OPC Scholar Begins Internship With Nairobi Mall Attack

by Jacob Kushner

Just days after I arrived in Nairobi as an OPC Fellow with the Associated Press, the news came via a phone call to a friend: The businessman from New Zealand whose BBQ I had just attend the week before had been shot in the chest.

The siege of Nairobi’s Westgate Mall by al-Shabab militants went on to capture the newswires for days, as Kenyan police and military attempted to take back the mall and save the hostages believed to be held inside.

The last time I was at the center of a major breaking news event was in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. I was stringing for the AP when a negligent U.N. peacekeeping mission there introduced the cholera bacteria, which began sickening and killing people across the country.

These were very different types of disasters, yet I found myself reporting on the Nairobi attack much in the same manner I covered the cholera outbreak, rushing back and forth between the hospitals and morgues to learn as much as I could about the victims. In Nairobi as the siege dragged on, I met families mourning the sudden loss of loved ones who were killed while depositing a check or while chauffeuring a client to the mall.

For five days after the attack began I was so busy reporting across Nairobi that I didn’t have time to stop by the AP office itself. When I finally did, I found the typically quiet and somewhat empty office abuzz with nearly a dozen staffers busily compiling stories and video and sharing information across the newsroom.

The day the attack began, Jason Straziuso, AP reporter and editor, had been just minutes away from the mall when he received a call from a family friend trapped inside.

“Reporters everywhere must separate their emotions from scenes of horror, but that’s a near-impossible task when your friends are facing at-

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New Book on China From Audrey Topping

Q&A

Audrey Ronning Topping recently published China Mission: A Personal History from the Last Imperial Dynasty to the People’s Republic, an account of China as seen by three generations of her family. She discussed the book, which is reviewed on page 12, with Susan Kille.

Q: How long did you work on China Mission?
A: For 30 some years off and on. In 1975 I was in China on assignment for The New York Times and National Geographic when I heard about the discovery of the life-size clay soldiers guarding the tomb of China’s First Emperor, who was buried in 210 BCE. It was the most important archeological find since King Tut’s tomb. I flew to the ancient capital of Xian and became the first Western journalist to witness the excavation of the incredible find. My story was a world scoop. I was awed by the working site resembling an ancient battlefield with legions of broken soldiers and horses half buried in the red earth of the Yellow River Valley. Then it struck me: Here I am witnessing the reincarnation of Emperor Qin Shihuang Ti. The history of China’s first Imperial Dynasty was being revealed before my eyes. And 2,200 years after the first dynasty, my grandparents would witness the fall of the last dynasty. While looking into the ancient site I decided to write a book about how

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Killing Bhutto: Getting Away With Murder

On December 27, 2007 a suicide bomber killed Benazir Bhutto, the former prime minister of Pakistan. She was the head of a political family as important to Pakistan history as the Gandhis in India or the Kennedys in the United States.

Bhutto had recently returned from exile to challenge military dictator Pervez Musharraf in a democratic election. Speculations as to who assassinated Bhutto ran wild. The individuals behind the conspiracy have never been found, but in Getting Away with Murder, Heraldo Muñoz goes further than anyone else to unravel the mystery of Bhutto’s death. Leading a United Nations’ inquiry, Muñoz delved into the murky world of Pakistani politics, the controversies and violence surrounding the Bhutto family and the unexpected role that the U.S. played in the tragic events.

OPC member Tom Brokaw wrote “This is a chilling account of deceit, corruption and murder at the highest levels of power in Pakistan, an American ally. A carefully researched and compelling tale of tragedy masked as a government.”

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As reporters work to unravel what really occurred at Westgate and make sense of the regional politics that fostered the attack, I’ve decided to stick around after my OPC fellowship ends and base myself out of East Africa for the coming year.

Jacob Kushner is the recipient of the 2013 N.S. Bienstock Memorial Scholarship.
Topping and Rowan Recall Covering the Chinese Civil War

EVENT RECAP: OCTOBER 1

by Aimee Vitrak

The description of “legend” can be overused. The notion of a “legend” begs the question: how do you know when one has crossed over into the territory of unforgettable, admirable and heroic? The answer arrived on October 1 when two OPC members relayed their experiences on covering the Chinese civil war. Seymour Topping and Roy Rowan, made that long-ago and far-away event pertinent and relevant to the packed house in the Solarium Room at the 3 West Club. Topping and Rowan are the two surviving American correspondents who covered China’s civil war.

OPC Foundation President William J. Holstein set a cinematic scene for the crowd: The communists and nationalists had not chosen to engage with each other until the Japanese left after World War II. In 1946, Rowan had been in the American military and found a job driving Jeep convoys for a U.N. agency and Topping was still in American uniform as an infantry captain and took a terminal leave to begin working as a correspondent for the International News Service.

From there, Topping and Rowan bandied recollections about like they had happened that morning, which at 91 and 93, respectively, only bolstered their “legend” status. They tossed out dates of when they filed the story (Rowan: December 7, 1947) and word count (Topping: 85-word dispatch to the AP, which scored a scoop of the communists taking of Nanking), which cuts central to the core of a journalist: to other audiences those particulars are too granular, but to this crowd, they tell everything about a good journalist.

Rowan spent more than a year supervising truck convoys never knowing if the U.N. relief he was delivering was to a nationalist or communist village. “We were successful but also under attack,” he said. “We took a bullet through the windshield and decided then and there to pack up and return to Shanghai. I was feeling despondent. I had no job; no prospects. When I arrived in Shanghai, there was a stack of letters for me including a rejection letter from the Columbia Journalism School.” He paused to let the crowd’s laughter settle. “In a gloomy mood, I walked to the then-Palace Hotel. I was standing next to this gentleman, he was drinking straight vodka out of a blue bottle sheathed in ice and asked if I wanted a drink and it turned out he was the Time and Life bureau chief in Shanghai.” And thus began Rowan’s career.

“I got a job, like Roy, in a bar as a correspondent based in Peking,” Topping said. He covered the war for three years and worked for INS and then shifted to the AP. “Most important, in Nanking, I met the beautiful Audrey Ronning. I courted her assiduously and became engaged before her and her family were evacuated with other diplomatic families when communists closed in on Nanking.”

Topping slept in a cave on a cot in Yenan while he waited to interview Mao, but the interview never happened. He was told Mao was in seclusion, but at that point, Topping hypothesized that Mao was planning military operations in Manchuria.

Topping said that Mao had asked President Roosevelt if he could visit Washginton so they could come to some kind of understanding about the war, but Roosevelt never received the message. “If Mao had gotten to Washington...there could possibly not have been a Korean war or Vietnam war,” Topping said.

Rowan teamed up with photographer Jack Birns and their territory was the entire country of China. Rowan said they’d go out to the airport at 4 a.m. and take off with a former flying ace from World War II, one named “Earthquake Magoolin,” to get around the country. They landed on dirt roads with no orientation as to what they’d happen upon.

Rowan and Birns were in Beijing and had an interview with Nationalist Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek. Rowan wrote in his notebook that Chiang Kai-Shek seemed like a sparrow — he was jumpy and nervous and repeated stock phrases like the communists are a cancer. “It was an unsatisfactory interview,” Rowan said. “The big point he made was that Manchuria was safely in his hands; he had 250,000 troops. So Jack and I decided to head to Manchuria a few days later and there the nationalists were in full retreat.”

Holstein asked, “Do you think that Chiang Kai-Shek had no idea what was going on in Manchuria or did he lie to you?”

“He lied to us,” Rowan said.

Rowan and Birns took many photos of the collapse of Manchuria but it was Saturday morning in Shanghai and Life used to go to press Saturday night in New York. “We put the film on a Pan Am flight to San Franciso, 40 hour trip minus 13 hours. Life set up a portable film processing outfit at the San Francisco airport; got a courier to carry the negatives to Chicago where a New York editor came out to Chicago and edited the film in a taxi cab. It went to press a day late, but it was a great scoop. There were no other Americans in Manchuria.”

More photos of the event and videos are at http://opcofamerica.org Rowan discusses the fall of Shanghai and Topping relays Chiang Kai-Shek’s troops fleeing to Formosa.
Global Newscasters Reach in America Is Low, Ambitions High

EVENT RECAP: OCTOBER 1
by Aimee Vitrak

The Ford Foundation East River Room was full of people curious about the global broadcasters who are newcomers to the U.S. market. The international media organizations are fueled largely by seasoned American journalists like panelist Marcy McGinnis, formerly of CBS News who is now Senior Vice President of News Gathering and moderator Jim Laurie who was an NBC correspondent in Saigon and now is a broadcast consultant. Both McGinnis and Laurie are OPC members.

Laurie asked for a show of hands from the audience for who had seen the channels represented on the panel: Al Jazeera America, CCTV and NHK. Al Jazeera America was the most recognizable of the three and reaches 40 million American households. Part of the issue behind the seeming obscurity of these channels is the difficulty each has had in securing a channel with cable and satellite providers, and even, as is the case with Al Jazeera America, difficulty using its own material for a website due to legacy contractual issues related to the channel it purchased for broadcast, Current TV.

News anchor for CCTV Elaine Reyes said that to distinguish itself in the crowded marketplace, CCTV news is going wider and international with its coverage. “We want to cover undercovered areas of the world like Latin America, Africa. You’re not going to go to many other channels on the dial and see a live shot from North Korea with their missile lauches. You’re not going to see a live shot in Havana or the protests in Brazil [on American TV].”

She gave an example of traveling a week before to Bali for the APEC Conference and when President Obama cancelled, there was a pause in the atmosphere as many of the western press corps left. Coverage of an important gathering like APEC is something Reyes said is fundamental to her news organization’s mission.

Laurie asked if in the crowded American news marketplace if any of these channels can be successful? Porter Bibb, media commentator, said, “None of these networks are suffering the way American news media has in terms of profit and loss. Al Jazeera, CCTV and NHK have basically blank checks to pay for what they do. They do very good journalism, but they’re either government or partisan controlled or perceived to be, which inhibits its reach. The distribution pipelines are hostile to anything that isn’t red, white and blue America. As a viewer, I want to see what Al Jazeera can cover from the Middle East.”

Videos from the panel are at http://youtube.com/opcofamerica
OPC SCHOLARS

Gregory D. Johnsen, winner of the 2006 David R. Schweisberg Memorial Scholarship, was selected by BuzzFeed as the inaugural Michael Hastings National Security Reporting Fellow. The fellowship, which began October 20, is a yearlong position focused on national security and institutions of power, the cornerstone of Hasting’s work. Hastings, who won a Polk Award for the Rolling Stone profile that led to the 2010 ouster of General Stanley McChrystal, was 33 when he died in a fiery solo car crash in June. Ben Smith, editor-in-chief of BuzzFeed said: “Gregory Johnsen has already proven himself one of his generation’s wisest and most original voices on national security. He’s the right writer to carry on Michael’s legacy of fiercely intelligent and deeply compelling journalism about how America has shaped and been shaped by more than a decade of war,” Johnsen is a Ph.D. candidate in Near Eastern studies at Princeton University and the author of the critically acclaimed book The Last Refuge: Yemen, al-Qaeda and America’s War in Arabia.

Ben Hubbard, who won the 2007 Stan Swinton Scholarship, and C.J. Chivers were awarded the 2012 Medill Medal for Courage in Journalism from Northwestern’s Medill School of Journalism for their work in Syria. Hubbard won for his reporting for The Associated Press, but he and Chivers are now colleagues at The New York Times. Hubbard began his career with an OPC Foundation internship in AP’s Jerusalem Bureau. Hubbard and Chivers went in and out of Syria multiple times in 2012, often traveling at night by foot to avoid detection. They gained the trust of rebel groups and reported amidst bombs, bullets and the constant threat of capture. “Syria is probably as dangerous as or more dangerous than any other country that a winner has reported from,” said Richard Stolley, a former OPC president and a former managing editor of Time who was one of three judges for the award. “What was most remarkable was, under these awful conditions, how good their writing and reporting was.”

Hannah Rappleye, who won the IF Stone Award from Harper’s Magazine in 2011, is working as a reporter for the investigative unit at NBC, with a focus on criminal justice, immigration and human rights. A Soros Media Justice fellow in 2012, Rappleye has a story coming out in The Nation this winter that was funded by the Open Society Foundation. She will continue her freelance work in her new location, New Orleans.

James Jeffry, winner of the 2012 David R. Schweisberg Memorial Scholarship, is returning to Ethiopia, a country that has fascinated him since his first visit there in 2000, when he spent six months teaching English to monks in Addis Ababa. He wrote about Ethiopian coffee for his graduate dissertation at the University of Texas. Jeffry intends to report primarily on business and entrepreneurship.

Sophia Jones, winner of the 2012 Reuters Scholarship, will be joining The Huffington Post as a Middle East correspondent for its new global news site that launches in January 2014. Jones is currently a freelance journalist in Cairo. Her stories have appeared in The Daily Beast and Foreign Policy, among others. She also interned for Reuters at the Ramallah Bureau in the West Bank.

WINNERS

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) will award its 2013 International Press Freedom Awards to four courageous journalists who have reported in the face of severe reprisal: Janet Hinostroza, a television reporter in Ecuador and a target of the government’s ongoing assault on free expression; Bassem Youssef, the host of a satirical Egyptian television show that has attracted 40 million viewers while drawing criminal charges for “insulting the president,” “insulting Islam,” and “reporting false news;” Nedim Şener, a leading investigative journalist with the Turkish daily Posta who is considered a terrorist by his government; and Nguyen Van Hai, a Vietnamese blogger who is currently serving a 12-year prison sentence. Also, Paul Steiger, founding editor-in-chief of ProPublica and former managing editor of The Wall Street Journal, will be presented with the Burton Benjamin Memorial Award for lifetime achievement in the cause of press freedom. The winners will be honored at CPJ’s annual award and benefit dinner November 26 at the Waldorf-Astoria.

OPC member Christiane Amanpour will be among the winners as the Newswomen’s Club of New York presents awards during its annual gala, November 14 at the Down Town Association. Amanpour will be honored for an ABC news special tracing the common roots of the

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Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Marie Colvin Front Page Award for Foreign Correspondence will go to Alia Malek of Al Jazeera. Tina Brown will receive the Front Page Award for Lifetime Achievement.

Gemma Tarlach, an associate editor of Discover Magazine, and Steve Chapple, a columnist for U-T San Diego, have received Kyoto Prize Journalism Fellowships that will enable them to travel to Japan in November to attend the 2013 awards ceremony, lectures and workshops of the Kyoto Prize — Japan’s highest private award for lifetime achievement. They will meet and interview the 2013 Kyoto Prize laureates, Dr. Robert Dennard, an IBM Fellow; Dr. Masatoshi Nei, an evolutionary biologist; and Cecil Taylor, a jazz pianist.

PRESS FREEDOM

MOGUDISHU: Radio Shabelle, a Somali-owned private station that has had more than 10 of its journalists murdered in the past 10 years in gun attacks, went off the air on October 26, shortly after a raid by government security forces. According to the government, the station was closed because it was occupying a government building and was given adequate time to find an alternative location. Abdimalik Yusuf Mohamud, station director, disagreed. “This is politics and has nothing to do with the premise,” he told Al Jazeera. “We only received one letter and we received it five days ago.” The station, considered Somalia’s most popular and influential domestic station in the country, often broadcasts politically sensitive stories.

BANGKOK: Five journalists, including a photographer for Agence France-Presse, who went to cover a roadside bombing on October 19, were injured by a second bomb that went off about 45 minutes later. Two soldiers died from the first explosion. The incident was in the far south of Thailand, an area where rebels are active. CPJ called on both sides of the insurgent conflict to refrain from attacks that imperil journalists.

BUJUMBURA, Burundi: Journalist Hassan Ruvakuki, who had been jailed on terrorism charges, was granted a conditional release in October that allows him to go back to work. Ruvakuki, who works for French radio station RFI’s Swahili service and for a local broadcaster, was arrested in November 2011 and given a life sentence in June 2012, a ruling condemned by press rights groups. The sentence was later cut to three years, and he was released in March for health reasons. Ruvakuki has maintained his innocence.

DODOMA, Tanzania: Media owners, publishers and journalism groups agreed in early October to not cover any news event and to not publish statements or pictures of the minister of information, culture and sports or that of the country’s director of information. The indefinite coverage ban was in protest to a government ban on Swahili-language newspapers. On September 27, authorities suspended publication of Mwananchi for 14 days and Mtanzania for 90 days, citing seditious stories. A third Swahili-language paper, Mwanahalisi, has been suspended since July 2012. The October 9 statement announcing the coverage ban was signed by representatives from the Media Owners’ Association of Tanzania, Tanzania Editors’ Forum, the Media Institute of Southern Africa, Tanzania Chapter, the Media Council of Tanzania, the Union of Tanzania Press Clubs, Dar es Salaam City Press Clubs and Tanzania Human Rights Defenders.

MALE, Maldives: On October 7, six masked men armed with steel bars and machetes started an early-morning fire that destroyed much of the headquarters of Raajje TV, a popular television station that supports former President Mohamed Nasheed, who was forced from office in 2012. The attack came a few days after the station reported on threats it had received. The men forced their way into the building after restraining and stabbing a security guard. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) reported that witnesses said police were called but did not respond until after the building was ablaze. With the help of other media, Raajje TV resumed limited broadcasting.

BEIJING: While the world awaited the announcement of the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize winner in October, RSF issued a call to remember that dissident Liu Xiaobo, the 2010 laureate, will mark his sixth year of imprisonment in December. Liu was a co-author in 2008 of Charta 08, a manifesto that called for China’s political and legal system to shift in the direction of democracy. Liu, a literary critic, writer and political activist, was arrested in December 2008 and sentenced a year later to 11 years for undermining the state authorities.

CARACAS: Press rights groups are concerned about President Nicolás Maduro’s crackdown on media organizations, whose freedoms already were restricted by former President Hugo Chávez who died in March. In September, Maduro created an agency called the Strategic Center for Security and Protection
of the Fatherland. He said the agency would centralize intelligence information to help overcome plans, plots and attacks against the country. CPJ, however, described it as “a bald-faced attempt to intimidate the media and censor the news.” Also, TV station Globovisión is facing a fine of up to 10 percent of its annual income in an investigation of whether coverage of shortages of food, electricity and other essentials in Venezuela has “provoked anxiety.” Those widespread shortages include newsprint; print media, particularly local newspapers, are finding it hard to find the paper they need.

MURDERS

Mohamed Mohamud, a Somali journalist, was shot six times in the neck, chest and a shoulder on October 22 and four days later died from those injuries, bringing to seven the total number of journalists killed in Somalia this year. Mohamud, who reported for the private U.K.-based Universal TV, was shot early in the morning as he drove to work in Mogadishu.

Three journalists were gunned down within three weeks in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. On October 24, Al-Mosuliya TV cameraman Bashar Abdulqader Najm Al-Nouaymi was killed by a gunman using a silencer. Mohammed Karim Al-Badrani, a correspondent for Al Sharqiya television, and cameraman Mohammed Ghanem were shot to death October 5 while on assignment in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. Ali Wajih, news director of the privately owned Al Sharqiya, said the AP that 16 staff members have been killed on the job since 2003, the year of the U.S. invasion.

Cláudio Moleiro de Souza, a radio station manager in northwestern Brazil, was shot and killed October 12 by an intruder inside the radio station. Alberto Dutra Duran, a colleague, was also wounded. The motive was unclear but RSF called on investigators to “seriously examine the possibility that it was linked to his work as a journalist.” Souza was the sixth journalist to be killed in Brazil since January.

The president of the Khyber Union of Journalists linked the October 11 murder of Ayub Khan Khattak to the Pakistani journalist’s coverage of a local drug mafia. Khattak, a reporter for Karak Times and for a TV channel, was shot dead by two gunmen outside his home. Pakistan is the second deadliest country for journalists so far this year, after Syria. A day earlier, three men used iron rods to beat Sardar Shafiq, a reporter for the Urdu daily Ittehad and former general secretary of the Abbotabad Union of Journalists. He was attacked while leaving his office.

José Dario Arenas, a newspaper vendor in Caicedonia, Colombia, who helped reporters cover a sensitive local story, was killed September 28 by gunmen while selling copies of Extra Quindio, a regional daily from the nearby Quindío province. The top story in the paper that day was about complaints by relatives of inmates who said they had been mistreated by guards at the Caicedonia prison. Reporters said Arenas had pitched the story idea, helped find sources and supplied photographs.

Thomson Reuters reported on October 29 a third-quarter profit of 48 cents per share, beating Wall Street expectations by 4 cents. Thomson Reuters Editor-in-Chief Steve Adler told staff members earlier that month that the company planned to cut as much as 5 percent of its newsroom staff. Continuing staff cuts in the face of a positive earnings report left many in the industry to cry foul. The company employs about 2,800 journalists worldwide, so the cuts translate to about 140 people. A week earlier Thomson Reuters CEO Jim Smith said the company plans to eliminate 2,500 jobs from its core financial and risk division in February 2014. In September, the company announced it was ending work on Reuters Next, an ambitious 2-year-old and much-delayed reworking of the company’s legacy web product built around creating streams of content, even from outside sources, tied to a specific news event.

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Seymour Topping, an OPC board member, is this year’s recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Society of the Silurians. He has spent 67 years in journalism, beginning as the editor of his high school newspaper and going on to a career that included extensive international reporting. He was foreign editor and managing editor of The New York Times, administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes and SanPaolo Professor of International Journalism at Columbia University, where he remains an emeritus professor. The award will be presented at the Silurians’ annual banquet November 14 at the Players Club.

After years of experimenting with ways to promote serious journalism, Pierre Omidyar revealed October 16 he was going to finance a new mass media venture where he will be joined by Glenn Greenwald, the journalist who brought The Guardian the scoop about National Security Agency surveillance contained in documents leaked by Edward J. Snowden. Ironically, Greenwald was a victim of a news leak about the venture that spurred Omidyar to step forward. Omidyar, who founded eBay and is now a philanthropist, wrote on his blog that last summer he considered buying The Washington Post, which sold to another tech billionaire, Jeff Bezos, for $250 million. “That process got me thinking about what kind of social impact could be created if a similar investment was made in something entirely new, built from the ground up,” Omidyar wrote. Certainly, much can be created with a couple hundred million dollars, but for now plans are unclear.

Stephen Shepard, founding dean of CUNY’s journalism school and an OPC member got to know the McGraw family in the 20 years he spent as editor-in-chief of Business Week. That tenure ended in 2009 when McGraw-Hill sold the magazine to Bloomberg L.P., but the friendship continued as did the family’s interest in business journalism. Now, CUNY’s journalism school is getting a new business journalism center, thanks to a $3 million donation by the Harold W. McGraw Jr. Family Foundation, which was established in 2010 by the children of its namesake, the late chief executive and chairman of McGraw-Hill. Shepard said the Harold W. McGraw Jr. Center for Business Journalism will have two main goals: to find and recruit journalists for fellowship programs and to offer scholarships to students who choose to pursue CUNY’s business and economics reporting concentration. Shepard, who will step down as dean at the end of the year, is staying on as a professor and said he promised the McGraws he would help look after the center.

Omidyar...
PEOPLE REMEMBERED

Jeffrey Blyth, an OPC member who covered major events around the world, died September 21 in New York. He was 87. As the New York-based correspondent for the London Daily Mail from 1957 to 1972, Blyth rode into Havana on Fidel Castro’s jeep, saw the building of the Berlin Wall, stood in the Dallas police garage when Jack Ruby killed Lee Harvey Oswald and was in Los Angeles when Sen. Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated. He covered the Hungarian revolution, the Suez Crisis and the Vietnam War. One of his biggest scoops came in 1956 when he persuaded Prince Rainier to give an exclusive interview on the eve of his wedding to Grace Kelly. His first big scoop was when, as shipping correspondent for the Daily Mail, he found the car in which the famous spies Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean had fled London and then abandoned near the docks of Southampton, England. Blyth, a past president of the Foreign Press Association of New York, was born in South Shields, England, and started his career at age 16 earning 7 shillings a week at the Shields Gazette. After the Mail, he was a New York correspondent for the BBC and the South African Broadcasting Company. He set up a company called Interpress, filing regular weekly reports on show business, media and travel for various British publications. He is survived by his widow, Myrna Blyth, who served as Ladies’ Home Journal editor-in-chief from 1981 to 2002, during which she launched More in 1997 as a spinoff. She currently is AARP publications’ editorial director.

Al Rossiter Jr., a longtime UPI science writer who became the wire service’s executive editor, died September 23 in Washington, N.C. He was 77. He joined UPI in 1959 and after being appointed science editor in 1973, he won many awards for his coverage of the U.S. space program. Rossiter was named executive editor in 1987 after three top UPI editors left the company amid significant staffing cuts. He was executive vice president, responsible for editorial operations worldwide when he left UPI in 1992. He later served as assistant vice president at Duke University’s office of public affairs and director of the Duke News Service until his retirement in 2001.


Rolla J. “Bud” Crick, a founder of the Pacific Stars and Stripes, died May 1 in Portland, Oregon. He was 95 and had traveled to more than 100 countries and all seven continents.

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In Response to Growing Dangers, Editors Shun Freelancers

by Michael Serrill

Whenever guns go off and hostilities break out, whether in Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya or Syria, freelance reporters and photographers appear at the edge of the battlefield, ready to risk life and limb to get the story. These days the opportunities for these men and women are dwindling, as mainstream media are increasingly wary of putting them to work unless they meet very specific criteria. Even if the freelancer goes in without a sponsor and comes out with a great story, she may not be able to sell it.

That was the consensus at the annual meeting of the International Press Institute’s Foreign Editors Circle, held in Toronto October 31. The meeting included editors from various Canadian newspaper and broadcast outlets, plus foreign editors from the Associated Press, Detroit Free Press, Christian Science Monitor, Miami Herald and myself, from the OPC and Bloomberg News.

The editors, despite severe cutbacks in overseas staff in recent years, said it is just too dangerous to send non-staff reporters into situations where their status as non-partisan observers is not respected and they stand a good chance of being kidnapped, assaulted or murdered. Right now, for instance, few media outlets are risking sending anyone into northern Syria after a plague of kidnappings, the editors said. Though little known — because the media have agreed not to publicize information on individual cases — some 30 reporters and photographers are now missing and assumed kidnapped in Syria. The Islamic militants of the Al Nusra Front have reportedly targeted five journalists by name for seizure if they dare to enter the battle zone.

Even in situations where the danger is less, many news outlets are demanding that freelancers meet certain criteria. They have to have insurance and hostile environment training, something the Canadian Broadcasting Company provides all its reporters who put themselves in danger, according to CBC Director of News Content David Walmsley. That training is provided by a private contractor whose staffers have military backgrounds. The company also tracks reporters and photographers while they are inside hostile territory and provides “extraction” services if needed. They counsel families and provide advice and assistance if a reporter is taken hostage.

Less prosperous outfits than the CBC, of course, can’t afford the insurance and training to send either staff or freelance reporters into hostile situations. The result is that the reporting doesn’t get done. With northern Syria a no-go zone for journalists, the extent of the slaughter there, and the condition of in-country refugees, is simply not known.

Our sister organization, Vienna-based IPI, describes itself as “a global network of editors, media executives and leading journalists dedicated to furthering and safeguarding press freedom, promoting the free flow of news and information, and improving the practice of journalism.” You can find them at http://freemedia.at

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At the beginning of World War II, he tried to join the Army Air Corps but was turned down because of a hernia. He was drafted a few months later. Crick told an officer that his dream job would be to start a Stars & Stripes in the Pacific Theater. The officer introduced him to a major with that goal. As a combat reporter, he was in Hiroshima shortly after the United States dropped the atom bomb. After leaving the service, he spent 42 years reporting in Portland for The Oregon Journal and then The Oregonian. He covered everything, but especially the military. He was nominated for two Pulitzer Prizes. He was in Saigon the week it fell to Communist forces and in Iran when Ayatollah Khomeini took power. In 1957, when the Navy drew lots to chose a journalist to go to the South Pole, Crick was chosen; an engine malfunction turned a planned 20-minute stop at the pole into a 23-day ordeal. After retiring, he volunteered to work for the Oregon Red Cross and was in New York City as their spokesman for three months after the destruction of the World Trade Center towers.
the history of my own family was entwined with the history of China. The actual writing of China Mission took about three years but while it was cooking I published two books: The Splendors of Tibet and Charlie’s World: The story of an Australian Cockatoo and his American Family.

Q: Descriptions in family letters to and from China bring this book alive with first-hand accounts. How did the Ronnings preserve these letters?
A: I think handwriting is a lost art. In the olden days, before email and Twitter, people like my grandparents, Halvor and Hannah Ronning, as well as my parents wrote intimate and thoughtful letters by dipping quill pens in India ink under the light of oil lamps. In those days, no one threw letters away. They were cherished and kept in special boxes or secret drawers. Later, some family letters were typed with carbon copies. My grandparents also sent letters about their work to mission headquarters both in Norwegian and English, which were kept in files.

Q: What was missing from the family archive that you wish was there?
A: In China my grandfather wrote a diary of letters to his brother Nils in Minneapolis, who took it upon himself to destroy letters he felt too intimate for others to read and I regret that. I also regret that I never met my grandmother or my great-aunt who died 20 years before I was born. As a child I was told I looked like my grandmother and I was curious about her life. I started writing the story of Hannah but Halvor kept taking over and became the strongest character. I knew my grandfather well and loved him deeply. He was a great storyteller and told many of the stories in the book.

Q: Do you have an anecdote to share about organizing the book?
A: The first draft ended when my family settled in Canada in 1928 shortly before I was born. It was generously accepted by LSU Press but the anonymous reader, who later turned out to be Andrew Burstein, suggested many cuts, but commented that it ended too soon. So I added the three last chapters and the epilogue.

Q: While making clear the deep Christian faith that began the Ronnings’ relationship with China, the book is never moralizing. Was that a challenge?
A: No, not moralizing was never a challenge, perhaps because my grandparents and parents were not judgmental. They were more concerned with giving than taking and never felt superior to the Chinese or sorry for themselves. They spoke Chinese and understood the enormous problems facing China. Which is more than I can say for some other foreigners in China.

Q: Is there anything you did not put in the book but wish you had?
A: Oh yes! I am constantly thinking of what I left out and I would like to write the whole book over. I feel I have only revealed the tip of the iceberg but writers have to know when to stop. I haven’t learned that yet.

Q: What do you predict is in China’s future?
A: Remember that China is the only civilization on earth that has come down through the ages intact. The women of China are a special breed, a strong force that has evolved through “survival of the fittest.” They are demanding “Half The Sky” and although China has and will have great problems, both environmental and political, I believe that China is on the road to a special type of democracy with feminine Chinese characteristics.

Q: Your father made a “three wishes journey” to China. Where would you go on such a trip?
A: Well I might wish that my five daughters, seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren will accompany me back to China to visit the Buddhist Temples Caves again — with a stopover in Norway to pay my respects to my ancestors in Telemark and a romp in Galapagos Islands.
New Books

ASIA

THE BOOK BY AUDREY
Ronning Topping, China Mission: A personal History from the Last Imperial Dynasty to the People’s Republic [Louisiana State University Press, October] is more than a family memoir. It is an engaging account of a turbulent century in China. Beginning with her grandparents in 1891, Topping writes: “Ronning was there for almost every event of importance.”

Ronnings have been kicked out of China six times but they keep going back. Nine Ronnings were born in China and three died there. Topping tells their story through on-the-ground reports drawn from a treasure of family letters and diaries written over three generations, books by family members and her own reporting and research.

Hannah Rorem, Topping’s grandmother, was just 20 when she sailed to China to be a missionary with Halvor Ronning, 29, and his sister, Thea. A month after they arrived, Hannah and Halvor were married. The couple, Americans with Norwegian roots, had seven children. Nelius, the oldest, had plans to be a missionary in China but died as a young man in Canada. Another son, Talbert, did become a missionary in China. Chester, their second child, served in China first as a teacher and then as a senior Canadian diplomat highly valued for his native speaking skills and deep knowledge of Chinese history and culture. And, as is common knowledge among OPC members, China is where Audrey Ronning meant the dashing foreign correspondent, Seymour Topping.

Audrey met “Top” in China during the outbreak of the Civil War. Chester and Top witnessed the fall of Nanking to the Communists. Audrey Topping has returned to China many times as a journalist and author, including 1966 to report on the Cultural Revolution for The New York Times Magazine; after getting her story and spectacular photos, she was escorted out of the country by Red Guards who called her a “Ronning dog of Imperialism.”

China Mission, Topping writes, refers to the missionary efforts of her grandparents and uncle, but also to her father’s diplomatic mission for the West to understand the complexity and beauty of China. The book rewards readers with unique perspectives of Chinese history.

KATHY ELDON, AN OPC member, said it took 17 years and “a lot of blood, sweat and tears” to write her memoir, In the Heart of Life [HarperOne, October]. It is a revealing account of the disruptions of her life – loves, sorrows, challenges, tragedies, joys, guilt and more – and her recovery from what gives the book its subtitle: A Mother Loses Everything Before She Discovers True Joy.

Eldon was born and raised in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and from an early age was fascinated by Africa. She graduated in 1968 from Wellesley College, where Hillary Clinton was a year behind her and Diane Sawyer a year ahead. She fell in love with an Englishman, married in 1969 and headed to London. In 1977, she moved to Nairobi with her husband and their two children, Dan, who was 7, and Amy, 3.

In Kenya, Eldon worked as a journalist and felt more at home than “I ever had in London, or even Iowa.” The family experienced the failed 1982 coup and its aftermath. They took trips into the bush and had many friends. Dan sometimes joined her on assignments and some of his

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