



“BREAKING NEWS: TELLING OUR OWN STORIES”



TELLING OUR OWN STORIES

The weekend of May 4–5, 2019, Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities partnered with Hawai‘i Book and Music Festival to bring together a weekend of programming titled “Breaking News: Telling Our Own Stories.” In an era of the growing power of social media, the increasing corporatization of mass media, and ongoing debates about “fake news,” what an important time to reflect on journalism, how we make and consume media, and the role of storytelling in community and political education.

A major focus of our program looked at the many facets of “breaking news,” and the changing role of journalism in our current political moment. We listened to experts from the Honolulu Star-Advertiser, Hawai‘i News Now, Civil Beat, Honolulu Magazine, PBS Hawai‘i’s HIKI NŌ, Hawai‘i Public Radio, and Pulitzer Prize winners William Finnegan and Gilbert King. We learned about the deep kuleana of journalists, how hard newsrooms work, and how rigorous research and complex storytelling is necessary to strengthening democracy.

We also explored the theme of “telling our own stories.” As access to creating and sharing videos, writing, photographs, and other things online increases, how do we tell meaningful and thoughtful stories that matter? Whose voices are missing from mainstream media, and how do we remedy those gaps? Through hearing from oral historians, young woman filmmakers, Micronesian writers, and reading messages from the currently incarcerated, our community conversation was deeply enriched, thanks to the waiwai shared from many perspectives.

These essays explore further that rich time together, and we invite you to read them and respond by sharing your own story with us.

Sincerely,

Aiko Yamashiro

Executive Director, Hawai‘i Council for the Humanities

Why The Future Of Local Journalism, If There's To Be One, Depends On The Public

By Sandra Oshiro



Before the Hawai'i Council for the Humanities asked if I could moderate a panel on journalism and democracy, I had been reading a book by Alan Rusbridger, the editor of *The Guardian* during the tumultuous years of the news industry's digital upheaval.

In flipping through the pages of *Breaking News: The Remaking of Journalism and Why It Matters Now*, I relived the years that Rusbridger described, when the internet and social media were seen as passing fads and print with its millions of subscribers appeared unassailable.

Not long after the web's ascendance, it dawned on many journalists that what was then evolving in our industry was not a temporary spell of bad news but rather something fundamental and structural.

One newspaper after another fired its staff and closed its doors, having failed in the midst of an unforgiving recession to transition to a digital world, one where much of the content the public paid for in print could be gotten elsewhere for free.

We remain today in the midst of that transformation, still attempting in our newsrooms to change the wheels of the truck as it barrels down the freeway. Where we are headed and what all of it means for citizens who rely on the news to stay informed is largely a case of "to be determined."

The four of us on our panel represented a spectrum of local media: Mary Vorsino, dig-

ital content director at television's Hawaii News Now; Suevon Lee, education reporter with the online site Honolulu Civil Beat; Joel Knight, engagement editor for the Honolulu Star-Advertiser newspaper and website; and myself, news editor with Hawai'i Public Radio.

For all our platform diversity, we have similar challenges. There is the reality of limited resources, the competition for audiences and the struggle to uphold high journalism standards and fulfill our role as watchdogs and surrogates for the public. For us, this plays out daily in the face of social media's dizzying speed and pressures to break news, update quickly, and engage with audiences.



Constance Hale using her writer expertise to wrangle the crowd and lead us in a workshop with Pulitzer winner Bill Finnegan on how to find the good story in a contested issue.

Not least of all, whether we are nonprofit or commercial, there are bills to pay. A business model that works for one outlet may not apply to another. How can we sustain our local news operations if journalism is to continue to play its vital role in our democracy and to do so free from the financial influences that can color or diminish our coverage? It's a question much on our minds.

As Mary pointed out, the platforms that we rely on to help drive audiences to us are not under our control. If Facebook decides to change its algorithm to disadvantage news outlets, there is a limit to what we can do in response.

But the opportunities in this digitally driven landscape are there as well. We get to reach out to our audiences across multiple platforms, whether from our core channels, on social media, through newsletters, or at live events. We can find out from members of the public what questions they want us to ask the

mayor or we can crowdsource people to interview, solicit tips, and brainstorm angles for stories. The public tells us with a click what it likes and doesn't like, and that helps us refine the content we produce.

Our audiences are global: Mary said her outlet's social media has a bigger footprint than the population of Hawai'i. That kind of reach outside of the state presents new opportunities.

Innovation and creativity can flourish online. We're able to present information in compelling ways, use audio and images, embed documents and create animation that explain complex topics in digestible ways.

More importantly, we hear from our audiences directly and often. There are now multiple ways they can respond to the news or comment on our stories. They can tweet at us or post on Facebook, and they can still pick up the phone to complain or send off a letter to the editor in praise of our work.

All of this engagement strengthens our connection to the community. Often it pushes us to do better and helps elevate our journalism. In a democracy, that's important, too, since we should be held accountable just as we press politicians to justify their actions and challenge them when they deny the facts.

Periodically during our discussion, we surveyed our audience with pop questions—unscientific and broadly worded to be sure, but helpful in understanding who we were addressing. In answer to one question, our audience by show of hands seemed to signal that they trust local media more than national news sources.

But this is not a competition. Without public faith in our journalism, we will lose the audiences we need to sustain ourselves and are diminished in our capacity to fulfill our role in a democracy.

"In the long run, trust is going to override everything," Joel said.

It turns out, we are not unappreciated: a recent Pew Research Center survey of urban Honolulu news consumers indicates they are generally satisfied with the job we do. Fifty-nine percent say local journalists are in

touch with the community, 62 percent believe we report the news accurately and 61 percent agree local journalists are transparent about their reporting.

But we get lower ratings when it comes to keeping an eye on local political leaders, dealing fairly with all sides, and including people like themselves in their stories—all of which should spur us to improve coverage, diversify our sources and newsrooms, and raise the level of public trust so needed for journalism to survive.

I frame our future in existential terms because I do believe that there is an urgency to all of this. Having watched The Honolulu Advertiser sale and merger with its competitor, reading that more than 1,800 communities since 2004 have lost all local news coverage, and seeing news outlets fumble their attempts to develop sustainable digital strategies, I find myself playing the role of Chicken Little: the sky is indeed falling.

It's up to all of us—journalists and the public we serve—to keep the skies aloft. Journalists by now know the challenges we face and are not without help to deploy tactics proven to work in our fraught environment. Citizens, if they patronize news operations that respond to their information needs, should put their dollars down for that service, just as they pay for electricity, mobile phones and Netflix.

“Good information shouldn't be cheap,” as Suevon said.

After looking across the landscape of the past 40 years, The Guardian's Rusbridger, concludes that not all is lost if journalism acts to remake itself—and the public pays attention. “There are signs—sputtering, but hopeful. If the world wakes up in time then we may be all right,” he writes. “Trust me, we do not want a world without news.”

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How Can the Media Combat “Fake News?” With Less Drama and More Data

By Colin Moore



What does it mean to be a talking head in an age when trust in the media is at an all-time low? I had the chance to explore this question at the 2019 Hawai'i Book and Music Festival with fellow panelists Neal Milner and Catherine Toth Fox. As pundits, rather

than journalists, both Neal and I explained how we saw our role as “explainers,” rather than “influencers.” We try to put the breathless coverage of breaking news stories into perspective. Catherine, who has extensive experience with social media, noted that many consumers simply don't know how to evaluate the veracity of stories that appear on their Facebook feeds. What ultimately emerged from our discussion was that more context, better data, and less drama would improve civic discourse in the United States.

Yet we ran short of time before we could fully address the question that many in the audience found so troubling: What can the media do to resist the current “post-truth” moment in American politics?

I've reflected on this a bit since the festival—and there are no easy answers. Along with many in the media, I've been quick to blame the proliferation of opinion-driven newscasts like Fox News. However, the truth is that most Americans don't live in “echo chambers,” hearing only news that reinforces their preexisting beliefs. Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania have shown that citizens do consume news from a variety of sources (Pickard 2014). Indeed, people who watch Fox News, are more likely to watch CNN than most Americans.

The greater problem is that some citizens have stopped paying attention to the news altogether.

As Netflix has replaced the evening news broadcast in many households, Americans live lives that are relatively free of any news at all. Corporate consolidations and increased pressure to attract viewers have led to an “outrage industry” that favors extremist views and provocative commentators (Berry and Sobieraj 2016). This has left the public with fewer trusted voices to help them navigate contemporary debates and makes them particularly vulnerable to conspiracy theories of the sort that can quickly spread on social media platforms.

It's not that media isn't trying, but many approaches have not worked as planned. For example, we might think that nonpartisan fact-checking organizations have the power to neutralize the debates about truth that proliferate on social media. There are a num

ber of terrific online services, such as Fact-check.org, Politifact, and Snopes, that work to dispel all manner of myths from bizarre urban legends to pernicious rumors about elected officials.

But research suggests that attempts to debunk rumors often draw further attention to them and may even help them spread (Marietta and Barker 2019). There is also no evidence that presenting the facts persuades citizens that their evaluations of a political opponent are incorrect. People are more likely to question the integrity of fact-checking organizations than to reevaluate their previously held beliefs. Even worse, many studies show that Americans become even more attached to their false beliefs when they are shown evidence that they are untrue (Berinsky 2015).

So, what can be done?

As our discussion at the festival revealed, we need to provide more context. What do systematic studies say? What should we as citizens worry about and what's simply noise? These are the questions we need to answer. But this requires journalists to work against some of their most deeply ingrained instincts to focus on human drama in their reporting.

One way to accomplish this goal is to rely more on data and less on anecdotes. The rise of “data journalism” has been one of the most positive, although relatively unheralded, developments in news in the past decade.

Finally, part of the solution requires us to re-invest in quality journalism and civic education. One way may be to tax search engine and social media platforms like Facebook and Google to provide funding for public service journalism. Some journalism advocacy groups like the Media Reform Coalition in the United Kingdom have suggested a two percent tax on major beneficiaries of digital advertising, for a public fund that would pay for local news coverage and investigative journalism. These corporations have absorbed much of the ad revenue that used to go to newspapers, but they do not support the hard work of news gathering and reporting—the work that is needed to provide context and present deeply researched and data-driven stories.

What can the media do to resist the current “post-truth” moment in American politics? There is no silver bullet, but putting the news in perspective and relying more on data and less on drama can help. This is doubly true for pundits like me. The best way to compete with the outrage industry is by providing the perspective and tools to help viewers think beyond the 24-hour “breaking news” cycle.

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Pundits, influencers, or great performers? These folks had us cracking up on Sunday morning, talking about opinion and commentary in journalism.

Deeper Connections Digitally

By Sha Ongelungel



Watching social media evolve has been a lot like watching puppies and babies grow up. They start out cute and innocent, and cynical people like me look to them when we need a reminder that the world is, indeed, a lovely place. But, these days, it feels as though social media has hit puberty, learned how to talk back, and keeps chewing up all my nice things. To be fair, we are all still growing up on social media. We are all learning how to maneuver the trolls and misinformation while finding belonging and better ways to use social media platforms.

My social media journey started when I was a seventh grader in Oregon. Given a choice between a Jazzercise class in the school gym or an HTML class in the computer lab, I chose what sounded far less likely to result in injury and embarrassment—HTML class. The teacher went into the history of hypertext markup language, which seemed like something from *Star Trek*, and I was pretty much lost. I remained lost in the proverbial sauce until he handed every student a worksheet with more futuristic looking codes, and then something clicked. It took me one week to build my first website on Geocities. After one year, you could find me on Geocities, Tripod, and Fortunecity. Within three years, I was blogging on Xanga and LiveJournal about Palauan politics and my experiences as a Palauan-American. You could type “Palau” or “Palauan” into a Lycos search, and my name would appear on the first page. That was more than two decades ago when I came to realize building my “online brand” could lead to building community.

At that time, the online Palauan community was minimal at best—mostly college students and professionals on a University of Hawai'i listserv called the “Bridge List,” and all born and raised in Palau. I was an adoles

cent Palauan-American with more questions than commonalities. While grateful for all the Palauans who were patient enough to answer and explain anything and everything to me, I could never escape the cloud of my own “Americanness” and longed for a community that fit me better.

After the Bridge List (and listservs in general) fizzled out in popularity, there came a website called “Friendster.” Friendster was a “social networking website,” different from the world of clinical email groups and chatrooms filled with anonymous alter egos. I could create a profile and connect with others who shared my interests. More importantly, I could find other Micronesians! This exciting new website resulted in my introduction to Kapinga.com (which eventually became Microlslands.com). I was still an awkward teenager in real life, but now I had equally awkward Micronesian-American teenager friends to whom I could vent about the trauma of living between two cultures and my concerns over the future of our communities. Digitally, I felt like I had found my home.

With today’s mainstreaming of social media and its rise to social and political power, I am fully aware of how powerful and painful misinformation can be. From politicians presenting “alternative facts” to regular citizens spreading inaccurate stories about the greater Micronesian community—I have witnessed the dissemination of misinformation transform reasonable people into fear-mongering purveyors of online bigotry. I have mourned for the mental health of long-admired activists as I watched compassion fatigue, or emotional burnout, take its toll, forcing them to walk away from the issues that mattered to them the most. In activist and advocacy spaces, fighting the trollish misinformation monster remains my most significant personal challenge.

How do I continue pushing forward online, in the face of obstacles and enemies that cannot be contained? I follow my dad’s advice:

“Your job isn’t to go out there and change minds. Your strength is putting the information out there, making the truth accessible. Stop wasting time arguing with the willfully ignorant and start identi-

fying your allies and accomplices. Connect with them, strategize with them, and trust them to draw on their strengths to handle the next step. Anything else is wasting your time and resources, and when have you ever had that luxury?”



These leaders dropping really hard and necessary truths about media representation of Micronesians. Thank you for your courage and dignity and standing together.

That was not my intention when I created the #BeingMicronesian hashtag on Twitter in 2018. I was in a foul mood after reading xenophobic comments on Stolen Stuff Hawaii Facebook post. The comments ranged from the usual insults about Micronesians being leeches on resources, to calling for a purge of Micronesians in Hawai‘i and going “hunting for cockroaches.” It can be hard to see the good in humanity when I read those comments—whether in Facebook groups, on posts from local news media, on Instagram “humor” accounts, or just individual tweets. Truth be told, the comments had me on the verge of falling victim to the same compassion fatigue that had claimed the fighting spirit of my nearest-and-dearests. #BeingMicronesian started because I was angry and disheartened over the increase of anti-Micronesian sentiment over the past few years. I wanted someone else to recognize this and be just as angry as I was, instead of saying “they are just jokes,” or that people wouldn’t say these things if the community didn’t deserve it.

Unexpectedly, some of my most beautiful and meaningful human connections came from #BeingMicronesian and the media piec-

es that followed. People from within my own community spoke up, offering stories of bullying and discrimination that they had been hesitant about sharing before the hashtag. My favorite Palauan music producer, Regner Techitong (@itsregnaahh), tweeted about living in Hawai‘i while attending high school and how he wouldn’t admit to being a Micronesian except to other Micronesians:

“I felt embarrassed and it’s something I’ll never forget for as long as I live. I still to this day can’t believe I let some racial slurs make me hate and deny a huge part of who I was. But it wasn’t long after high school that I realized the power of embracing who you are.” (Oct 1 2018)

Others who were not part of the greater Micronesian community contacted me asking for more information and if there were ways for them to help. The story of #BeingMicronesian was featured in national news media. The level of support and interaction I was having with people all over the world gave me a renewed sense of purpose. Native Hawaiian cultural historian Adam Keawe Manalo-Camp, who owns and administrates the “Hawaiian History and Culture” Facebook group that’s over 27,000 members strong, reached out and even wrote an op-ed piece for Civil Beat that outlined the historical connection between Native Hawaiians and Micronesians.

We can utilize the same social media platforms that were used to demonize our communities to inform, educate, identify, and mobilize ourselves and our allies. Six months after Adam and I had our first meeting, we launched two nonprofit organizations (Indigenous Pasifika and Progressive Pasifika) as well as multiple ongoing projects rooted in our shared goals of social justice. We are working alongside organizations and individuals we came to know through social media. By bringing together different perspectives and communities, we are finding and fortifying intersections that have been ignored by too many for far too long. Climate change is a social justice as well as a feminist issue. Consent is about gender roles and sexual power dynamics and also about socioeconomic equality. We cannot address Indigenous rights and self-determination without

acknowledging who benefits from these rights being violated. Many of our struggles stem from colonization, which is not an isolated historical occurrence but a widespread international problem that continues to hugely impact our lives. We know the road to solidarity and equality means starting with this uphill climb, but we also know that there is strength in numbers and that knowledge is power. Most of all, we know that we have the upper hand by making deeper connections digitally.

Sha Merirei Ongelungel is a Palauan-American rabble-rouser, artist, designer, and sporadic podcaster living in Honolulu, Hawai'i. You can connect with her on Twitter (@sha_merirei), Instagram (@merirei), or peruse her work at www.merirei.com.

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Thank you Congressman Ed Case for visiting our program and connecting these important discussions to civic leadership.

Where Objectivity Meets Emotion: Journalism as an Artistic Medium

By Kailanianna Ablog



If carrying a tripod and running up hills in Mānoa Valley or interviewing notable political figures have taught me anything, being a student journalist can be an invigorating experience. Pursuing stories, understanding multiple perspectives, presenting your findings, and correcting mistakes are just a handful of the responsibilities that reporters adhere to. In the words of the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics, we must "seek truth and report it."

I began my journalistic endeavors during my sophomore year at Sacred Hearts Academy. During my time writing for the paper and dabbling in broadcast journalism, I began to hone the art of concise writing. I learned to summarize paragraphs of transcribed text into three sentences, picking out the best few quotes from a 30-minute-long interview.

As I learned from a former Editor-In-Chief of Ka Leo O Hawai'i, the student paper I currently write for: "Journalism is real estate." Whether it be on paper, online or television, you are limited in space or expression. A story you perceive as deserving a full page may only be given half of one; your producer may request you cut down the 5-minute segment you made to 90 seconds. Journalism is not the place for someone to write their AP English Literature essay; audiences care about the facts of a sto-

ry, not fluffy details or what the reporter thinks (unless they are writing an op-ed; that would be a different story).

What I noticed, however, is that conditioning writers to favor concise explanations can remove a sense of human connection and sincerity in one's work. Falling into a set formula becomes mundane and comfortable (not in a good way), thereby creating apprehension to explore anything that deviates from this formula.

How can viewing journalism as an artistic medium cultivate a healthy balance of sincere, emotional response and objectivity?

A PLACE FOR ART

As a junior now at UH Mānoa, I got to serve as a Program Assistant to Hawai'i Council for the Humanities, where I helped organize and promote "Breaking News: Telling Our Own Stories." Between drafting email bursts and designing flyers, the "Fearless: Creative Media and Telling Courageous Stories" panel caught my attention the most.

I knew that I wanted to reconnect with my creative mind and somehow better incorporate art into my work. While listening to the panelists speak, their words reminded me of the artistic girl I used to be and the importance of never losing that creative edge.

The panel featured three young filmmakers from Hawai'i Women in Filmmaking—Inez Anderson, Jessica Hearther, Phoenix Maimiti Valentine—and PBS Hawai'i HIKI NŌ's Robert Pennybacker. This session focused on youth as mediamakers and their use of video to convey sincere, human stories. The panel also highlighted Mr. Pennybacker and his work with HIKI NŌ, the first and only student news show (which I have had the honor of contributing to) in the

nation. This session reminded me of a few things.

Until recently, I have not supported my creative endeavors as much as my academic ones. Growing up, I loved to draw and write stories; I even recall trying my hand at poetry. As the years went by, however, I started to find less use in creative endeavors as I was introduced to the world of STEM and logic. I was open to learning new things, of course, but instead of partaking in art as a passion, it soon became an excuse to escape stress.

I began to separate art from my person, despite it having helped shape how I saw myself and the world.

While in high school, I spent most of my time reaching for high marks and taking on extra work. A part of me enjoyed the competition and opportunity to network with others. While I bloomed socially and scholastically, the creative child within me remained ignored.

I enrolled at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa during the Fall 2017 semester. Excited to be majoring in anthropology and a staff writer for Ka Leo O Hawai'i, I dove into my studies, despite knowing a part of my identity was underdeveloped. I learned from a few painful high school experiences that I had relied too heavily on logic and neglected my emotional and creative self.

I knew I loved my work as a journalist and an aspiring archaeologist, but I did not want to forget that the world is not just arithmetic and made of cold, hard facts. This is where the panel comes back in.

An overarching message the young women had: one, to see a need and go for it, two, never be afraid of how people will perceive your passion, and three, encourage others through your work. The young women were inspiring, and I felt

the fire in their voices, the humble yet determined gazes that burned as they answered questions. These women were unafraid to put their full human selves into their work, something that I, until recently, neglected to do.

Do creativity and emotion have a place in journalism? Definitely. Should they replace concise writing and logic? Of course not.

The panelists made it very clear that there is a balance between logic and emotion—that emotions tend to drive logical thought. Regardless of one's interests, there are a multitude of ways that work and play can be intertwined and accurately expressed. As the panel went on, I suddenly realized that I knew all of this: art and logic can co-exist. There is beauty in combining two seemingly opposite concepts.

I had simply allowed myself to forget.

Finding an intersection between artistic passion and thorough reporting is essential in boosting the field of journalism. As much as they are mediums of information, reporters are also human. Allowing the humanities to cultivate one's work, especially in journalism, can appeal to the creative mind and invoke sincere reactions from audiences.

Logic and emotion are often considered two powerful entities. Together, they can propel one's best research and nurtures a greater sense of passion, thus awakening the whole human and reporter within all of us.

To incorporate what the young women and Mr. Pennybacker had said during the panel, I am spearheading a new column for Ka Leo O Hawai'i called "Ka Leo Abroad," which details the experiences of students studying in different countries. This summer, I am studying in South Korea under the Korean Language Flag-

ship Program, which is funded by the US Department of Defense. Combining my interests in photography and reporting, I will be discussing my personal experiences and sharing tourist locations and general tips about studying in a different country. Those interested can check out <http://www.manoanow.org/kaleo/> for updates.

Kailanianna Ablog is a junior at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Outside of her duties as Ka Leo O Hawai'i's Opinions Editor, she is a student interchanger with the UHM Outreach College and a member of SW!TCH, a Korean Pop dance cover group.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

To check out more fearless stories, please see the websites for these two organizations: PBS Hawai'i's HIKI NŌ and Hawai'i Women in Filmmaking.



Hawai'i Women in Filmmaking and PBS Hawai'i repping strong in this very exciting panel on being fearless in the media. Mahalo Kimberlee Bassford for your graceful expert moderation.

TELL US YOUR STORY

Media continues to be a subject of scrutiny and re-evaluation everywhere we turn. What do you want to hear more about in the news? What, to you, is a sign of a strong healthy democracy? What kind of news do we need to become better-informed citizens? As we gear up for another round of Democracy and Informed Citizen programming in 2020, we want to hear from you and feature your ideas in our e-newsletter. Please write to Hawai'i Council for the Humanities at info@hihumanities.org.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This program was part of the “Democracy and the Informed Citizen” initiative, administered by the Federation of State Humanities Councils and supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the partnership of the Pulitzer Prizes. The initiative seeks to deepen the public’s knowledge and appreciation of the vital connections between democracy, the humanities, journalism, and an informed citizenry.

Mahalo nui to our Program Assistant Kailanianna Ablog for her tremendous work; to our stalwart and creative Humanities Advisors, Craig Howes and Jay Hartwell, for all their support; to Hawai'i Book and Music Festival Director Roger Jellinek for his collaboration and belief; to Try Think staff Rob Chang and Tammy Jones, for helping make safe space for these conversations, and to our Council Staff and Board for all their support of this project.

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