings and other materials, tracking original documents, doing initial interviews and follow-up interviews, developing varied sources, getting all sides of the story, keeping organized notes and tapes, verifying all information, and being persistent. Working as a private investigator taught additional tools and databases and places to look as well as keeping more complete notes and transcripts, detailing times and places, and doing day-to-day searches of court records, legal data, and property. It gave him experience and kept him practiced, he said.

Helvarg follows 10 general rules when producing investigative reports:

- (1) Study your interviewee in advance.
- (2) Go in prepared, with notebook, pen or pencil, and tape recorder.

- (3) Make a list of five or six questions. Others will come to you.
- (4) Observe etiquette. Get off to a good beginning.
- (5) Establish eye contact and stick to the subject.
- (6) Ease off before leaving. Close with an open-ended question like, “Do you think we’ve covered everything?”
- (7) Keep the door open for further communication.
- (8) Transcribe your tape while you can still decipher your notes.
- (9) Save your notes.
- (10) Learn from the Freedom of Information Act.

What Attracted You to Environment Reporting?

The perks of the beat are secondary to Helvarg’s cat-like curiosity. While gathering investigative reports about AIDS, immigration, and a security break down at a nuclear power plant, he had the opportunity to probe stories about high-seas driftnets, military dumping of toxic waste at sea, and the car bombing of an environmental activist. “I found myself increasingly drawn to hard-edged environmental stories,” Helvarg said. “In large measure this was a case of finding an ecological niche that needed to be filled. I noticed that most political and investigative reporters tended to view the environment beat as either uninteresting or low-prestige, while many environment reporters came to the beat from a science or nature writing background. And, just curiosity kind of draws me to want to have the adventures, to do the first-hand reporting so that, you know, I’d rather, if I’m going to write about nuclear waste in the Pacific, I’d rather dive the site myself than see it in documents.”

In Frome (1998) Helvarg calls the environment the defining issue of the 21st century. It is not just about science and economics, but is multi-faceted, about how people live and use resources and distribute wealth, he says, adding, “My key goal remains to produce the best possible investigative works to help inform, broaden and democratize the crucial environmental debates taking place today” (p. 160).

Advocacy and Environment Reporting

Calling journalism the roughed-out sketch of history, in which he sees himself as having a personal stake, Helvarg gets passionate about accuracy and exploring a full range of sources as well as trying to be fair and honest in his presentation.

“Voracity is important to me. I’ll work harder than most reporters I know to get the facts right and my ducks in a row. As a freelancer, I don’t have the deadline pressure generally; and if I do, I won’t put stuff in that I haven’t checked. It’s an internal thing. I get very upset if I get something wrong,” he said.

Before Helvarg became a journalist he scorned reporters, perceiving media outlets as conservative forces rather than agents for change. “I thought [journalism] was advocacy for the powers that be. I thought it was essentially a reflection of the establishment,” he said. But a New York Daily News reporter at the democratic national convention in Chicago in 1968 changed 17-year-old Helvarg’s view when he took off his helmet and gave it to one of the girls protesting with Helvarg’s teenage group, saying, “You know, I always respected the police and didn’t like you kids calling them pigs, but the way these guys are acting today, they are pigs!” Helvarg recalled. A few hours later the group ran into him again and his head was bleeding,

having sacrificed his helmet for the girl. “I think that was my first very positive impression of a reporter,” Helvarg said.

Activism is not the same thing as propaganda, said Helvarg, who is committed to social engagement, which motivates his work. His political activism initially fulfilled this middle-class, first generation American’s need to participate in the democratic process, but he chose to become a journalist because “it gave me tremendous access. I realized I could cross lines that other people couldn’t,” he said. In Northern Ireland, Helvarg said he quickly “came to see the limits of advocacy reporting when confronted by Hiram Johnson’s old lesson that truth is the first casualty of war. I quickly learned to develop survival skills as an eyewitness and an investigator in order to produce accurate and analytical reports too often defined by the gun, the car-bomb, and the disinformation campaign.” He learned that his sympathies didn’t matter – that all sides were going to lie to him because information is a tool of war. That made him realized he could not be both activist and reporter at the same time. “In Northern Ireland, I learned very quickly that regardless of your sympathies you have to operate independently otherwise you become a propagandist. You get manipulated. Or else you become worse than a propagandist: you become a dupe, being manipulated because you’re not being smart. I quickly realized there may be two sides to a story but they can both be wrong, or lies,” he said.

Many close friends died while reporting from war zones with Helvarg, one he quotes sentimentally, with a choke in his voice trying to bring to life a point about advocacy in journalism. The man, John Hoglund, a frontline reporter, said, “There’s no such thing as objectivity in journalism. The thing about it is that I’m not going to

be a propagandist for anyone. If you do something right, I'll take your picture. If you do something wrong, I'll take your picture also." To that Helvarg adds this: "We all have a point of view, but we can't – or we shouldn't – cheat with it. You have to be factual." That said, he added that different types of media outlets – magazines vs. newspapers, television vs. blogging – have different requirements and also different standards for including point of view in a story.

"People sometimes perceive me as an advocate in the reporting I do. And when I do training overseas in places like Poland, it's very funny because these Polish reporters who came up under communism had to figure out how to get the word out in [their new] free-swinging atmosphere. At one point we were talking about how you have to get both points of view and [one of the reporters says,] 'Well, I'm interviewing this guy and he has one point of view and I have an opposite point of view, so that's two points of view!' So you get a strong sense of advocacy where the issues are freedom and democracy."

One accusation came after his book, War Against the Greens, came out. The right-wing American Enterprise Institute, Washington Times newspaper, and assorted members of the wise-use movement accused Helvarg of being a shill for the Sierra Club. "They were unable to find factual errors in the book, so they accused me of being a liar," he said, strutting his reason to be voracious about details and uncompromising about accuracy.

Helvarg was threatened with libel twice, both on stories about the environment. The first came from a dolphin trainer who lost his security clearance because he talked to Helvarg without permission. The second was in 1984 when he reviewed the movie

“Salvadore.” “The main character got a libel lawyer in San Francisco to say I portrayed him as a drunk and a loser. I did. And I suggested to the publisher that there’s no need for a retraction, that I could get half the press corps to verify. More importantly, the lawyer hadn’t seen the movie,” he said. Neither lawsuit materialized.

Early on Helvarg noticed some differences between environment reporters and other investigative reporters. “There was this self-flagellation I found with environment reporters that I never found with other investigative reporters looking at political corruption or national defense issues and AIDS. In the last 30 years environmentalism has become a societal ethic. Considering yourself an environmentalist and reporting on the environment – if you’re a good journalist [i.e., one who doesn’t slant facts and other information] – is no different than a national defense reporter considering himself or herself a patriot. We have shared values as a society and environmental protection has been one of them,” Helvarg said.

Investigative Reporting and Advocacy Journalism

With Helvarg committing the rest of his career as a writer of advocacy to heightening awareness about oceans, part of his function will be to press newsrooms to add a specific beat covering oceans. He says, “The one ocean resource not being fully exploited is good investigative reporting on waste, fraud, abuse concerning salt water special interest operations and the agencies that are supposed to regulate them.

“It’s hard to stop thinking of myself as a journalist,” he says. “But I do see that in setting up a non-profit advocacy group my status changes. It’s a return to activism in a way, 30 years later.” Helvarg considers both his books his best investigative work,

but adds Blue Frontier also comes from the heart whereas War Against the Greens is more of an intellectual pursuit. Both have strong viewpoints, a requirement for making book-length journalism a good read, Helvarg says. The earliest example of a call to action in Blue Frontier comes when Helvarg writes, “This is why there is a desperate need to develop and expand not only our biological knowledge of the seas, but also an active and educated political constituency to protect the oceans’ living resources.

“Unfortunately, our politicians and national leaders seem to be suffering anoxia of the brain when it comes to understanding the value of our living Blue Frontier” (Helvarg 2001, p. 5). War Against the Greens relies strictly on description, dialog, statistics, facts, setting, characterization, plot, narration and detail to carry the author’s point of view until the last chapter when Helvarg directly states his conclusion:

If Wise Use’s attempt to sponsor a ‘holy war against the new pagans’ of environmental regulation and reform is fully exposed to the public – the right-wing terrorism and vigilante violence, personal profiteering, political sabotage, dirty tricks, and disinformation – the public’s reaction will almost certainly force the transnationals into abandoning Wise Use. (p. 459)

Personal Lessons From Environment Reporting

Helvarg was surprised at the level of passion and commitment that many environmental reporters, particularly those working outside the United States brought to the beat. While still critical thinkers, they tended not to fall into the traps of cynicism or careerism that many other reporters have. He says it reminded him of the

reasons he first got into journalism, and has helped refresh his commitment to the craft.

What Makes Environment Reporting Meaningful for You?

Helvarg finds the best reporting he does is from a first-person perspective. Covering the environment has allowed him to have adventures and encounters with people, animals and habitats that challenged and excited him and also needed a voice he felt he could provide. “It’s symbiotic if I can go on great dive adventures that also become the basis for radio reports, articles, TV segments and books that help inform the public on the risky state of the world’s coral reefs for example, and perhaps inspire them to take corrective action.”

Personal Lessons From Investigative Reporting About the Environment

Helvarg feels that too little investigative journalism is focused on the economic and political interests driving how people use and abuse critical ecosystems. As a result, while continuing to “follow the money,” he also became an advocate within the field, encouraging colleagues in IRE (Investigative Reports & Editors) and other journalism groups to see the environment as an opportunity for new kinds of storytelling. “We’re at a critical point,” he says. “A year ago I thought about returning to war reporting in Iraq or becoming an advocate for ocean protection, exploration and restoration. In part I decided that while we’ll probably always have wars, we may not always have wild fish.” One of his plans is to establish a fellowship for investigative reporting on the seas.

Attraction to Investigative Reporting

This journalism specialty charms Helvarg's soul with its sense of mystery and intrigue. "At its best, investigative reporting is fun. It's puzzle-solving," he says, "I won a local Emmy and generated some prison."

That said, he hates its monotony and repetition. "I didn't know it would be tedious at times," he says. "It's probably good that I didn't. On the other hand, you're digging for hours in some really boring stuff and there's an 'Ah ha!' moment, and the pieces fall into place, and you have the factual metaphor you're searching for."

What Makes Investigative Reporting Meaningful For You?

For a time, Helvarg's need for a larger social purpose was met in providing people with information and points of view they might not otherwise have access to. A deeper personal sense of satisfaction came from the practice of his craft when he added investigative reporting to his quiver, he suggested. It happened at a time when "easy satisfactions were few and the inquiries I was making were putting lives – my own and others – at risk," Helvarg explained.

The Future of Environment Reporting

Conditions allowing the ability of ecosystems to sustain themselves in the face of growing environmental abuses will keep the environment beat alive for a long time to come, Helvarg predicted. "There's a collapse of the natural systems that sustain us, so look for more investigative reporting in this area," he said.

“I used to say that it’s better to come to reporting out of something you’re passionate about and want to write about than it is to just decide you’re going to be a journalist and study journalism. I used to say *that* when people came out of journalism school. I have no training in journalism other than on-the-job. I think on-the-job works best. Today, journalism students don’t *learn* journalism, they *go into it*.

I came to reporting out of my interest in history and activism. So it was following my interest of how history impacts all of us, which I learned early on from my parents’ experiences. I was attracted initially to war reporting and found that you have to be more investigative because you aren’t getting the truth from either side.”

TOM BAYLES

Background

Tom Bayles, 38, descendent of a priest who came over on the Mayflower as well as German immigrants, began Boy Scouts in Ramsey, New Jersey where he became a Star Scout, dropped his first novel behind the couch at age 11, got report cards saying he needed a lot of help in writing, and became a newspaper reporter in Largo, Florida for love of the byline. Currently weekend editor, environment editor and investigative projects reporter for the Sarasota Herald-Tribune. In that capacity, he became a firefighter for an immersion report on wildfires in Florida, spent \$800 on clothes and \$100 on makeup (“So I would look good”) to begin reporting for SNN news, the newspaper’s cable television station located in a corner of the paper’s newsroom. Wanted to become an environment reporter once he discovered the beat existed while in college at the University of South Florida. Gathered a love of the environment and wildlife from the Boy Scout manual he read cover to cover many times and the My Side of the Mountain series of children’s books he read and re-read. Is an avid beachcomber and sailor, frequently out on his boat midweek chasing a story not accessible any other way.

Mesmerized and fascinated by the atmospheric reactions between the Earth and sky, before the 15-year veteran reporter obtained a master of arts degree in journalism from the University of Southern Florida after he started a masters degree in geomorphology, intending to become a weatherman. He is the first in his family to pursue anything even close to writing as a career. A two-time Pulitzer prize nominee

for investigative reporting about the environment, he holds assorted awards for feature writing, environment reporting, and investigative reporting, including the Florida Society of Newspaper Editors Best of Show gold medal award given for an investigative series about the building of sandy beaches in Florida, which sprang from a related local death (Bayles described the barges used in dredging to build the beaches as floating construction sites during a storm at sea). At age 7, Woodward and Bernstein introduced him to investigative reporting through the movie “All the President’s Men.” Beyond that, he learned his investigative reporting skills from his two years with The Associated Press and also with Rosemary Armao, former director of Investigative Reporters and Editors, who was managing editor of the paper until late 2002.

Bayles, who has strong convictions and opinions and is passionate about his work, loaded trucks for United Parcel Service at 3 o’clock in the morning in junior college in Largo, Florida, wrote for the University of South Florida’s student paper while working on a bachelor of arts to teach high school social studies, including sociology, geography and history, but did not pursue a classroom, managed a restaurant instead, craved a newspaper byline again, started stringing for the St. Petersburg Times for a friend he knew from the student paper, became editor of the Beacon-Leader-Bee Newspapers, a weekly chain in the Tampa Bay area, city government reporter for the St. Petersburg Times, and breaking news reporter for The Associated Press throughout Florida, covering race riots in St. Petersburg, the murder of international fashion designer Gianni Versace in Miami, the aftermath of the Value-Jet crash, and part of the Florida tobacco trials before joining the Sarasota newspaper

in 1998. “Journalism turned out to be more interesting than I thought it would be,” Bayles said. He describes the environment reporter’s post as the plum position at the paper, one that is taken seriously and is well-funded.

Although reared Methodist, Bayles describes himself as a universalist.

View of Investigative Reporting

“Do you know what an investigative reporter needs to be?” Bayles quizzes. “A master reporter. An investigative reporter has to be able to do any kind of reporting at a high level. When you were a city government reporter, you should have been a really good one. When covering cops, you should have just kicked ass. You know how to approach the school board. You know how to approach a cop. You know how to approach business. You know?”

“And the little things that you as a reporter do to get into the mayor’s office all the time. Make them your best friends. When you’re the investigative reporter on a big project, all of that comes into play. And if you never were a schools reporter and never covered the environment and all of a sudden you’re on a project about that, you’re at a huge disadvantage. So a master reporter and a master generalist are your main keys to being a successful investigator.”

No special formal education is required to be a good investigative reporter, Bayles said, “but I do think you’re going to have a hard time being an investigative reporter unless you have some type of advanced degree. The higher level analytical thinking skills that you flex when you are in college come very much into play. I constantly compare what I do in my investigation with a very large term paper, trying

to impress the hell out of your professor and get an A. It's the same thing – with perhaps a little more at stake. And you have more resources to help you get there, like a librarian and a budget.”

Investigative reporting, he said, is one of the lynchpins of the profession. It's what makes journalism the fourth estate, what makes it the watchdog for truth, justice, and the American way, Bayles said. “The qualities of an investigative journalist are tenacity, organization, respect, humility, an incredible ability to clarify a complex situation, and absolute perfect fact-checking,” he said.

Although the immediate gratification that came with working well on deadline and seeing his byline in the paper within a couple of hours, or by the next morning, attracted Bayles to newspaper reporting in the first place, there's nothing like seeing your byline on an investigative report, he said.

“The feeling it gives,” he waxes. “I thought it would be really cool to be an investigative journalist. That's the *crème de la crème*. It's fun, you're respected in the newsroom, and you do good things and you change the world. That's what I thought it would be, and it is that way. It's very cool.” For the most part Bayles has been doing nothing but project work for about three years and loving it, slowing being able to handle the delayed gratification it brings.

“I love it,” he said. “It's really cool to [hear that] you don't have to file a story for the foreseeable future – just go. Not only is that cool to be relieved from the daily grind, but more importantly it is a very heart-warming testament to your boss's belief in your ability to get the job done and be a self-starter. Because not everyone is a self-starter. Some people could not do investigative journalism. They'd be lost. [In some

cases] they can't do them," he said, "because maybe you don't see your byline for a year while you're doing it. That's tough."

As President George W. Bush deployed members of the armed services to Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Middle East, Bayles was pulled off project work to write stories with military connections throughout Florida as well as locally. "It was tedium," he said. "I was punching out daily stories about the environment just to see my byline and stuff – they wanted that [environment stories] too – and I was getting very frustrated because here I was being a daily journalist again. I wasn't – I'm by no means saying that is beneath me – not at all! But it was just like (groan) I want to get back to a project! (Groan) I want to get back to a project! I'm happy to be even on a small project again. I like to be on projects, and now that I have a taste of blood I want more. I enjoy the hell out of it."

Criteria for Moving the Public

There are three things an investigative report must have to be effective, Bayles said. The first is voice, he stressed, the voice of authority. "I'm still learning how to do that. It is a sense of confidence with the prose. It is not wavering on driving home your point that something needs to be fixed. People should not be in avoidable accidents. Period. Not, people shouldn't be dying in avoidable accidents, but you know the dredging companies really need to make some money and oh, they're poor dumb people anyway and maybe it's okay if they die. No! People shouldn't die in avoidable accidents! And you stick to that theme. And you hammer it home with everything you say. And the story backs that up. It's an authoritative tone from beginning to end that

says here's what we're trying to say. With authority, you know it when you've got it. It's something where there are really clear sides to it."

The second essential is balance, "extremely important" for presenting something in context for public discussion, Bayles said. The voice of authority comes by being fair in the way the story gets framed in the newspaper, Bayles said, restricting his comments to mainstream journalism. "We're coming out very strongly that this is something the general public needs to know and look at and then they can decide to do what they want. That [report] better be fair." The essence of investigative reporting, he said, is truth.

The third essential is a sense of outrage.

"You can be personally outraged when you write something, but you have to put [it] in context," he said. "Try to bring a little clarity to the situation, a little more truth. That's why you're an independent thinker on any particular topic you're writing about."

Investigative Reporting Procedure

Investigative reporting at the Sarasota Herald-Tribune is individualistic, Bayles stressed, but generally involves an editor regularly asking whether there's a story. That occurs at periodic intervals to help investigators assess what they have, where it appears to be leading, and what needs to be done to flush out the story. Bayles' style when developing an investigative report about the environment begins with finding out what everyone else has written on the subject in question. "All my investigations start with a Lexis-Nexis search," he said. "Not only does it give me a knowledge base,

because I trust what other papers write, but it shows me where the holes are in the topic. Then I go to the source chain.” Just like in scholarly research.

“Usually, after I do my Lexis-Nexis search, I outline my larger stories because at that point I have a pretty good sense of where I’m going. I don’t know what information is going to be in what particular paragraph. But I write a rough lede, where I’m going to go with this story. And this is what I use to sell my editors on something,” said Bayles. His outline is a five-part format for each story in the series, following in order: (1) introduce the concept in four or five paragraphs, maybe up to eight; (2) write the first subhead to lead into the breadth of the problem and what the report looks into, including between three and five examples demonstrating any national implications, and finishing by flushing out those examples and how they relate to Florida’s problem (local angle); (3) write a second subhead to lead into the meat of the story – the statistics and arguments; (4) write a third subhead leading into a response from all sides; and (5) end with an anecdote, perhaps something whimsical. “I’m very fond of a technique that Newsweek writers use a lot, where the end of it leaves you feeling like you just got hugged. I try to do that. I can’t get away with that in daily reporting too much because it’s almost a little preachy. But you can get away with it in your bigger pieces,” Bayles said.

An Example

Bayles described his process in detail on a story nominated for a Pulitzer prize. Known as the “Beach Builders” series, it was sparked when a local man died in a dredging accident on the job. Bayles’ investigation into the cause of death led to winks

between special interests and law enforcement officials, and several unfavorable economic and environmental consequences of creating and maintaining sandy beaches all along Florida's coast to protect property values and maintain tourism.

Building up the beaches in Sarasota also was aimed at preventing barrier islands in the Gulf of Mexico, which protect Florida's coastline from erosion, from disappearing into open water. Building a beach for Sarasota, he explained, involves dredging from barges in the Gulf of Mexico, hence the analogy to a floating construction site during a storm. The story developed into a three-part series including exposes, explanations, and interpretations that took the concept of beach building to a new level of understanding for the public by illuminating government and politics, the environment, economics, and law enforcement and looking at them together, as a whole.

The newspaper used three voices in the report. In the first section, it spoke for people in a weak position. In the second section, it spoke for the elite or comfortable. In the third, it section spoke for wildlife. The newspaper's frame was to show injustice. Its point of view, its intent, was to say the injustices were avoidable, that they shouldn't happen. Period.

The Details

"So, one of our home boys died on a barge. And we get to thinking, let's figure out how he died," Bayles said. "It's a death, it's a young guy, it's an accident. Let's see if this is a preventable accident. So I make a few calls and all of a sudden within one day I learn there are probably seven more deaths in the Southeast United States.

So the flag goes up. So then I started getting records and I realize that the vast majority of these were due to cost-saving measures on the dredging firm's behalf, that were overseen by the federal government, and that allowed safety measures to be missing," Bayles said, escalating further into outrage with each word, although Bayles describes that passion as nothing more than "professional interest."

Bayles filed piles of Freedom of Information Act requests and got some help from people in the government and the Army Corps of Engineers. "Most of my stuff came, as it always does, from people whom I made my friend and they just gave it to me. The FOIAs asked for accident records in all 41 Army Corps districts that border beaches in America – Alaska and Hawaii, too. And as they came in, I learned how to streamline the FOIA system by convincing the FOIA officers that it would be best to just call me back with it rather than going through all the expense of copying it and mailing it. And I got a lot of Coast Guard records with lines blacked out. And a lot of OSHA records – they're online. They're pretty easy to do. I had a computer-assisted guy up my back (backing him up), so he helped a lot, too.

"In the beginning when we were trying to frame up what we were going to say, we found first of all right off the bat that these dredging companies, which were employed by the government, were not following the government's own safety rules and things like that. Some have rusty hand rails and the gears are supposed to be covered. A big gear wasn't and sucked one guy in. So I cross-referenced OSHA's databases with the records I was finding from these companies, and a guy came to me who was a disgruntled safety officer no longer working for anyone involved in

dredging who had kept really good records for the past 15 years at one of the government contracting companies. So we had clerks type all that into a database.

“So at this point we know we have a story about this vaunted industry. Before we wrote what we did, no one ever wrote anything bad about beach building. It was always ‘Save the community’ and ‘It’s the greatest thing since sliced bread!’ Nobody ever asked these questions. So we knew we had a story that we, as a paper, could say we knew these accidents were preventable. Now who is going to dispute that?”

At that point Bayles knew he had a “Gotcha!” story, the sort that doesn’t come along very often. In the past, investigative reports often stopped there. But Bayles wanted to see what else might be wrong with beach building. “We wanted to see where we could effect very positive social change for people in a weak position,” Bayles said. He began talking with dredgers and their families, learning what they go through on the barge and how many times a finger or foot or limb gets crushed on the job, discovering one company had averaged three injuries a day for 10 years. He continued to “drag string” for a story that would say everyone thinks beach building is so great but it may not be so great for the people who do it. That was the voice Bayles and his editors decided they’d use for the first day of the story.

The second day of what would become the three-part series took on a different voice. This one said what a great thing it is for the communities along the new two-mile stretch of beach being built – that it is only costing those communities \$100,000, and the local politicians are great because they got the federal government to do it. But, Bayles said, “If you go in the back end of that figure, that \$100,000 is the tip of the \$55 million, 50-year cost of this beach. The federal government mandates through

water resources [laws] that once they decide to make a beach sandy, they agree to keep it sandy for 50 years. So, every time a storm comes by and washes the beach away, they put it back. Sixty-five percent of the funding comes from the federal government in most cases. So, the wheatfield farmer in Iowa is paying for Sarasota's new beach. It's not the cost from the taxpayer that's getting the most benefit.

"In the balanced story we ran, we had the success stories – the Miami Beaches. And in doing that, I came to find there were environmental factors that were not looked into," Bayles said.

In the last part of the report, Bayles began his investigation into environmental impacts of beach building based on the premise that if you take 1.2 million cubic yards of something and dump it at the shore, there's going to be some effect on wildlife there. The question was how much. Bayles went to the Army Corps of Engineers and asked to see an environmental impact statement, which is required by state and federal law before any development can occur.

"So I get one," he says, "and it's 500 pages long and you can't read it. So I ask for a few more. Well, they're all the same! How can a detailed environmental study of Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina be exactly the same as for Sarasota, Florida? So I went to various professors, some independent voices critical of [beach building], and they pointed me to some of their students' work. They were right in the loop." Bayles found the dumping caused dramatic impact to the bottom ecosystems along the shore. "The 500 little creatures that inhabit the beach get smothered, and there's damage to the fishes. We had the research department do a search of all the newspapers in America to find if anyone else had written about this stuff. I found a small newspaper

that had reported on how a sea turtle got killed in the dredging of this one channel that needs to be kept deep for the military. The sand from the dredging is dumped on a nearby beach. So I called the people working that beach and asked how often that happens. And they started screaming at me! They said, 'It's not a beach nourishment!'

"And I said well, what is it?"

"Well, it's a channel dredging, so it doesn't count."

"I said well, where's the sand put? On the beach? What does it do to the beach?"

"It widens it."

"So what is it? I asked."

"It's channel dredging! It's channel dredging!"

"You know, well, bullshit. It's an artificial separation between the two. They're putting sand on the beach and in the process they're killing turtles. Well, I come to find out they get this special exemption. The private dredging industry is exempted by the federal government from its own endangered species regulations by allowing incidental takes – they call it a 'take' when it's really a death – of like 35 turtles a year. And one year they reached that number by April, so they upped it to 50. I mean, it's just ridiculous what people will do for beaches!

"So it has a huge environmental cost that no one ever reported about. Some people had touched on how much money it costs, and how committed it is, but everything else was never reported by anyone anywhere. Everyone always thought beach building was great," he said. The story cost \$70,000 total to produce.

The reporting, Bayles explained, flushed out the voice the newspaper would use. “We had a good idea of what the voice would be after some initial phone calls, but the reporting told us what was wrong with this picture, and that was our voice. Men are dying while reshaping the beaches and reshaping the ecosystem, a lot of people are spending a lot of money to do this, and a lot of creatures are being killed in this quest in a futile attempt to keep a barrier island from moving.”

Why Environment Reporting?

Bayles said, “I love to be out on the water. I love the beach. I love the forest. I wouldn’t say I’m an environmentalist, but I definitely love being outdoors and learning the cool things about animals and the reactions between the Earth and the sky.”

He was attracted to geomorphology, the study of things that live in and things that occur one mile above the Earth and one mile below the Earth, because of his love of the outdoors. “It’s so cool,” he said. “You’ve got volcanoes, plate tectonics, soil, water, all that kind of stuff – everything on the surface of the planet. Plus you can do lower stratosphere and weather patterns. So I knew that I loved to learn about that stuff – this is great stuff and Wow! There’s a beat dedicated to all this.

“I had a friend, a reporter, and I was just so jealous because she got to write about the coolest stuff. I didn’t know she had to go to water board meetings and sit through them, but most of what she got to write was about really significant things. I thought that was cool, and I made it a career goal to work myself into an environment beat if one should ever open up while I’m around.

“If I stay as a reporter and stay on a beat, the environment would never get boring. Environment seeps into every aspect of reporting – cops, courts, death, natural disaster, almost anything is an environment story. With the environment, there’s always something new. Here at this paper they let me spread my wings and become a firefighter. Some of my stories I do out on my boat. I take my boat out for the day and do a story on something that needs a boat to get to. So it rarely feels like working.”

Advocacy and Environment Reporting

“Writing with authority, it’s fun to do. And it’s challenging. And it’s hard. People in the beach building industry don’t like me very much because they think I’m against beach building. They think I’m against it as an issue personally. And I’m not. I see it as one of the very valid ways that we can protect priorities and also provide recreation for tourist dollars.

“I’ve been asked more than once – why are you so against us? And I’m not! I just am reporting things – true things – that they wish wouldn’t come out. It’s a spin game. And you gotta figure out – you don’t necessarily come down in the middle every time. You gotta prove what you say. Check and double check and triple check the facts. The beach story is the one that probably gives me the most to stomach. The beach industry – this good old boy closed right up to Congress. They [the company hired to build the beach] had special things, they limited competition, they are constantly getting charged by the Justice Department with bid rigging. There’s a long history. There are only two or three firms that do this kind of work, they limit foreign

competition, and jump back and forth between lobbyists and congressional candidates, all in the same industry. And it just reeks!

“But I still gotta think to myself, am I being fair in the way we frame it up? As long as it’s fair in the way it’s framed, in a way that the average reader can look at it, it’s fair. That’s why journalism isn’t truly objective. Too many judgment calls all based on the subjective learning that we’ve had from childhood on.

Investigative Reporting and Advocacy Journalism

There’s no such thing as true objectivity, but there is such a thing as balance, Bayles said. Advocacy, he said, consists of one-sided propaganda from someone who is trying to further a single cause rather than general understanding of the topic. The public entrusts journalists to do the latter, he said.

“There are two different types of advocacy. There’s advocacy born out of self-motive, and advocacy on behalf of another person. Self-advocacy is what lobbying groups do. They say this is our cause and you need to think it’s important. That’s different than saying here’s something where there’s a waste of money and wrong things are happening to people, and that’s not going to further your agenda,” Bayles said.

However, he said, “If I’m asked to write a story about wife beaters or children rapers, my perspective is going to be that it’s not a good thing. I’m not going to put someone in the story who rapes children, and interview him in prison and use a quote of him saying it’s really what we all need to be doing to relieve tension. I’m not going to do that because there are moral imperatives that come before journalistic goals. My

duty is to stop these things from happening. Your duty as a citizen outweighs your oath as a journalist in most cases. And even in all those cases, there's a creative solution so that you can do both. You can act the proper way journalistically, and you can also do your duty as a citizen when you get in a pinch like that," such as publishing a column reflecting contact with someone who appears to be a suspect in a crime without going to the police directly with the information.

It's very easy to confuse investigative reporting with advocacy, Bayles said. "Voice, framing, and point-of-view are the factors.

"There's not a problem with writing a story and having, as part of that story, some alternatives. But when you go much beyond that, then you're advocating something, you're moving away from being an independent. You move toward molding your community rather than mirroring it. When you put out a story that shows the police chief's a crook, you're going to change your community because the chief is going to get fired. That's not advocating that the chief gets fired, though. That's what an editorial would do. With a story, you have to balance it, and stop there.

"Mainstream weeklies or dailies are dedicated to both sides of the truth. If an article points to a problem and says this is the solution, period, that's being an advocate. That's imposing the might of the newspaper on the community, and that is advocacy. Let's flip the coin, though. What if we're writing a story about a family that is in real need of a liver transplant for their 2-year-old daughter and they're broke. What if we write a story that brings in \$2 million worth of contributions and everyone lives happily ever after. Didn't we advocate on behalf of the little girl? Yeah. We did. And that's ethical. We decide. There are many more of those people in the world than

we in the media write about. So it's an independent decision to write the story. Its not like the United Way came to us, told us about a person, told us to put it in the newspaper, and we said sure.

“There's a fundamental difference between what Amnesty International will write about itself and how I will use the organization in a news story about political prisoners of war.”

Personal Lessons from Environment Reporting

“It has reinforced my desire to continue learning throughout my life because reporting on the environment is like a big science project. Quite often you have to learn new things about nature that keeps feeding the brain. It reinforced my love of learning. It was nice to know that being on the environment beat is like being in college again, because it's rewarding in terms of learning, and getting paid for it,” Bayles said.

Realities of the Environment Beat

“Like most beats, there's never enough time to do all the stories you want to do. Often an editor will forget you're the environment reporter and assign you to a breaking news piece or filling in on another beat because many environment stories can wait. It's frustrating when you're in the middle of a Weekender (an evergreen that runs over the weekend – doesn't have a day hook) on a local environment problem and you get pulled to cover a trial. But I guess that happens on any beat. I think it may

happen more often on the environment beat because so many of the stories are left pressing,” Bayles said.

What Makes Environment Reporting Meaningful for You?

“It’s really important that someone outside the government and special interests is watching what’s going on with our environment. Just like if we screw up our school, we screw up a whole generation of our children. If we screw up the environment, we screw up our planet . If we’re not paying attention, we could all die. The planet could become inhabitable. I’m going a bit far, but it’s important that we in the media keep watch.”

After reviewing these notes, Bayles said this quote is, “right on, and key to how I feel about my job.” He said did not specifically note any spiritual connection to the environment that gives environment reporting meaning for him.

What Makes Investigative Reporting Meaningful for You?

For Bayles, part of the joy of investigative reporting is being able to work from home when he chooses. But, there’s more to it than that. Bayles loves the work. “I even do it on my own time,” he said. “Journalism is the greatest profession in the world. I get paid for something I would do for free. And that’s really cool. And I get paid well. I have good benefits, and bosses treat me right. I have a lot of autonomy. Investigative reporting is the best because you have the greatest potential change the world for a little bit better. It truly is the Fourth Estate, and I’m part of it.

“There’s no way that I could have as much positive influence on my community except through journalism. I would never be a politician, I would never be an actor or any kind of activist or some great author that would change the world for the better. This is the only way I have to leave the world just a little bit better than I left it, in the smallest way, even if it’s only Sarasota County rather than the whole United States or the world. If there are enough [people] out there who are inspired by this and we put some better rules in place to make the environment, to make it a little bit easier for humans and animals to co-exist, from both viewpoints, then there you go! That’s as great a legacy as anybody can have – where I come from anyway.

“If you cover the city council and report what happened, that’s great – people need to know that. They wouldn’t go to the city council meeting, most of them. So that’s an important service. But it’s not going to change anything unless some major blow-up happens and someone gets canned.

“But with investigative reporting, you can pour your heart and soul into it and definitely have some positive outcomes: if not changing laws, then you’re alerting society to potential problems that could be fixed. There you have it!”

Types of Investigative Reporting

“Explanatory journalism doesn’t necessarily have a balance. It’s an explanation of what’s going on. For instance, in the “Inside the Fire” series I was “embedded” with firefighters. The story is showing an explanation of what happens to the men and machines that fight the forest fires during a big fire year, back in the woods where no one ever sees them. And here’s what it’s like when people flee from a

neighborhood that a fire pounced on, and burned down their homes. Here's the chaos. Here's an explanation of what it's like to be a firefighter, what it's like to stop a huge wildfire, what it's like to be a homeowner threatened by a wildfire. There's no greater purpose to that except to illuminate people's knowledge about something that hasn't been written about in that kind of detail.

"That's an investigation because it takes a lot of original reporting, of looking into things that aren't necessarily in a database anywhere that has been created by some government entity. It's the softest form of investigation for sure. But it's definitely going out to learn something – to investigate what it's like."

Responsibility

To help mankind and the environment.

A Description of Journalists in General

Bayles is motivated by opportunities to learn new things about the world around him. Broadening that, he said, "The motivation of any journalist is to make something better for a group of people who need help righting a wrong in the government, which might be people in Montana paying [to put] sand out here on Siesta Key. It's not really right."

He added, "The best journalists are the ones who constantly learn. They love the profession because they are learning all the time."

Journalists don't help out the authorities. But there are moral imperatives that come before journalistic goals, Bayles said. "Your duty as a citizen in most cases

comes before journalism. For instance, when I was doing the fire series, there was an arsonist running around the woods lighting most of the big fires we covered that year. And I started having a pen pal through the online journal I did for the web site while I was in the woods. He sounded awfully suspicious from things he was telling me – things that maybe only the person lighting the fires or the firefighters could know. So I thought he was a former firefighter, or that it might be the firebug. So now I had a name that I should probably turn over to the authorities, but I'm a journalist and we don't help the authorities. What do I do, right?"

Bayles talked about it with his editors and he decided it was his duty to stop the fires from happening. The police had not come to the paper and asked for information, and Bayles had gotten the information as a reporter, not as a private citizen. Bayles and his editors decided he would write an online diary that included a passage noting he had received a lot of e-mail on the topic, and quoting from some, including his suspect. In another case, Bayles the reporter saw a guy start a controlled burn that got out of hand and burned down a home. The authorities were investigating, but didn't know Bayles was on the scene working on his series. Again, he opted to write about it in a column in his online diary.

The Future of Environment Reporting

At least for investigative reporters, it appears from Bayles' experience that a new responsibility will be the possibility of providing daily diaries online for readers, making personal narrative a new component of standard investigative reporting. He stressed that while common thinking is that the Internet is going to change everything,

it doesn't – that it's just a different way to get information. "You still have to double check it," he said. "It's just another way for people to put their views out there. Or their spins. Which is fine. But you still have to get the original document in your hands. You still have to talk to the mayor," he said.

Bayles doesn't see any great changes ahead for the beat, or any instability about its future, although he anticipates more reporting about global climate change and global disease like AIDS and SARS. That, he said, may bring about a sense "among some of the elite environment reporters of a grander scale of projects and stories. But a very average mid-size newspaper like mine, it's going to carry on with a mix of daily journalism and longer pieces that bring things out."

He added, "The environment is too big an issue in Florida to be ignored. So you won't see massive cuts in the environment in most papers in Florida. I can't think of a paper in Florida that doesn't have an environment reporter."

That said, Bayles doesn't think environment stories are well suited for television news. "I don't think you can do anything really well on TV. Maybe the news magazines can kind of get into some stuff. But the power of television often eclipses the power of newspaper in audience in mass and numbers. They're going to get the word out faster than we are, and more completely. But as far as in-depth journalism, TV is just not going to have the lasting impact of newspaper stories."

At the Sarasota paper, the cable studio in the corner of the newsroom mostly teases to the newspaper version of a story. How to use the cable station for news, Bayles said, is the hot topic of the moment at the paper. It is an ongoing debate in this multimedia newsroom, one of the first in the country. How do you do a story on TV

that you're also doing in print? For the most part right now, those reporters at the paper choosing to do TV as well as print use it as a vehicle to tease something they've written, and co-ordinate the tease with when the series or story is going to run. So the whole news report is a tease.

"This is exactly the stuff that's happening in our New York Times-owned newsroom is a discussion of how long can a TV piece be that backs up a newspaper report? We talked about two minutes, three minutes, and the producer said why don't we try five minutes? Why don't we try eight minutes? And everyone started nodding their heads. Newsmagazines keep a topic interesting for an hour. Why can't we keep it interesting for 10 minutes, especially if it's something as multi-faceted as [an environment story]," Bayles said.

Questions also include whether to do a two-piece thing on the cable channel the day before and the day of a newspaper piece. Should the TV report be more substantial and contain different information? Also, there is sometimes major coordinating required with other broadcast outlets to get a story together. Sometimes the reporter is interviewed as an authority, Bayles said, speaking from experience.

"That's the way the environment beat or any beat is going to change in the future. Reporters are going to need increasing flexibility. I don't think the content – what we're covering – is going to change. But the way we're doing it certainly will.

DALE WILLMAN

Background

Dale Willman, a 30-year mainstream, cable, and public radio reporter who is a lifelong Republican, trapped as a kid, grew up an hour-and-a-half from the burning Cuyahoga River in 1969, never read newspapers or watched television news very much before becoming a reporter although watched Walter Cronkite because his parents did, graduated from high school and holds a master's degree but no bachelor's degree because he failed at proficiency in a second language. Is fluent in science communication. Became a journalist at age 8 when he produced his first newspaper, a house organ for the Willman family. His second job in the business was as chess columnist for the Smithville High School Mosaic. At 17 he became a disc jockey, but after a year his boss – also a friend – suggested pursuing news as a career instead.

Willman took his first journalism classes at Ohio State University where he became a nuclear propellerhead majoring in international studies but could not deliver the language requirement, quit to collect and deliver radio news in Columbus, Ohio. Grew to become a national award-winning radio reporter, leading voice in environmental journalism, managing editor, and journalism instructor in Croatia and Macedonia before securing a master's degree in environment and community from Antioch College, which led to distinguished media studies professor at Carleton College as well as trainer of professional journalists in storytelling, writing, and the latest field technology for radio production.

Willman began covering the environment in 1989, took biology as an undergrad and a freshwater ecology class for his master's, secured most of his knowledge of science on-the-job and through professional organizations including the National Association of Science Writers and the Society of Environmental Journalists. Grounded in investigative reporting techniques through workshops provided by Investigative Reporters and Editors.

Worships the environment. In 2002 dedicated the rest of his career to environment reporting by establishing Field Notes Productions to produce environment stories for national and international radio broadcast. Before getting there he was a dishwasher, waiter, bagboy and night mop and clean-up at a grocery store, and summer landscaper, also National Public Radio news anchor, reporter, editor, segment producer, Midwest editor of NPR's National Desk in which he managed a staff of three plus a bureau chief and several freelancers, managing editor of the Great Lakes Radio Consortium overseeing a \$380,000 budget and staff of three serving a weekly news feed carried by more than 135 radio stations in 20 states, national correspondent/environment reporter for CNN Radio covering the White House, Pentagon, State Department and writing travel features, CBS radio correspondent, Monitor Radio (Christian Science Monitor) anchor and senior editor, landing prestigious journalism awards along the way including two-time winner of the Edward R. Murrow Award, once for the best use of sound and once for investigative reporting.

Willman describes his religious practice as universalist.

View of Investigative Reporting

Before he ever did an investigative report, Willman said he had a clear idea of the impacts that kind of journalism produced. He became interested in it at an early age when he learned Arizona Republic investigative reporter Don Bowles got blown up after uncovering organized crime. It was the story that brought about Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE), and it got Willman thinking. Reporting of the Watergate break-in also intrigued Willman and he chomped at the bit for his chance. No opportunities to do it presented themselves. He became an early member of IRE when disco was popular, and started to learn about investigative report through the organization's conferences and newsletters, preparing, laying in wait for opportunity.

“What turned me on to investigative reporting was in ‘All the President’s Men,’ the Eye of God above [Redford and Hoffman as Woodward and Bernstein] as they looked through the stuff at the Library of Congress. What turned me off to investigative reporting for a long time was the view that it was just laborious, and dreadfully long hours sitting in archives somewhere and just pouring over arcane documents. That was my view before I began to learn more about it, let alone do it.

“There’s the view that all reporting is investigative in some sense. Which it is. And as I read more about it, my understanding grew. [I learned] it doesn’t necessarily have to be records, but it is often prying things out that people don’t want revealed – not in a ‘60 Minutes’ ‘Gotcha!’ sort of way, but wading through things and finding that nugget, digging through and finding that one kernel that sends you into a direction and making connections.

“Document work to me is in a sense investigative reporting. It means connecting the dots. News reporting is often doing something about this dot, and that dot. And that dot over there. Investigative reporting and document reporting are connecting those dots. It’s finding the threads. It’s finding the commonality amongst those things.”

Criteria for Moving the Public

“Being taken seriously is separate from hooking an audience. To me, the way of hooking people into a story is to be a storyteller. To present the story, at least in the beginning, through the eyes of someone affected. There’s a basic convention in radio, and that is using a focus statement – one line that goes like this: Someone is doing something for a reason. In using that, that gives you a story that people can relate to. It puts it in human terms, and it gets people engaged, because chances are they probably know someone like that. So that’s the way of hooking them in.

“How to move the public – that heads toward advocacy. I don’t purposefully try to move the public in terms of a direction they should take. I try to move them to feel the story. To be a part of it. And to be compelled to do something. But I don’t try to tell them what it is they should do,” Willman said.

Investigative Reporting Procedure

There is no rigid process for investigative reporting that Willman follows. The process for him is intuitive. One thing leads to another, he said.

Throughout his life, once there was something he wanted to do, Willman set out to learn more about it. The same is true for stories. Always on the lookout for the right investigative story for him to pursue, Willman did so and it landed him a Murrow award.

Investigative reporting means a lot of conversations, calling people who know about a topic, calling people who understand it, he said. “I find I can’t investigate something adequately until I understand it. I am kind of dense. So it means I have to gather a lot more information than probably I will ever use. But that context is important for giving me a greater understanding of the issue. That’s the only way I can actually do an investigation.”

He describes the story about Disney’s Broadway production of “Beauty and the Beast,” for which he won the Edward R. Murrow Award for Investigative Reporting. The story told of why the orchestra musicians wore respirators and double canister gas masks as they performed, which was because the ventilation for the production’s pyrotechnics sucked harmful particulate matter into and through the orchestra pit. Willman picked up on the story three years into that practice and exposed it, working on the story on his own time although employed by CNN Radio. To clarify, CNN Radio did not give him on-the-job time to investigate the story, but said they would be interested in running it if it passed scrutiny. CNN Television declined to do the story when Willman could not deliver tape, which happened because Disney got wind of the story before he could get the hidden camera video CNN Television wanted.

The story took almost a year to collect. It took several months just to get permission from the musician's union to go into the pit with the orchestra. Willman met with the union representatives and the musicians, explained to them what he wanted to do, why he thought it was important, and that he was not interested in doing a story that would hurt them. He guaranteed any of them anonymity if they needed it, but said it was important that he had their participation. He told them he would not do the story unless he had full approval of everyone in the orchestra pit. As he cultivated each union member involved, Willman researched pyrotechnics, a business "that is really cloooooosed" because it mostly consists of family operations which do not have public records. "And regulators don't want to talk to you," he said.

Willman, based on his research, explained the chemistry that makes propylene glycol come out in a mist or fog on the stage, which floats the particulate matter into the air. The chemical is safe in foods, for ingestion, but "no one knows what it does when it is inhaled, hot or cold," he said. Willman cited a case where a singer in the stage wings accidentally got a blast in the face of hot propylene glycol³ that seared his lungs and permanently scarred his throat.

Willman had very little support from CNN Radio for the story. The process in this story is a fairly unusual one, he said, because of having to get the approval and support of those who were in the pit. If they didn't support his effort, he said, "they could do a lot to screw it up. They could tell Disney we were doing the story. I just thought it was the human thing to do, to make sure people agree this is the right thing

³ Propylene glycol is related to anti-freeze – ethylene glycol. The difference is propylene glycol has three carbons, whereas ethylene glycol has only two. Propylene glycol is like glycerin, and is often found in personal care products.

to do. Many of the musicians didn't think it was a problem, didn't think it was effecting them. I had to convince them that some pyrotechnics have heavy metals in them because they add color, and that those metals have a huge effect on your health."

The research not only involved talking with the musicians, but also the fire marshals' association, regulators, legislative officials, a special interest organization aimed at protecting the health of performers in relations to their work, and plenty of reading and Internet research.

"This is exactly what I imagined investigative reporting to be," Willman said. "The people element of it was the part that was a little different. To have a large group of people I had to convince. But the rest of it really fit what I thought investigative reporting should be."

Why Environment Reporting

"To me, almost all environment reporting, because of the nature of the topics, has to be investigative. The reason is simple to me, and this is what attracts me to environment reporting: environment issues by nature are so complex. The environment covers so many disciplines. It's everything from architecture to macrobiology to ethnobotany to whatever. It's this crossing of disciplines so you're forced to be investigative in the sense that you really, in order to understand the issues that you cover, have to dig deeper. You have to do a lot of concentrating on the dots to make sense of those stories. That's part of the progression of my own growth.

"I started becoming interested in environment reporting at the same time I began to evolve in my understanding of journalism in general. I didn't place any value

on [environment reporting, though]. I grew up in [the traditional journalism] school where you hear the voice of god and you impart truth to people. I didn't realize how strongly I felt about the environment until I was much older. There were a lot of things that influenced me," he said, citing family camping trips throughout the country to places like Dodge City and Yellowstone National Park. "It linked the environment to people. So I understood we were not separate from the environment, we were part of it.

Advocacy and Environment Reporting

"There is a lot of advocacy in environmental journalism. I don't think it's wrong, but it's certainly not for me. There is so much baggage around the phrase environment reporting as it is, that as soon as people begin to feel you are an advocate, you lose a big chunk of your audience. While I respect a good many people who are doing advocacy journalism – I consider real advocacy journalism that which selects a point of view, and advocates for a certain point of view beyond all others. While there's a role for that, it's not what I want to do. You end up preaching to the converted rather than providing information for those undecided to make an informed choice.

"Is environment reporting always advocacy? No. It does not need to be. You can take an issue and present that issue, and present the facts and allow the people to make up their minds. It, to some extent, rests on how you view the public's capacity to assimilate information. If you think they need to be persuaded to a point of view, you're going to do advocacy journalism. If you are convinced the public will make the

right choice given enough information, then you'll just provide information rather than a point of view," Willman said.

Investigative Reporting and Advocacy Journalism

Is investigative reporting advocacy? It's a tough question for Willman. He is torn. "Can you be an environmentalist and be fair and objective? I think yeah, because you're human. Does the fact that you feel strongly about an issue mean that you're an advocate? To me, advocacy is propaganda whereas investigative reporting done well is not. The reporter may feel passionate about an issue, but works as hard as possible to be fair on that issue, and be as comprehensive as possible. One of the definitions of propaganda is to manipulate the truth to achieve a particular goal. And that means being selective in the information that you provide. To me, that's advocacy, and that's not straight journalism, the kind where you are informing people about issues significant to them.

"Just because you believe in something or understand something doesn't mean you're an advocate. Religion reporters proudly go to church or temple. Every business reporter I know is a capitalist. Does that mean they are biased in what they do? Yes! What I look at to determine if they are an advocate or not is the depth of their reporting. Your report doesn't necessarily aim toward a call for action, whereas advocacy does. I look at the weight of the evidence and make a judgment as to what is fair. For instance, with what we know today it's not fair to say that humans aren't at least partly responsible for global climate change.

“Many muckrakers in the past were advocates. I have a certain difficulty with that. Izzy Stone was a muckraker. People thought he was biased, but he dug out a lot of important stories. So I don’t see much of a difference between investigative reporting and muckraking in that sense. Good muckraking to me is just good investigative reporting.”

Willman views book-length journalism as the ultimate in comprehensive investigative reporting. Citing Botany of Desire by Michael Palen, about genetic engineering of crops, Willman said, “He doesn’t come out and say genetic engineering is bad. His purpose isn’t to condemn genetic engineering.” The book, Willman said, “made me consider all viewpoints and make up my own mind. The weight of the evidence does condemn genetic engineering.

“Economists say that in a market where there is complete information, people will make the right choices. I don’t think that happens with environment issues. The Exxon Valdez oil spill was a huge plus for the gross national product (GNP) because we lost a little bit in fisheries but the hundreds of millions of dollars spent to clean it up actually helped the GNP. The loss of the vista, the loss of the fish that are a wonderful part of the ecosystem, the degradation of the ecosystem, that’s not factored into the economic equation.

“I truly believe that if the public has complete information they are smart enough to make their minds up and it will be in favor of the environment,” Willman said, adding, “I don’t think complete information is given to consumers about the environmental affects of their actions. And without that they cannot make informed choices. It’s our jobs as journalists to give them that complete information, and then

we should trust in their ability to make the right decisions. And that's what separates the journalism I believe in from advocacy journalism – advocates, it would seem, don't believe that people will make the right choice, so they must help them with that decision.”

Personal Lessons from Investigative Reporting About the Environment

“Am I an environmentalist? Yeah, I am. But do I try to advocate in my pieces? No.” This is the essence of who Willman is, he says. This clarity about his identity came from reporting about the environment, studying it, studying community, and completing an investigative report about the environment, he said.

Realities of the Environment Beat

“What's different is the whole issue of the breadth of knowledge needed for environment reporting. That's the biggest reality. A separate reality is that many environment stories are slow to develop, which is counter to the news cycle that demands new, different, immediate. So journalists are trained to look for those sorts of stories – those which change rapidly, and with suddenness, rather than those that require a longer scale to put together to report on, and to get the public to understand. It makes it a harder sell to editors who are used to a whole different style of story.

“The environment is one of the most polarized beats. The language has been hijacked to a great extent so that it's hard to do a story without being accused of being an advocate or zealot for one side or the other,” Willman said.

What Makes Environment Reporting Meaningful for You?

For Willman, the clearest indication of a greater power is to be outside in the environment. Describing living in Minnesota, he said, “The cold here is crisp, and the stars, on the nights when it drops down below zero and the clouds go away, I don’t know how someone can say there’s not a higher power. When I’m out hiking it’s the same thing. For me, that’s the greater experience.” Reporting about the environment deepens his connection to the environment as well as its meaning, Willman said.

What Makes Investigative Reporting Meaningful for You?

“I have this incredibly strong, stubborn sense of fairness. I don’t know where it came from, but I have this intense – I hate injustice. I hate abuse by the powerful. I get really mad about it. I used to get really angry in school about dumb things, about when people have power and they abuse it. I’m offended by that.

“To me, investigative reporting is looking at those who were abusing power and covering it up. It is a way of putting light on that and making people aware of an injustice. It’s righting wrongs. It’s this sense of anger and injustice that really pushed me to want to do investigative reporting. The other element is that I also think investigative reporting is just really good reporting.”

Responsibility

“The environment beat isn’t alone in this, but many of the stories we do can have a huge effect on people’s health and their lives. So if we’re doing a story about PCB contamination in the Hudson (River), or lead in water supplies, or toxic releases

from power plants, all those issues have potential ramifications in people's lives. And that's a huge responsibility, to get it right, to be as accurate as possible and say it in a tone that doesn't make it too alarmist and yet doesn't play down potential threats. So it has to strike a perfect balance between those, so you don't lose listeners," Willman said.

The Future of Environment Reporting

"I get angry at a lot of environment reporting now because I realize that [many of those doing it] just don't get it, they just don't understand it. Investigative reporting in part means providing greater context. It's that depth, that context that is so important for environment stories, and we don't have it. As a result, the public doesn't understand these issues, because they are ill-informed by the poor reporting being done by many people."

CHARLES PEKOW

Background

After talking with Charles Pekow, one wonders if institutionalization for psychological disorder is among the best grooming for prospective investigative reporters. Pekow, a long-time freelance journalist in Washington, D.C. hailing from Highland Park, a Chicago suburb, lapped up investigative reports at every opportunity from his first exposure to them around age 16 with CBS-TV's "60 Minutes" news magazine. Pekow, who lived at Bruno Bettelheim's Sonia Shankman Orthogenic School between the ages of 11 and 21, a residential institution for emotionally disturbed children at the University of Chicago, has written about his 10-year experience there between 1965 and 1975, accusing Bettelheim of terrorizing the residents, which included bullying, public humiliation, and physical abuse, such as beating autistic children who could not speaking clearly, slapping children in the face for not eating dinner, pulling residents' hair or beating them for skipping school or calling a counselor something derogatory, and having women monitor the growing boys as they washed in open shower rooms, Pekow said, and wrote in an exposé about Bettelheim.

Pekow's claims have been verified and embellished upon by some of his classmates, both male and female. Despite numerous efforts, he was not able to get his view of the truth published for a long time. Bethelheim's saintly image outside the walls of the Orthogenic School made news magazines and newspapers view the controversy Pekow presented as off-limits, evidenced by rejection slips he received.

When Bettelheim committed suicide at age 86 in March 1990, The Washington Post on August 26 of that year carried a first-person, supported, exposé in its “Outlook” section by Pekow, who wrote about, among other things, residents who complained about Bettelheim to the law and were not taken seriously because it was the word of “mental patients” against that of a world-famous psychologist.

Pekow’s experience there, coupled with his sense of being wronged when committed by his parents, roots his motivation to right wrongs deep in a sense of outrage at injustice. He speaks about the institution prohibiting the residents from watching television, reading newspapers and news magazines, or listening to the radio based on the thinking that they would make the residents’ already fragile emotional states more unstable. Consequently, Pekow became addicted to news during summer vacations home, for instance. He recalls being embarrassed that he did not know that former Illinois Governor Otto Kerner had resigned, and remembers protesting to institution counselors that he was entitled to know things like the name of the governor of the state and what was going on in the world, claiming a violation of his civil rights. The rules began to relax and the residents were allowed to watch “60 Minutes” on Sunday nights. The reports intrigued, excited, and inspired Pekow. One year instead of summer reruns of the program, the station rebroadcast Edward R. Murrow’s “See It Now” series. “These were real inspirations,” Pekow said. At home for summer vacation, he and his mother would talk about Murrow and the series, “Harvest of Shame,” and Murrow’s historic broadcast of the story of Milo Radulovich, a landmark piece of advocacy journalism in which Murrow said there is no other side to the story but that Radulovich should not be removed from the service because

members of his family were labeled radicals during the McCarthy Era. “That was a tremendous piece of journalism,” Pekow said. Routinely his parents would talk about important things in local news, and Pekow would keep up by following the political and social problems in Chicago, reading Mike Royko and others, “and that would inspire me as a citizen to do something.”

For Pekow, that “something” was to dedicate his career to righting wrongs, and to do it through investigative reporting. Prior to becoming a journalist, he held summer jobs as a messenger in a law firm, and worked in a hotel as purchasing manager, desk clerk, switchboard operator, and reception all connected to the family business, which was hotel management and ownership.

Pekow, who holds a master’s in journalism from Northwestern University and a bachelor’s in government from Georgetown University, has no formal training in investigative techniques, holds three national awards for investigative reporting, and also one for analytical reporting. In his career he has gathered and written about 20 or 30 stories about the environment. By contrast, he has done several dozen investigative reports. General ones take months. Investigative reports about the environment take longer partly due to scientific jargon and partly due to complexity, he said. Most of the stories he’s had suppressed did not concern the environment, he said.

Pekow describes himself as an atheist. Summarizing his views on religion, he said, “Humans arose from the environment, not from divine intervention; though none of us know what other universes may exist or what they may contain. I don’t believe in deity or practiced religion. I think you can debunk religion. But how do we know

for sure what's beyond the Earth? How can we prove there is or isn't anything there? We haven't reached that stage yet."

View of Investigative Reporting

"A report covers. And investigative report uncovers," Pekow said, citing a few examples. There wasn't much investigative reporting in Chicago's mainstream press when he was growing up, he said. "There is a fine line as to when good reporting becomes investigative reporting. It's a matter of art," Pekow said.

That doesn't mean anything going beyond "he said, she said" reporting is investigative, he said. Investigative reporting is taking something not handed to you, he said. Although that's also the definition of enterprise reporting, investigative reporting goes further, since enterprise reporting can also be in the "he said, she said" style, Pekow suggested, stressing again that investigative reporting uncovers, while an enterprise report can just cover. Investigative reporting also must involve some wrongdoing, such as an abuse of public trust or a social or environmental problem, he said.

Pekow's biggest inspiration was Watergate. He also remembers Jack Anderson's column in the Chicago Daily News. "He was always coming up with big exposés," Pekow recalled. He also cited as an influence Ralph Nader and his "raiders" "who wrote exposés largely on government programs, fraud and business. Those were major inspirations to me. Also, Mike Royko's columns of cronyism in the Chicago government." Upton Sinclair's The Jungle also had a big impact on Pekow, who

regards the book-length work of what is now referred to as creative nonfiction as “a major, moving piece of investigative reporting, although it was fictional.

“Originally, investigative reporting relied on anonymous sources. At the beginning there was the image of the reporter as detective. That’s what I thought investigative reporting was: a lot of shoe leather. Later on I thought it was going into government files. But initially it was just interviewing. Initially, when I read the reports or saw them on TV, I didn’t think too much about the techniques. I thought, you gotta get people to talk who don’t want to talk. I’ve done that many times, and even given anonymity. But later on in my career I got to thinking that maybe journalists do that too much, and became more careful about that.”

His attraction to investigative reporting is a philosophical one. “It’s the idea of making the world what it says it is, of trying to get the reality behind the reality. So it’s after the truth behind the truth, which people have been thinking about since ancient Greece and more recently since Hegel – you know, what the world *is* as opposed to what we simply see or what someone wants us to see. I wanted to see if I could find the truth behind the “truth,” reality behind “reality.” Pekow’s background and witness of election politics led him to see and know things that weren’t what they seemed to be, he said.

One doesn’t need any particular aptitude to do investigative reporting, he said. “The most important thing is to be able to stick to a story. You have to be able to get doors slammed in your face and take it. You have to be able to call 12 people before finding one person who will talk to you. And sometimes you have to try different tactics on a person who doesn’t want to talk to get the person to talk to you. Not many

people can spot a needle in a haystack. But an investigative reporter can. It takes persistence rather than intelligence. And time. That's what investigative reporting has to do with aptitude. You don't have to have a specific degree or course of study. There are many people with degrees in journalism who are not successful at it [investigative reporting], and there are many people who are. I know people who don't have a college degree who do this type of reporting. On the other hand, a law degree could help. Or a degree in biology might make it easier to understand environmental stories better."

While Pekow has never plied a source with liquor to get the person to talk, he has traded information for that purpose. He also stays away from writing stories based on stolen memos. Yet, he said, "People have given me things that they didn't mean to and say 'whoops' and I say, 'Too late!' You don't go through someone's legal files when you're in their office and left alone, but if it's left on the desk and you can look at it, yeah. But I don't remember getting something useful that way."

Pekow added that from investigative reporting in general he gets a sense of spiritual wealth. "It inspires me," he said, "but it's much harder to sell."

Criteria for Moving the Public

"It's finding something that's not obvious and going out and digging, through files, finding recalcitrant witnesses, not taking the first answer. Asking the tougher questions." And delivering an artful telling of the story, he stressed.

Investigative Reporting Procedure

Pekow's response to this question requires some background. In the January/February issue of The Washington Monthly, Pekow delivered a gripping story of a family cremated while camping along the banks of the Pecos River in New Mexico when a corroded oil pipeline "ruptured and sent a flaming fireball across the campground. Burning fuel rained down upon the campers. The fire was so hot it melted sand into glass and turned parts of the concrete bridge into powder. Tents and sleeping bags turned to soup. The flames leapt 500 feet in the air, were visible from 30 miles away, and left a crater 86 feet long, 46 feet wide, and 20 feet deep.

"Amanda Smith survived the fire only long enough to describe the horror of the scene to rescue workers. The explosion wiped out most of the Smith family, killing Amanda, her parents, her husband, her two kids, her brother and sister-in law, their 22-month old daughter and twin 6-month-old babies," Pekow wrote.

For this section, Pekow described how he collected that report. "In environment reporting, you're obviously dealing with something scientific, something harder than if you were doing something strictly human [as in "human behavior"]. So you may have to find more physical evidence or documents than if you were reporting on some other form of corruption or dishonesty, where you'd have to interview a lot of witnesses. The scientific expertise makes it more difficult to do if, like me, you don't have that. I have had to familiarize myself more with scientific issues. The big help to me was knowing something about the environment and the drawback was what I didn't know.

“What I learned through beat reporting was somewhat inadequate [when it came to reporting about the environment]. I had to do a lot of background research. On the pipeline story, I knew, for instance, about the pipeline safety program. I learned through beat reporting that the government’s efforts to regulate pipelines were inadequate, that the government did not have the resources or an effective way of protecting the public and the environment from pipeline tragedies.

“By beat reporting, I mean just covering a topic. I write a monthly column on propane for a propane magazine. In the course of writing that column, I came across a problem I thought deserved some investigation. So I went to it!”

The story became Pekow’s first in-depth report involving the environment. “First I went through government documents. Some of the things were in the Federal Register. And I had to dig through the Office of Pipeline Safety’s information. Some of it’s on the Web, but you have to look for it. You have to look very carefully and deeply at it and through a bunch of other government files.

“I then interviewed some people – experts in the oil business, and one person in the environmental movement in Alaska who I was able to identify as an expert on pipelines. So I had to track her down. I also interviewed members of Congress. I picked up newspaper clips from way back when, looked into the National Transportation Safety Board and pipeline safety, rummaged through files – it’s easier now than it used to be because so much of it is on the Web – and put together a story that put two and two together.”

And, Pekow adds, “I had to get some scientific facts in addition to quotes. I had to document what the dangers were about corrosion in pipelines and so forth, and the actual dangers of them exploding.”

Why Environment Reporting?

“Before I even read a lot of news articles, I was very interested in environmental issues. We gotta protect the world. When I was young, before I ever wrote a lead or news story, I would read a lot of environmental magazines and newsletters, like Clear Creek. I was interested in pollution, in the wasting of resources, air and water pollution, mercury in the fish – a big topic back around 1970. It was important. If we don’t take care of the environment, what do we have left? We poison ourselves!

“In retrospect, many of the sources were biased. I was getting one side of the issue. At the time, though, I thought they were telling the truth. When you’re younger, it’s easier to get bogged down in perspective. Now, [looking back] I have to wonder if there was really as much poison in food, if it is really as dangerous as they thought it would be. People were predicting mass starvation and population doomsdays. But what they were talking about and that I was worried about didn’t materialize. I was a teenager when I was reading this – maybe 15-16-17 years old.

“With the combination of my training as a journalist and the wisdom of age, I can see things more clearly. Plus, more facts come out with time. But there’s nothing more important than protecting the world, saving the world. We all need the

environment. It should be in good shape, or we can't have good lives. The world will fall apart if we don't take care of the environment."

Advocacy and Environment Reporting

Pekow learned of environmental issues mostly from the environmental publications he read in the late 1960s and early 1970s. "I remember reading one article that said the way to stop air pollution is to stop driving cars. The way to do that is to pour sugar syrup in the gas tanks. That was Clear Creek. So they were not just reporting, they were encouraging action.

"Advocacy journalism advocates a point of view or an action. I can advocate a legislative or regulatory action, or that people carpool or boycott a product. As long as it's written based on facts, it's advocacy journalism. Everything from The New Republic to The Nation to The Weekly Standard is advocacy journalism. For that matter, Sierra magazine also. They're asking people to take positions and write members of Congress – it's definitely writing with a point of view.

"Advocacy journalism belongs anywhere, as long as it's labeled as such. But it doesn't belong in a nightly newscast. And if it appears in a magazine or newspaper, it belongs in the opinion section or the editorial or op-ed pages. It should be clearly labeled as opinion.

"Advocacy is that which includes a call to action or point of view, for instance, what a specific policy should be about something. Slant is in the eyes of the beholder. Slant is when you're not being fair to one side. In advocacy, you're making it clear you're promoting something. With slant, you're just leaving out part of the story but

making it appear that you are not. In that case, you're being slanted and appearing to be objective. Modern journalists have been trained not to be advocates.

"It is a weakness of mine, and one of the greatest weaknesses of man [sic], that we tend to want to read what fits our own prejudices. I'm concerned about this, personally. The problem with advocacy journalism is they're preaching to the choir, largely, Pekow said, implying non-advocacy journalism reaches a broader audience

Investigative Reporting and Advocacy Journalism

Investigative reporting is like advocacy in the sense that it is calling attention to a problem the reporter wants people to think about, Pekow said. The difference between investigative reporting and advocacy journalism is that an investigative news report doesn't necessarily point out the solution. "You just say here is the problem, public. You might want to think about it.

"It differs in that you're not taking action, you're not yelling and cleaning up the environment yourself, not going before businesses and corporations and telling them to stop. You're just giving information and the tools people need to do that themselves.

"The degree to which I spell out a solution has to do with the type of publication I'm writing for. For The Washington Monthly, they want you to come up with some suggestions. So I did make some suggestions in the pipeline story. I didn't emphasize them, but I suggested first of all that the responsibility for pipeline safety should not belong to the U.S. Department of Transportation because DoT does not have the expertise in either energy or environmental protection. You've got the

Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy, either one which would be a better place for this. But because pipeline safety laws were created before [either agency], they put it in the department of transportation just because pipelines move across state lines. I suggest that they move it, and I guess you can call that advocacy, although I'm not testifying, I'm not writing letter to members of Congress or anything making that suggestion. I'm not lobbying, I'm just putting that out as something they might want to consider.

"It's also ridiculous that there are only 50 federal inspectors, whereas there are tens of thousands of miles of pipelines. And there are some pipelines that aren't under federal inspection. Some are being covered by the state, but the level of effort is woefully inadequate. We may be seeing a lot more tragedies of this type. We could be seeing more minor tragedies where only one or two people get killed, or where there are only gradual leaks in the pipelines.

"You can have advocacy without investigative reporting, and there can be a merger between the two, which is sometimes done in Sierra magazine," Pekow explained.

Pekow has been accused of advocacy in investigative reports not related to the environment. In one case he was accused of being out to get somebody. Pekow says, "I wouldn't just do a story out of revenge! I got my facts lined up. I think there was some animosity between the publisher and the target. [The publisher] asked me to look at one thing. The story didn't come out the way they wanted, but I said, 'Here are the facts. It's not necessarily the fault of this individual.' I put my name on that."

Personal Lessons from Environment Reporting

“The environment is the most important subject to me. It’s closer to ultimate truth,” Pekow said, citing Martin Heidegger’s philosophical views, as well as Ludwig Feuerbach, “who said man arose from nature, the environment. It was a novel suggestion at the time,” Pekow said. “You gotta remember our roots,” he said. “That makes it the most important beat.” Although Pekow’s passion for the environment is evident, he has never gone out and specifically looked for a story about the environment. For him, the thrill is finding something wrong that he thinks needs some investigation.

Personal Lessons from Investigative Reporting About the Environment

“I learned I could handle the reporting without the science background,” Pekow said. He has found more opportunities to write investigative reports about social services than about the environment, he added.

Budgetary constraints in journalism have prevented smaller newspapers from producing investigative reporting, Pekow said. “Advertising brought down news,” he said. “Beyond that, publications don’t have the resources. Another reason for the decline in investigative reporting in general is there’s a bigger and bigger squeeze for profits as newspapers and television stations become part of bigger and bigger conglomerates. You have to understand journalism. But today, many managers just see the newspaper or the newsroom as another profit center.

“That has to do with trends in the quality of investigative reporting. We’re beginning to see more people starting to go after business.”

Realities of the Environment Beat

“You have to humanize the stories, make them readable by talking about specific cases. That makes them interesting to read,” he said. Pekow has not had any more trouble selling a report about the environment than he has any other story.

What Makes Environment Reporting Meaningful for You?

“A good story is a good story, but the environment was something of a tremendous concern to me. I wasn’t equipped to be a scientist. I was equipped to be a reporter and an *investigative* reporter. So this is the one way I have of protecting the environment outside of doing the normal things of living an environmentally sound life.

“If there’s any such thing as ultimate good or truth, it would have to do with the purity of resources and the purity of the environment. What right do we have as humans to despoil the earth for other humans or other beings or for the earth itself? There needs to be some environmental control. If that constitutes advocacy, so be it,” Pekow said, adding that everyone has a right to clean land, clean air, and clean water, but that right has to be tempered by other interests.

“Poisoning things in the wrong place can poison fish, people, can ruin the environment, can knock out invasive species. I always wondered, what right do we have, we’re just humans, just one species, what right do we have to knock out other species for our own convenience? I feel quite strongly about that.” Keeping resources pure strengthens diversity, Pekow said, adding in another direction, “I wonder now if

we're getting too far away from ultimate truth with too much technology. Is life becoming too comfortable? Those are good questions that go beyond the scope I write about. They go into philosophy. The environment is everything. It's where we live. If we don't keep our environment in order, our lives eventually will become unpleasant."

Further, he said, "The environment is probably the most important because it is the one that transcends mankind, that transcends everything we do, where we came from. Without the environment, where would we be? It's something we have to watch, and clean up.

"Environment reporting is more likely to affect me personally. If I'm writing an exposé about some organization, the connection is a little less fluent.

Environmentalism can mean two things: maintaining a world where people don't get sick, and it can also mean protecting the environment, because there's something more than mankind.

Personal Lessons from Investigative Reporting

"It confirmed that I could do what I had hoped to do," Pekow said.

What Makes Investigative Reporting Meaningful for You?

"I got into journalism and investigative journalism because I wanted to find truth. At some point I began to wonder if the journalism I was seeing was completely the truth itself! Or was it one more step in bringing the truth? With the communists, people thought they were creating the perfect society, and when they found out what it really was really like, kaboom!

“I was in a school for disturbed children where the place was so restricted that we weren’t allowed to read newspapers. So for a long time I didn’t know what was going on in the world. I sort of became skeptical. I was also very critical of the press because sometimes when I’d see stories, they had nothing to do with reality. I experienced injustices...and truth in the world not being what [people say] it is.

“[Investigative reporting is] not a very lucrative way of making a living, but it’s a way to be a good citizen. It’s a way of using my ability to help improve the world,” Pekow said. “I get a little money, but more importantly I get the satisfaction of knowing I made some contribution, and I hope that’s it’s for a better, more livable world for me, too. If I can maybe in some small way get people thinking about making pipeline safety better, it protects the environment for me, too.”

The Future of Environment Reporting

“The environment beat is probably going to continue to be fractured in the sense that a lot of it is going to be done by specialized publications – a newsletter covering sludge hauling or propane, for instance. So the only people who will be reading it are people with a specialized interest in that one particular area. The environment is not a big story for the mainstream press, unless it hinges on another beat: war, politics, etc. It’s still somewhat of a lower level in the mainstream media. Unfortunately, I don’t know that that’s going to change. In the mainstream press now, I see a smaller quantity of reporting on the environment.”

Pekow also cited media ownership concentration as presenting a conflict of interest when it comes to reporting about the environment. Several large owners of

media conglomerates are “in the energy business or the land use business. Does this mean they’re going to pull their environment stories? What it may mean is shying away from environment stories. Is ABC going to want to cover a land use story [fairly] when Disney (which owns ABC) wants to knock down trees and open a theme park? Synergy will definitely become a problem. General Electric owns NBC as well as energy and engineering businesses that affect the environment.

“How is Westinghouse going to cover an energy crisis? It’s something [the media and the public] are going to have to keep an eye on. Is the environment beat really overblown? Should it be discussed? How clean is clean should be debated. And, how do you communicate risk? What environment stories do you cover?

“I am willing to accept criticism about why I am writing stories about recreational trails. I consider that environmental because it has to do with transportation. Why am I concentrating on stories for bicyclists as opposed to something else? Because bicycling is an interest of mine, and because [some of] my clients are bicycling magazines. What’s saleable has a lot to do with the future of investigative reporting about the environment.”

TOM MEERSMAN

Background

Tom Meersman, 53, talks about righting wrongs, crusading for justice, and playing fair. He has spent more than two decades reporting about the environment, natural resources, and energy issues in the Upper Midwest, currently for Minnesota's largest newspaper and previously for Minnesota Public Radio. Coverage has included air and water quality, pollution, nuclear power, forestry, agricultural feedlots, garbage and recycling, wind energy, motorized recreation, deformed frogs, state and national parks, Lake Superior, the Mississippi River, lakes and streams, endangered species, and other topics. Meersman's work has been recognized with several awards.

He is knowledgeable about how the legislature is organized and how its committees function. He knows the makeup, authorities, jurisdictions and procedures used in Federal, tribal, state and local agencies that deal with health, environmental protection, and parks. His legal knowledge includes the basic tenets of environmental law, Freedom of Information Act, Minnesota Data Practices Act and the state's open-meeting law, as well as "ex parte communications" rules. He can distinguish between what is legitimate, peer-reviewed work, and what has become known as "junk science." Meersman is comfortable with numbers, including how health risk assessments and computer modeling can be used as factors in determining environmental policy. He is also familiar with the history of several advocacy groups and trade associations, their leadership, constituencies, and major concerns. Meersman

has been a reporter for 23 years. He has no desire to be an editor. As part of his beat, Meersman does occasional investigative projects.

A native of Spokane, Washington with Belgian ancestry, Meersman's interest in United States-Canadian relationships relating to the environment led him to do his first reports about the environment. His first exposure to investigative reporting that he can recall came through television with "60 Minutes," which he watched for years and years.

Meersman holds master's and bachelor's degrees in English, and a secondary education teaching certificate. Before becoming a reporter he taught high school, was a live-in counselor in group homes for emotionally disturbed adolescents in San Francisco and Madison, Wisconsin, and visual arts administrator for the Metropolitan Cultural Arts Center in Minneapolis. Deep into his career as an environment reporter, Meersman became a member of the Central European Environmental Journalism Program Advisory Committee of the National Safety Council, a program that brought environment writers from former Communist countries to the United States for tours and training. After four years he shifted to the National Advisory Board for the Institutes for Journalism and Natural Resources, a non-profit organization based on Missoula, Montana that organizes field tours and workshops for journalists so they may better understand cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions of forestry, fisheries, mining, agriculture, water use, and other issues. He is a founding board member of the Society of Environmental Journalists, and currently a member of the National Advisory Board of the Ted Scripps Fellowships in Environmental Journalism at the University of Colorado. Meersman also has taught environmental journalism at

Gustavus Adolphus College. Although reared Catholic, he claims no religious affiliation at this point.

View of Investigative Reporting

“My perception was it would involve a fair amount of time, collection of considerable documents, that you have to be organized enough to be able to categorize those documents and be able to get at them over a period of time. You’d have to have yourself together and know what you have, and be able to organize it and focus it,” Meersman said.

He continued, “I knew that before I did any investigative reporting because I had seen other investigative reporters’ files and boxes that they’d have for certain things. I knew that you’d have to collect a lot of stuff and that it would probably take a while, that you might need to use the Freedom of Information Act or other tools to get some of the information. There’s a certain amount of discovery with investigative reporting. You collect as much information as you can to try to figure out what the facts are.

“Much good reporting is investigative. When I think of something as investigative, it’s doing a lot more interviews and spending a lot more weeks pretty solidly on a story, even though it is not a six-page project or a series that takes three months or six months or a year to do. I like to think investigative reporting is not something that is only done by two or three people on staff, Meersman said, adding, “Many reporters who want to look at something seriously will do a circumscribed but

nonetheless investigative look at something, within a certain scope, in order to write a good, solid story that the paper would be proud of and someday run on 1-A.

“I want to make a distinction here,” Meersman says. “I’ve always been interested in journalism that gets at things that are not obvious. I think of that as *enterprise journalism*. Spending just two weeks looking at something – I consider that to be enterprise reporting [even if] it involves getting documents and doing quite a few more interviews than you might normally do for a story, and might be a bigger picture look at something than just a narrow set of facts. That’s a form of investigative reporting.

“Obviously there are some things that take much longer to do, and you have to have clearance in order to spend a large amount of time on a project. So those [projects] are clearly investigative, where you are off on a project and unavailable for most other assignments. In our shop, if something is a project it’s an investigative piece of journalism. And in some cases reporters are physically removed from where they normally work to go work with a project team in a particular area of the newsroom. And they are generally off-limits for [other] assignments. It takes two or three months to do a project.

“I do a lot of reports that are not three or four month investigative projects but are enterprise stories, where you take something that is interesting and you do something with it,” Meersman said. “So I consider enterprise reporting to be investigation over a very short time span. But it’s not line-by-line, word-by-word editing like a project that might involve six to 10 people weighing in at different stages. But it [takes] close editing like any story would. Also, we may or may not take

it to a lawyer. We [wouldn't] do a lot of the other things we do with some investigative reports, like have the option of carefully packaging it with details graphics and lots of photos. If it's a two-week story you can do some of that, but you don't have the luxury of time to consider alternative packages and designs.

"Investigative reporting is not an either-or. I see a whole range of reporting where you can use investigation in a very limited way. You scope it right away, you're not searching through tons of stuff, you're basically trying to set a good story in context, and to broaden it, and make it more significant to people instead of This is Just One Place, one area, These People Have a Problem. Too Bad for Them.

"Investigative reporting might [locate] 10 similar situations and look at them all and maybe find out that the people responsible have disappeared and there's no money in the kitty anymore because..." Meersman said, letting the words hang.

"Investigative reporting is when it's all part of the same continuity. Some things require a good, hard look separately. An awful lot of environment reporting is investigative. If you see the promise, and look to what the story is and develop it thoroughly without over-reporting or spending too much time, there's a lot of potential there for stories to be much broader than they were without having to be major investigations that come up with some big 'Gotcha!'

"Investigative reporting is thorough and inclusive, and it doesn't take cheap shots, and it doesn't go with unsubstantiated allegations. It's the opposite," Meersman said, alluding to traditional muckraking reports. With investigative reporting, "You are working your head off to get as much documentation as you can get from a full variety of sources. Muckraking, to me, also has the connotation of being quick turnover, not

necessarily something that is deliberate and carefully done. I have this sense of muckraking as kind of superficial. It's easy to take shots at people in reporting that doesn't get nearly as deep as it should. You don't just put somebody on the spot or publicly embarrass them."

On the inside, investigative reporting takes its toll on the reporter as well as everyone else in the reporter's life due to the emotional stress involved, Meersman said. "You have to prepare other people in your life when you're working on a project or enterprise report and say 'I'm not going to be around much in the next couple of weeks.' Or 'I'm going to be missing a lot of dinners.' Inevitably there comes a crunch time on a project to get everything perfect. It's 16 hours a day, and it's not pleasant, because you're working toward something you believe in. People understand it, then, when you're grumpy and cranky because you're not getting enough sleep. You have to give up your other life for a while.

"One of the things that I may find in investigative environment projects is that the reporter writes with more authority. You don't have a preconceived notion of the story, you investigate, you let the facts lay themselves out for you, and that's what the story is. You don't try to spin them like somebody may in what I think of as advocacy journalism. On the other hand, when you present facts, by doing so you write with authority about something and sometimes that's not a topic or those findings are not something that anybody else has assembled. So you don't need to just call up somebody and get their opinion about something and contrast it with somebody else's opinion and say that b-c maybe nobody has an opinion about the new facts that you have discovered."

As an example, Meersman talked about a story about all terrain vehicles he put together. “Nobody knew how much damage was being created by the vehicles on public land. We went out and viewed a significant number of those lands and wrote with authority about the extent of the damage. Some people might call that advocacy journalism because you don’t have any authority other than yourself to make those conclusions. But you become the authority by doing the leg work and presenting those conclusions to the public.

“That is investigative reporting in general. Some people might interpret that as you taking sides and you being an advocate, but in fact you are testing the reality to find out what’s true. You have these occasions where there’s an open question out there that everyone claims to have an opinion about, but nobody really has any defined answers to.”

Attraction to Journalism and Investigative Reporting

“I do a lot of enterprise stories. I’ve always been attracted to stories. This is what actually got me into journalism. I saw public radio as an alternative to other broadcasting. I felt it was different. It was freer. You could get into things deeper, you could be more playful with your issues. It was interesting to me, and it’s what got me into journalism. One of the things that drew me there [to Minnesota Public Radio] was that you could do [reports] that you wouldn’t normally see elsewhere. I’ve always felt that a mission of journalism is to break new ground, to raise issues that are not being raised elsewhere, to shine a light on something that hasn’t had it before.

“That’s always been an important thing to me in journalism. It connects my previous life as an educator with my life now. I feel that I’m still a teacher as a journalist, and feel that I educate a big audience on specific issues. I’m essentially a teacher. To be a good teacher, I’m not rewriting press releases or reporting things that are already being taken care of. I need to take a look at issues in terms of the bigger questions, sometimes, and sometimes in narrow slices. I like to spend more time looking at something that any reporter might be able to file a story about on deadline. Sometimes there’s a lot more to it. I might do a follow-up with concerned citizens, whether they be whistleblowers or regular people who [say something is being ignored] and, ‘Isn’t this an issue of some concern to you?’ For example, a reporter writing about an oil pipeline leak (which happens pretty frequently here), the reporter, instead of just writing six stories over two years about pipeline malfunction should be able to discern that they’re all coming from the same company and that there might be something more going on there with regard to that company’s performance or its inspections or its infrastructure or its equipment, and whether it’s upgraded or what. Instead of always taking [a story] in bit by bit, trying to realize what’s going on and see the bigger issue, to be able to step back and do a full blown story on it, that’s what attracts me to journalism.

“I’ve always been interested in educating about things that I think are important. A lot of that involves hard work, thinking, and reading, and paying attention to people who come to you with information, and making time to check up on those things.”

Criteria for Moving the Public

“You don’t need a degree from a prestigious university to do investigative reporting. You just need to be curious and care about what you’re writing about. You can have the degree and not have those things, and you won’t be good. The work is what you make it. That’s true in spades in journalism.”

To move the public in journalism, let the facts lead to the conclusion instead of starting with a conclusion and trying to work things around it. News journalism is reporting, he said, not persuasive writing. “There is a lot of journalism that is persuasive writing – editorials and op-eds are journalism, but *new* journalism is reporting and not opinion or persuasive writing.

Investigative Reporting Procedure

“Before I get into a project, I try to write down a handful of questions that I want to answer, so that I don’t learn too much and forget about what a regular person might want to know about this. And maybe some of the questions might be pertinent as I learn more. [This step] provides me a reality check to go back to. [It gives me a marker for saying] these are questions at that point that I thought a regular person would want to know in terms of information. You can’t neglect these things. You can go deeper if you want to, but you have to get these things first because these are the things that would come to any reasonable person’s mind when you bring up the topic.

“So when I’ve answered all those questions, and taken it further and found new things, a way I know I’ve got as much as I think I’ll get is if in additional interviews I start to hear the same thing. [When that happens, I say] I think there’s truth to this so I

don't really need to go that much further. Its a hard thing to figure out if you've left some stone unturned. You get tired of it [interviewing] when you start hearing a lot of repetition. You just have to make a judgment call. If your editor is following the story very closely and hearing from you, sometimes they'll raise the question of whether it might be time to start writing."

Why Environment Reporting?

Before Meersman became an environment reporter, he perceived the beat as a lot of news about pollution and parks and forests. "There seemed to be a lot of stories about air quality and water quality," he said. The reports, he recalled, seemed to have the same qualities as other reports, that is, not emphasizing one argument over another, such as favoring advocacy organizations.

The big attraction of reporting about the environment for Meersman hasn't changed over time. "I felt it had an impact on people, and on health, and on our general well-being. That there were a lot of problems and they weren't necessarily getting resolved. It didn't seem like a lot of reporting was identifying those problems. It seemed to me to be important to our welfare to pay attention to some of those problems. Not just for people's welfare, but for ecology and wildlife. It seemed like it would be interesting because there seemed to be a lot of problems that needed attention.

Advocacy and Environment Reporting

Meersman believes all life has an inalienable right to clean air, clean land, and

clean water, but adds a caveat. “With that right,” Meersman said, “comes a responsibility for us to help achieve that [clean air, clean land, and clean water] as a goal. In other words, I don’t think people should have the right to demand clean air and then do whatever they want in their private life that would sabotage that goal. With the rights to those things, we also need to take responsibility to help achieve them, instead of just demanding it and not giving anything back.”

That said, Meersman regards what has become known as *advocacy journalism* with some caution. “I view it with some caution because a reporter is playing a role in the story,” he said. “I like documentaries, and if that’s advocacy journalism, well, I like the idea of television in particular, like Nova. I like the idea of an in-depth look at things. Some people might say that’s advocacy by nature of the fact that you’re picking a topic and doing a show on it. It doesn’t necessarily [address] whether that show is balanced or not. Is doing a show on pesticides advocacy journalism? I’m in favor of advocacy journalism is that’s what it is, simply by topic. I’m not in favor of advocacy journalism if it is unfair or unbalanced within the context of the report that’s done.

“To be journalism, it has to be balanced. That’s what journalists are supposed to do. Fair and balanced. That to me is legitimate journalism. Anything is fair game as far as topics. [If a report] is biased, it doesn’t seem to me to be journalism.”

Meersman added that stories offering an answer to a problem can go too far. “First of all, I’m not sure it’s the truth. Secondly, it may propose solutions that are not solutions at all. If there’s a controversy or something that’s hard to solve, if it was easy to solve just like that, it would have been done! So the problem I have with advocacy

journalism is that it might be someone who lets their feeling get in the way of getting as close to the truth as possible, with the result that you mislead people and may actually propose solutions that are counterproductive.”

He added that some advocacy groups target a couple of issues while a regular environment reporter deals with dozens and dozens of issues. A reporter, he stressed, has a much broader set of responsibilities than just a single issue. “Sometimes advocacy people call you and don’t understand that,” he said. “They are working on an issue 24/7. They don’t necessarily have a perspective on the other important issues that environment reporters also need to pay attention to.

“The very fact that environmental issues get into the newspaper – and that some people don’t want to see there – causes them to brand the journalist who wrote the story – to kill the messenger – saying you must have an agenda to be able to write about this in a way that is critical. For example, all terrain vehicle advocates (ATV) might have thought that their point of view was correct when it disagreed with the facts that I reported. Our facts showed there was widespread damage from ATV use, and the advocates said it was their opinion that only a few people were doing the damage, and that we were exaggerating how widespread it was. Our conclusion was based upon reporting and physically viewing and photographing damage in all four corners of the state,” he said.

Investigative Reporting and Advocacy Journalism

“Both [investigative reporting and advocacy journalism] are the same in that they raise issues of legitimate concern. The purpose of raising issues is to get them

into public discussion. They could lead to action. Different advocacy groups do their homework. Some produce some wonderful reports. For other groups, that's not true. But for journalists it has to be true all the time. You have to document what you do, and talk to a lot of different people. So there are similarities in terms of issues that are important. But the approach is different.

“The journalist doesn't take a side. You can come to conclusions and use research and facts to say this is a significant problem, you can somehow quantify that, but that doesn't mean you provide a solution. My job is to identify and document and portray and put out there an issue that should have public attention, then let people talk about it, and let other people decide what needs to be done. To me, it's enough.

“Advocacy is taking a bunch of data from EPA and putting one's own spin on it to say what you think the data says in two pages, and it doesn't necessarily say that at all.

Personal Lessons from Environment Reporting

“It's what we make it. I'm kind of an independent guy. I liked teaching because it was relatively independent. You make it your classroom, you control the class, you have a curriculum you follow, but generally you have a fair amount of freedom in how you approach things and teach kids.

“I feel that way about my situation at this paper, and previously at public radio. It's not top-down. People rely on me to be smart enough and creative enough and attentive enough to come up with good stories and news stories and interesting stories.

Personal Lessons from Investigative Reporting About the Environment

“Every word needs to be right. Those who are unhappy with the report could seize on any shortcoming or error no matter how small to try to discredit the entire effort,” he said. “If there’s anything about it that’s not solid or absolutely right-on, if you are raising issues that maybe some people don’t want to hear about, there may be someone who tries to discredit the overall report. I did write a report one time where one small thing was not correct. It wasn’t a project, line-by-line fact-checking, but one small thing was not correct. The person who was the focus of the report came to the paper months later and wanted the paper to retract the entire story based on this one minor error. He had served on some panels that helped distribute funding for researchers. I had written something like that he served on boards that help distribute funds for research. He looked at that as a major flaw and was trying to discredit the entire piece which was raising a whole series of questions about his activities and his ethics that the article had laid out,” he said. “People always say to fact check, fact check, fact check. But there are people who will come in and say the reporter turned out a bad piece of journalism if it isn’t absolutely perfect.”

Realities of the Environment Beat

“It’s like this beat is new all the time,” Meersman said. “The diversity of topics, and the people. The practical matter that you get daily stories, enterprise stories, and investigative stories. It’s not like the crime beat where you have to do a story every day because there’s crime or an investigative team that may only write

three stories a year. There are a lot of topics, incredibly interesting people, scientists learning new things all the time.

“Some people have told me they got tired of the environment beat because they kept covering public meetings about opposition to landfills or NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) this or that. But I think wherever you live there’s always something pretty interesting.” Meersman gave an example of a juicy story with wide appeal and local angles in many states, a story easily overlooked.

“There’s a strong interest in Minnesota in the environment and the outdoors and nature,” he said, providing an example where one can see the educator at work. “There was a story I did about a Superfund site in Ashland, Wisc. on the shore of Lake Superior earlier this year. We could have done that story in two days, just doing six interviews and saying this is a new Superfund site in Wisconsin and there aren’t many new ones on the list. Here’s the problem, here are the parties, here’s what they say, blah, blah, blah.

“But we spent a couple of weeks on it and turned it into an enterprise story because the nature of the pollution was that it came from an old coal gas manufacturing plant. They used to make natural gas out of coal on the outskirts of many cities around the country. They would manufacture this gas and use it in the street lights before there was electricity. And because there were no pipelines until WWII, when natural gas really became an industry, our natural gas in a less pure form was manufactured on the outskirts of towns. So there are hundreds of towns in the Midwest that have areas of pollution from these old coal gasification plants.

“In this example, that’s extremely problematic because a lot of the residue from this particular coal manufacturing plant in Ashland got into Lake Superior and is just beneath the sediment going down about a foot and covering about 40 acres. And they don’t know how the hell they are supposed to get this contaminated sediment out of the lake. It’s a multi-million dollar cleanup effort and they’re debating how to do it.

“We could have done the story in 12 inches. But we ended up doing a front page story that jumped to the inside and that had a full page with it and it had maps of Wisconsin and Minnesota and showed the known sites of all these old coal gasification plants, and it provided a geographic context as well as a historical context that this legacy people 100 years ago left to us and we’re having to clean up in some cases. Ashland is a good example because it’s a very expensive cleanup because it involves Lake Superior. And there were all these lumber plants that were operating there at the turn of the century, so there were liability questions about how many of them, what did they use for creosote, how much came from coal gasification, how much came from the way they treated lumber.

“So this environment story turns into a historic story, just an interesting period story. We felt it was interesting enough to spend two weeks on it and have some nice maps. It was worth it.”

Meersman said he considers that to be an investigative piece because “we got databases and looked up historically what is known, how many sites are known, how many have been cleaned up, how many are not cleaned up. We [focused] on this narrow window of pollution problems of the past and did a very thorough report. And a lot of people thought it was very interesting. Although the Superfund site was in

Wisconsin, the company responsible for the cleanup had its headquarters in Minneapolis, providing Meersman with a strong local tie.

Meersman has not had difficulty getting stories about the environment published. The position he landed at the Star-Tribune in Minneapolis was highly coveted, he said, going into some detail that will not be provided here. Suffice it to say, in Meersman's words, "It is a very competitive, sought after position."

Although he came to the job with a background in environmental reporting, his previous job at Minnesota Public Radio didn't require him to have any special background that qualified him to cover the environment. The Star-Tribune did. "They wanted an environment reporter who could hit the ground running," Meersman said. Initially he covered the environment part-time for radio. Then it evolved into a full-time beat, he said. Initially, "because it was such a busy beat it was difficult to define a chunk of time, and to convince editors that a particular story about the environment was so important, and to focus on it, and let other stuff go to cover it as best as we could. It was a pragmatic decision. As long as you can produce a story a day for our local audiences, we're happy if most of them can be environment. But it wasn't like a business decision, like them figuring out what listeners want, should we create an environment beat. it was fairly young in Public Radio's history when I started. As it grew bigger, it could afford to have people doing one or two beats each, instead of everybody doing general assignment. It wasn't a big decision that we have to cover the environment. They just wanted quality news. I was doing a lot of stories on the environment and it evolved into a full-time beat because there was just so much to

write about. And they were interested in having good regional stories on the air,” he said.

What Makes Environment Reporting Meaningful for You?

“I have this strong emotional and physical connection with the next generation that gives me a stronger feeling about passing it on,” Meersman said, referring to a healthy and thriving planet. “Maybe it’s because I’m a parent, and also have taught younger people, whether they are your own kids or classroom kids. I tend to feel very strongly about keeping the quality of the environment as good if not improving it. It is absolutely important because you have to behave in a responsible way. Those are my values. You don’t take an action that will spoil things for the future. There needs to be respect. Ultimately it comes from that you’re gifted to be alive. You’re even more gifted to be in a country like this. Because we are gifted doesn’t give us the right to despoil the good natural resource base that we inherited from other people. We don’t have the right to wreck it.

“I don’t trace this to my background but I can certainly relate to it: In this part of the country, there are a number of Native American reservations. Their attitude is to behave and live for the seventh generation ahead of you. That would have played absolutely *no* role in my values as I was growing up, but I think that philosophy reinforces what I already believe. That overall spiritualism – that there’s a reason for you, and that you’re living in whatever period you do and have to behave this way; but there’s also responsibility that the people who came before you and especially the people who come after you keep the world in reasonably good shape.”

Getting back to his dedication to teaching, Meersman said, “You can do stories that educate people about nature.” He talked about a story he wrote about lynx coming back to Minnesota. “They have 30 confirmed, based on DNA analysis, and there seems to be a breeding population. A lot of them are in the Superior National Forest. And there are some theories about why they are coming back.

What Makes Investigative Reporting Meaningful for You?

Meersman said investigative reporting gives him the satisfaction that he’s doing what journalists are supposed to do, which to him is to be critical and thoughtful, pick important questions and project them and educate people about them. In addition to educating people, with “investigative reporting you get something extra special, which is shelf life. People will keep referring to it. Two years later people will ask for a copy. It has lasting significance. People will think about it and remember it much more than a regular story. You hope that will happen.

“If you do a strong investigative piece, it will have legs, so-to-speak. It will not be a story that people will read, say that’s interesting, and that sort of goes away. In my case, investigative journalism, where you really take a look at something, has made significant changes in terms of bringing about discussion, and changing policies. So, occasionally your work can actually change things in a way that you can see, in addition to educating.

Journalism in General

Meersman said it is a reporter’s task to not only quantify things but also

qualify them. He said, “Qualify means to put them in context. Why do people care about the land? It’s basically a value story. And also the issue of respect. Can motorized use of public lands co-exist with traditional recreational uses of the land, such as hiking and fishing and camping and cross-country skiing? In certain areas, nobody wants those areas any more for those types of purposes if they’ve been invaded by motorized vehicles, because it’s noisy, it’s dangerous, it’s unpleasant. The story is much more about values and how do these machines and their increasing popularity fit into the quality of life, the quality of recreational opportunities that the state has traditionally had and now, in some areas, are under siege due to lack of control.”

The Future of Investigative Reporting and Environment Reporting

“I think there will always be investigative reporting. It’s time consuming, but I think most newspapers realize it’s part of their franchise. Newspapers have a special responsibility to have the longer, more involved, bigger sorts of things that get put before the public. It’s part of newspapers’ key mission, that they have extended, well documented issues explored as part of their regular mix. It’s one of the hallmarks of newspapers and what I think they will continue to do.

“I think the future for environmental journalism is equally positive. The environment has matured as a subject over the past few decades. It may have been thought of just as parks and pollution in the past, but now I think it’s much more realized as the sustainability issue. Environment means air quality, which means something having to do with the way we design our roads and policies [concerning]

fuels and vehicle emissions. It has to do with the way we produce our electricity and what our utilities have in terms of sources of fuel and power. It has to do with public health issues in terms of food safety and water safety. And it has to do with agricultural issues in terms of how much ground water is used and who gets to use water anyway in areas where there's a water shortage. And it has to do with greenfields and brownfields and where we're going to be able to grow ultimately, and what seems to make sense, and what kind of pollution insurance is needed and how we deal with the legacy of the past when we are a society took some actions or allowed some behaviors that we now realize were not so good for the environment and need to be cleaned up.

“So environment is more a theme than a beat. It crosses many beats. There will always need to be a fair amount of reporting that is related to the environment, especially air and water quality, and transportation – whether you have an environment beat or not. It's part and parcel of all that's going on in the news about growth and development and how we change and what we get rid of and what we move toward, whether it be transportation systems or electric systems. The whole infrastructure of society has its roots in the environment. There are environmental considerations brought to bear on the choices we make.

“So the beat is safe, even if we don't call it a beat as such. It's a real important area that will continue to be there.”

To be safe, Meersman has always been skeptical of his sources and kept them at arms length rather than forming friendships with them. Over time advocacy groups, he said, have become more sophisticated, and his skepticism of them “has matched

their growth,” he said. “I think they raise good issues, but I see them for what they are: an interest group. Early on environment reporting would take what some of the environment groups had said and might not be as critical of what was backing up those kinds of claims.

“But the beat itself is more sophisticated now. Reporters know what questions to ask. [The beat] requires environment reporters to be a lot smarter to keep up with the science and the quantitative stuff and try to make some judgments: What does this mean? Is this a matter of concern?

“What we need to be more skeptical of is whether the government is doing its job and whether environment groups are playing it straighter than people were in the early days when we were looking at these gross physical problems in the ‘70s,” he said.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

* Get samples of their favorite investigative reports about the environment bearing their bylines. Also, get samples of other investigative work they have done outside the environment beat.

Biographical Information:

Media outlet:

Job title:

Beat:

Length of time on beat:

Number of years as a journalist:

Number of years as an investigative reporter:

Number of years writing about the environment:

Age:

Gender:

Education:

Mid-career journalistic fellowships, etc.:

Formal science courses taken in college or after:

Formal investigative reporting courses taken in college or after:

Location of elementary school (place):

Location of high school (place):

College:

Year graduated:

Major:

Graduate work at:

Year graduated:

Degree:

Field of study/emphasis:

Journalistic career: Get a resume.

Job experience prior to journalism:

Political affiliation (if any):

Religious affiliation (if any):

Place of birth:

Ancestry:

Interview questions

First Interview – focuses on the subject's past experience with investigative reporting.

1. Tell me what you knew about investigative reporting before you had any experience with it.
2. Tell me what attracted you to investigative reporting.
Probe: What did you think about the information collection methods?
Probe: What led you to that thinking?
3. Tell me how you perceived news about the environment before you began providing it yourself.
4. What attracted you to environment reporting?
5. What did you know about advocacy journalism before becoming a reporter?

6. How did you regard it?
7. Before becoming a reporter, how did you respond to advocacy in the media?
Probe: What led you to feel that way?
Probe: How strongly did you feel about that?

Second Interview – focuses on subject’s present experience with investigative reporting and the environment beat.

1. How did you become an investigative reporter?
2. What approaches work best in environment reporting when it comes to investigative work?
Probe: Why?
3. Please describe what you do when preparing an investigative report about the environment and compare that with what you do when preparing an investigative report in another realm.
Probe: How is that different from what you imagined?
4. What distinguishes what you do from what an activist does?
5. What is the difference between investigative reporting and all other kinds?
6. How is investigative reporting like advocacy?
Probe: How does it differ from advocacy?
7. What is the difference between investigative reporting, environment reporting, and advocacy journalism?
8. What would lead people to confuse investigative reporting with advocacy journalism?
9. What do you do when someone claims you are on a witch hunt, or have some sort of personal vendetta in play in a story?
Probe: What do you do when you are accused of advocacy?
10. How do you define advocacy journalism?
Probe: What are the characteristics of advocacy journalism?
Probe: What are the characteristics of investigative reporting?
11. What are the variables for advocacy?
12. What do you think constitutes advocacy?

13. What, if any, rights do you believe we have to clean air, clean land, and clean water?
14. What led you to that kind of thinking?
Probe: How strongly do you feel about that?
Probe: Where is that coming from?
15. What interests you about the environment beat?
16. What kind of relationship do you have with the environment beat?
Probe: What do you love about it?
Probe: What do you hate about it?
17. What kind of scrutiny are you under from other reporters as an environment reporter?
18. How do you deal with the stereotype that goes along with covering the environment?
19. How do you decide whether to self-censor?
20. At what point do you make sure you don't upset readers so that they stop reading?
21. How do ethics differ when you're dealing with mainstream publications, a trade press, or when doing something for a publication with a viewpoint?
22. What about publications for a specialty audience?
Probe: These are going to audiences not necessarily with a special viewpoint but with a special interest. And these are consumer magazines as opposed to trade publications. What are the ethics of writing for a publication like that?
How do they differ?
23. How do you balance what your audience wants to read vs. what you think they ought to have?
24. How are journalism ethics evolving?
Probe: What are they evolving into?
25. Please describe a situation in which you can do things that would normally be considered unethical.
26. What is the deciding line between when it's OK to rely on anonymous sources and when it is not?

27. How did you get the environment beat or opportunity to cover the environment?
28. How competitive was it?
29. What kind of obstacles did you encounter in trying to get environment stories to your audience?
30. What kind of money was available to you for your reports, compared with those on other beats?
31. How coveted is the beat?
32. At what age did you begin covering the environment or get assigned to the environment beat?
33. What kind of background were you required to have before covering an environment story?
34. How do your editors regard environment stories in general?
35. Is it easier to get money for an investigative report on another beat than for one on the environment beat?
36. What kind of aptitude is required for investigative reporting?
37. What kind of education is required for investigative reporting?
Probe: For investigative reporting on the environment beat?
38. Auto-driving probe: (Show the respondent two investigative reports – one on the environment and one from another realm) What is the difference between these two stories, other than subject matter?
39. What might make it OK for a journalist to advocate a position?
40. What other news outlets do you compare your work against?
Probe: Why them?
Probe: Which ones do your editors compare your work against?
Probe: Why them?
41. How many environment reports have you written?
42. How many of those are investigative pieces?
43. How many investigative reports have you written altogether?

44. How much time do you spend on an investigative report?

Probe: On other types of stories?

Probe: And when the investigative report involves the environment?

45. Please name someone who would be a good role model for someone who is interested in becoming an investigative reporter on the environment beat.

Probe: Why is this person a good role model?

Probe: Can you name another person who would be a good role model? [try for three]

Third Interview – focuses on synthesizing meanings and essences of the experience of being an investigative reporter doing environment reporting, or vice versa.

1. What is the difference between activism, advocacy and investigative reporting?

2. What do you get out of investigative reporting?

Probe: What is the value of it for you?

3. What do you get out of investigative reporting when you write about the environment?

Probe: What is the value of it for you?

4. How is that different from what you imagined?

5. What does it mean to be an investigative reporter today?

6. Thinking back, what did it mean to be an investigative reporter before you joined the ranks?

7. What value do you place on investigative reporting?

8. What value do you place on environment reporting?

9. What value do you place on advocacy journalism?

10. How do you imagine the environment beat in the future?

11. What difficulties do you anticipate, if any?

12. What openings, gaps, obstacles, or opportunities do you see for environment reporting, particularly where investigative work is concerned?

13. What have you learned about yourself from investigative reporting?

14. From doing it in the environment reporting arena?

15. What effect has covering the environment had on you?
Probe: On your health?
16. How passionate were you about investigative reporting at the start?
Probe: And now?
17. When it involved environment coverage, did that make a difference?
18. How committed were you to investigative reporting at the start?
Probe: And now?
Probe: Why?
19. How committed were you to the environment beat at the start?
Probe: And now?
Probe: Why?
20. How do you regard the environment beat now that you've contributed to it?
21. What do you know about investigative reporting that you didn't know before you did it? Or that you wish you knew before?
22. What do you think the future holds for investigative reporting?
Probe: For the environment beat?
Probe: For advocacy journalism?
Probe: For any combination of the three?
23. What have I missed?
24. What haven't I asked that you think should be included in this study?

GLOSSARY

DDT – Dichlorodiphenyl trichloroethane (DDT) is a pesticide widely used in the United States on crops and to control insects that carry malaria and similar diseases. It is still used and recommended for use in Third World countries for malaria control. Rachel Carson's 1962 book, Silent Spring, first reported how DDT accumulated in the food chain, causing cancer, genetic damage, and reproductive dysfunction among exposed species. Birds exposed to DDT laid eggs with weak, thin shells that were easily broken, resulting in significant decreases in their population. In 1972, DDT was the first pesticide to be banned by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (West, et. al., 2003)

Dioxin – Dioxin has been called the most toxic chemical known to humans. In the 1970s it was linked to Agent Orange and adverse health effects among United States soldiers in combat in Vietnam. Most recently, the international community has called for the worldwide elimination of dioxin and other persistent organic pollutants. Dioxin is an umbrella name for a class of chemical compounds that contain carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and chlorine. Dioxins are part of a larger class of compounds known as polycyclic halogenated aromatics. Dioxin is highly stable and insoluble in water. It adheres to clay and soot and dissolves in oil and organic solvents. Once released into the environment, dioxin remains for many years (West, et. al., 2003). A lethal dose of dioxin fits on the head of a pin.

Chlorofluorocarbons – Also known as CFCs, these are halocarbons, which are by-products of foam production, refrigeration, and air conditioning. In the stratosphere, CFCs contribute to the depletion of the earth's protective layer of "good ozone" (West, et. al., 2003).

PCBs – Stands for polychlorinated biphenyls, which persist in soil, sediment, water, waste disposal sites, and are found in some existing capacitors and transformers. Since they persist, they can be taken up from the soil by organisms and transferred through the food chain or accidentally leaked from electrical equipment. Their toxicity varies with the degree of chlorination and the actual position of the chlorine atoms on the basic structure. Some fish have been found to contain high levels of PCBs, which are transferred to humans when the fish are consumed. Poisoning from PCBs is associated with acne, respiratory distress, and liver damage (West, et al., 1995).

Genetic Modification – Genetic modification (GM) refers to the modifying of an organism, crop or animal by altering its DNA in some fashion, such as recombining its characteristics into a pattern not found in nature.

Global Climate Change – This concept refers to changes in weather patterns scientists have attributed primarily to air pollution and the decay of the earth's protective ozone layer.

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