



Chaffey  College

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# **Breaking the Story:** It's a Brave New World

*By Michelle Dowd*

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**Breaking the Story:**  
It's a Brave New World

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Michelle Dowd is a professor of Journalism and a contributing writer to *The New York Times*, *Alpinist*, *Catapult* and other national publications. She founded the award-winning literary journal and creative collective, *The Chaffey Review*, advises *The Breeze* (Chaffey's independent student-run news source), and has taught poetry and critical thinking in the California Institutions for Men and Women in Chino. She has been recognized as a Longreads Top 5 for her article on the relationship between environmentalism and hope in *The Alpinist*, nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize, and was profiled on the second season of *Sincerely X*, a TED production for stories too risky, painful, or controversial to be shared on the stage. She wrote 2020's most popular *Modern Love* column in *The New York Times*, which led to a book deal with Algonquin, who will be releasing her memoir, *Forager: Field Notes for Survival* in late 2022.

From the age of seven to seventeen, Michelle lived on a sixteen-acre undeveloped camp sitting on the San Andreas Fault, in the central section of the Transverse Ranges, within the Angeles National Forest. Here, she learned to identify flora and fauna, navigate by the stars, forage for edible plants, and care for the earth. Michelle and her three siblings moved with their parents into a one-room mess hall, slept on army bunks, walked down the hill to the outhouse, and foraged for seeds. They were told the end of the world was imminent and they needed to be prepared. Part of that preparation was learning to survive off what the mountain would yield. The other part was becoming a soldier in the army of God.

The gift of survival training is knowing what your real needs are and how to meet them. Michelle left the mountain at seventeen to earn her BA in English and World Literature at Pitzer College, followed by a position teaching writing at the University of Colorado, Boulder, where she began graduate work, founded a newsletter called *SmartKids* and raised her babies Summer, River, Storm and Zephyr, who have become her deepest joy.

Part memoir, part survival guide, *Forager* is about what sustains us when we're hungry, and how a relationship with nature can lead us to a healthier relationship with ourselves, our animal bodies and our planet. Structured around edible plants and how to make use of them in the wild, Michelle illustrates her mother's adherence to the rules of the rigorous religious community she was born into, while preparing to survive when the system breaks. *Forager* circles around the gifts of an unconventional past, and how a pilgrimage back to nature can be a pilgrimage back to our most authentic self.

As an E-RYT (Experienced Registered Yoga Teacher), Michelle has been guiding yoga and meditation in southern California studios since 2008, as well as teaching yoga to employees at local businesses, leading Yoga on Tap at Claremont Craft Ales and co-leading Claremont Yoga's Teacher Training certification. She has taught diverse student populations for 27 years--in two California State prisons, at Cal Poly, Pomona, Riverside Community College, and the University of Colorado. As Chaffey's co-leader (with Physics Professor Mark Padilla) of the Lemelson-MIT I3 program (Invention and Inclusion Innovation Initiative), she encourages taking risks, learning through play, teamwork and imagination, and she is committed to helping students cultivate careers doing work they love.

*News is what someone wants suppressed. Everything else is advertising. The power is to set the agenda. What we print and what we don't print matter a lot. — Katharine Graham*

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### **The First Amendment:**

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

### **The Five Core Principles of Journalism don't include the word objectivity. (Total objectivity is humanly impossible.)**

- Truth and Accuracy.
- Independence.
- Fairness and Impartiality.
- Humanity.
- Accountability.

### ***The Elements of Journalism*, by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel**

- 1) Journalism's first obligation is to the truth.
- 2) Its first loyalty is to citizens.
- 3) Its essence is a discipline of verification.
- 4) Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.
- 5) It must serve as an independent monitor of power.
- 6) It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.
- 7) It must strive to make the significant, interesting and relevant.
- 8) It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional.
- 9) Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience.

### **Videos:**

*The Breeze* visits New York

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8SpuEclsVI>

What is *The Breeze*?

<http://www.thebreezepaper.com/video-1/2019/8/29/3klwe7nfyhux4n7lffum3oga3f1785>

“Story rather than datum is the basic unit of journalism.” -- Nicholas Lemann

## **Chapter 1: The Unplayable Piano**

Vera Brandes loved jazz music. She dreamed of bringing her hero, pianist Keith Jarrett, to the Opera House in Cologne, Germany for a solo jazz concert. So she worked really hard to make that happen. In January, 1975, when she was 17 years old, she reserved the Opera House, contacted his people, and sold 1400 tickets for the 1300 seats in the venue. If her dream came true, she would become the youngest musical organizer in Germany's history.

But things didn't go as planned.

After a long and exhausting drive from Zürich, Jarrett arrived at the opera house late in the afternoon in a cold January rain, tired and cranky, only a few hours before the concert. He was hungry, hadn't slept well in several nights, and was wearing a back brace. He wanted to rehearse quickly before going out to dinner, but when he approached the piano, he immediately knew it wasn't the one he ordered. He told Vera unless she could find someone to bring out the Bösendorfer 290 Imperial concert grand piano he had requested, he wouldn't play the concert.

Keith possessed perfect pitch, was fastidious about his pianos, and was a renowned perfectionist. He tried the instrument. The black keys were sticking, the pedals didn't work, the upper register of the keyboard was harsh and tinny because all the felt had worn away, and it was too small, so it didn't have the volume to reach the back of the opera house. It was simply unplayable.

Vera went into panic mode, trying to figure out what had happened. The piano on the stage was a rehearsal piano brought out by staff by mistake, but after a brief search, she realized it was the only piano in the house. So Vera called around to every possible source of a concert piano, and she finally convinced the father of one of her friends to get her the piano. She gathered enough friends who could help bring the piano Keith wanted to the opera house. And just when she thought she had done so, the piano tuner said to her and heard about her plan, “Do you have 50,000 marks in your bank account?”

Vera said, “what do you mean?”

“Well, the piano tuner said, “any piano you bring here will be ruined in the rain and no one will ever play on it again. Not only will you for sure not have a piano Keith can play, but you will also have to pay for the one you ruin. You can't possibly get a piano here tonight. It's impossible.”

Keith told Vera the concert was off and stormed out to the car to go to dinner.

She followed him.

She watched him get into his car.

He ignored her.

She approached his car door and knocked. When he rolled down the window, she got down on her knees in the pouring rain and begged.

Keith looked at this young girl who was so passionate about music, she had worked tirelessly to put this event together. He took pity on her. “Never forget. Only for you.”

And he went on stage. And played the best concert of his life. In fact, this concert, the Köln Concert, is a masterpiece.

What happened?

All the adjustments Keith had to make made this performance unusual in every way. He stood up and pounded down on the keys to make sure the back of the auditorium could hear him. Because the piano was thin in the upper registers and weak in the bass register, Keith concentrated his playing in the middle portion of the keyboard and used ostinatos and rolling left-hand rhythmic figures to accentuate the bass notes.

These adjustments, which Keith intuitively improvised, made his performance particularly dynamic. His producer later said: "Because he could not fall in love with the sound of it, he found another way to get the most out of it."

The Köln Concert is the best-selling jazz solo album of all time.

Sometimes disruption encourages coping strategies that more than compensate for the discomfort. Sometimes disorder and frustration shake things up in a helpful way, requiring us to adopt a completely different approach.

Journalism is like that. It's the first draft of history and as you know, the first draft is never right.

In fact, we're working with an unplayable piano.

People have access to more news, but they trust the news less. Newsrooms are shrinking. Papers all over the country are owned by massive corporations, saddled to century-old business models, making them unable to compete with free online news aggregators, like the Huffington Post or Breitbart News.

In the past twenty years, the way news is covered, reported, written, and edited, has changed dramatically. This is partly because of our immediate access to information via handheld devices, and partly due to mergers, acquisitions and corporate ownership, escalated by Facebook, Twitter and aggregators like BuzzFeed.

But it's also because before the average person had access to verification tools, we had an old system, with a hierarchy of "responsible" gatekeepers who told us what was true.

Now audiences have to decide for themselves.

If no one has ever told you this, let me be the first: there's always been fake news. As long as people have been interpreting the events around them and sharing those stories with other people, even in the best cases, we have done so from a limited perspective, with unintentional bias and a hidden agenda. In the worst cases, reporters and the corporations or government agencies who inform them have deliberately made up what they think will move people to act in the way they desire.

And for most of us, the way we determine what is true is largely by what news sources we are looking at. People gravitate toward information that confirms what they believe, and they select sources that deliver it. According to Chris Mooney, in a *Mother Jones* article on "The Science of Why We Don't Believe Science," most Americans now consume information through Facebook links from friends, or tweets that lack nuance or context, relying on "narrowcasts" rather than broadcasts, and often highly ideological media that have relatively small, like-minded audiences.

It's frightening. But not actually new. Listening to people who agree with you stems from an evolutionary life-saving commitment to community. As humans, we are all inculcated with the values of our subcultures, from the people we consider "our people," and we will defend the values of our people against reason.

Numerous studies have shown that facts alone don't convince most people to change their minds. But stories, especially ones that address communal values, are far more persuasive."

And this may be where we can approach the unplayable piano with more dynamism. And a greater sense of urgency.



New forms of journalism resist the editorial restraint of traditional hierarchies most Americans have been taught to value since grade school. Our multiple-platform fluid communication models are certainly disorienting, but they're also disruptive to our monocultural narrative. Groups who have been notoriously left out of the newsroom - people of color, people of different faiths, women, immigrants, and members of the L.G.B.T.Q.I.A. community-are starting to find platforms where their voices are heard.

For new voices to be heard, there has to be a toppling of the old guard.

The purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to make the best possible decisions about their lives, communities, societies, and governments. The news helps us define our communities. It also helps us create a common language and common knowledge rooted in reality.

Journalism is for building a sense of community that the government can't control. Journalism is for citizenship, democracy and for taking back the language from a government that can and often does subvert it with propaganda that undermines freedom of thought itself. Journalism is so fundamental to personal agency, societies that want to suppress freedom must first suppress the press.

Journalism isn't meant to be a megaphone for the powerful. It's a trade skill designed to carry on and amplify the conversations of the people. The rise of blogs, social media, and mobile devices is a way for citizens to create their own content.

But many consumers of news worry about what's happening to our shared space, and the concept of shared knowledge.

Here's the conundrum. The old gatekeeping model established and maintained agreed upon standards, but it also limited perspectives. New technologies allow for more diverse voices than ever before. But new technologies also provide new ways to subvert the truth. Though people have access to more information from more perspectives than ever before, they often listen only to those voices with which they already agree.

Without context, it's difficult to absorb information with which we are unfamiliar.

So overall, does digital technology's disruption of journalism make the world worse or better?

It depends on who is telling the story.

We have new platforms on which to tell stories. But new technologies may be bringing us back closer to where we started...

## **Chapter 2 - Unleashing the Monster**

It is difficult to get the news from poems, yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there. ~  
William Carlos Williams

Once upon a time, in a land far far away, there lived a little girl named Mary, who often sat on her mother's grave, distressed that she had killed her. Legend has it, she learned to read and write by tracing her fingers along the words of her mother's tombstone.

It wasn't her fault, of course, that her mom died giving birth to her. But the truth is, if she hadn't given birth to Mary, Mary's mother, also named Mary, would still be alive. So, you can imagine young Mary's grief, and all the ways she blamed herself. You can imagine how she felt isolated in her family, which got even worse after her father remarried, and her stepmother brought in her own children.

This sounds like a fairytale, but it's true.

Mary visited her mother's grave for years, talking to her, imagining how things should have been different.

One day, in 1813, when Mary was 16, a young man showed up to study with her father. He was also a scholar of Mary's mother's writing, and visited with Mary as she sat at her mother's grave. Percy was twenty-two, a poet and an idealist, who was also the rebel son of a member of Parliament. He had recently been kicked out of Oxford for circulating radical pamphlets. Mary found both his devotion to her parents, and his rebellion, compelling.

So they fell madly in love.

And maybe they would have lived happily after.

But Percy was married with two children, and Mary's father was furious with them for ignoring that. So they had to run away to be together.

And this is where things begin to get a little darker.

Sixteen-year-old Mary runs off with 22-year-old Percy and treks around continental Europe, where she gives birth to a baby girl who dies after only a few weeks. Cut off from society, and from their parents, the couple runs out of money. So they decide to stay with Percy's poet friend Lord Byron, who is spending the summer on Lake Geneva.

The season is cold and rainy, and they spend many evenings around the fire, reading German ghost stories and discussing the power of electricity, and its potential to reanimate corpses.

One day, Byron suggests a competition. They should each write a ghost story, and the scariest one will win. Eighteen-year-old Mary, pregnant again, alienated from her family and all of society for running off with a married man, hanging out with two men on a lake, takes the competition seriously, and she begins to write her story.

Which comes to her in a dream.

Mary has a vision of a creature brought into the world without a mother, brought into a world that doesn't want him. This creature wants to feel love and acceptance, but he is consistently rejected, and so he turns against the world that made him.

Created from the remnants of the deceased, this monster is unleashed on the world before Dr. Frankenstein has considered the ethics of his actions or the ethics the monster will need to interact peacefully in a world that isn't ready for him.

Frankenstein's monster is made from the things we don't want and often don't acknowledge. And what we exclude from social sympathy becomes more dangerous than it would have otherwise. Is it possible he's the parts of us we disavow, that he's made from our mistakes and shadows, but he longs for what we all long for, to be seen and to belong. But through no fault of his own, he can't have those things.

Kind of like a teenage motherless new-mother Mary.

Mary Shelley wrote, "Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos..." And out of the chaos, *Frankenstein* became a phenomenal success.

Partly because the public assumes it was written by a man. Because of course, under the complicated circumstances, it made sense to publish *Frankenstein* anonymously.

*Frankenstein* is partly a story about a young woman's justifiable fear of giving birth. Mary used her own perspective to tap into widely-held cultural fears of the era. Her monster was a reaction to the Industrial Revolution and the growing debates about science and technology.

In some ways, journalism is also up against a mishmash of old world thinking, without the foundation of ethics needed to restrain this new monster. But it's too late to recall and disassemble it. It's our job to define the parameters to make this new journalism responsible.

What if old school journalism can't answer our questions?

Women were already creating. But they weren't telling their stories publicly. When Mary usurped the white male voice, the result was a terrifying tale.

Rebecca Solnit says that the history of this country has been written as white men's stories, and traditional news still privileges this voice. "One of the battles of our time is who the story is about, who matters and who decides."

Who gets to be the subject of the story is an immensely political question. As digital platforms continue to emerge and communication changes, both the way we tell stories and whose stories we tell will continue to change.

### **Chapter 3 - Journalism is the First Draft of History**

Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost. Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.—Thomas Jefferson

Before the printing press, it took a monk a full year to transcribe one Bible. And there were only 122 books in the library of Oxford University. In 1450, the first year after the press began, Gutenberg printed 180 Bibles. Within 50 years, there were 35,000 new books that had been written in Europe. And 10 million books in circulation.

A key point of Martin Luther's reformation was that every Christian should know how to read so they could wrestle their own path to salvation.

That was the selling point. And it worked.

But it is a little-known (but undisputed historical fact) that Johannes Gutenberg did not invent the printing press. Though the Gutenberg Bible was certainly the first mass produced printed work, it was hardly the first printed book — nor was it even the first made using movable type. Chinese and Korean inventors had been producing printed books for centuries before Gutenberg was born. One of the truisms of Western history is that a German guy named Gutenberg invented the printing press, changing the course of civilization forever. There is no doubt that Gutenberg's printing press was a novel technology. But to say that he invented the printing press is like saying Steve Jobs or Bill Gates invented the computer. He certainly made it a commercially available device, but Gutenberg's role was as a popularizer and entrepreneur. Gutenberg's real genius was in adapting the technology for a Western market, capitalizing on a few quirks of the Roman alphabet to bring printed books to the mainstream.

Bookmaking took off because the importance of The Bible was a European cultural construct and an ideological apparatus that furthered the interests of the state.

But of course, once a wider portion of the population could read and write, there were more voices added to the conversation.

When the printing press was no longer solely in the hands of the ruling class, war on the press began.

For example, in this country, the first newspaper was published in 1690. And it was shut down the very next day.

On September 25, 1690, the first colonial newspaper in America, *Publick Occurrences Both Forreign and Domestick*, was published. The British governor forced publisher Benjamin Harris and printer Richard Pierce to close down the newspaper for “reflections of a very high nature” and for failing to obtain a correct printing license. Harris hoped to publish the Boston newspaper every month, but his September 25th edition remains the only issue printed.

In 1798, John Adams passed the Sedition Act, permitting the deportation, fine, or imprisonment of anyone deemed a threat or publishing “false, scandalous, or malicious writing” against the government of the United States. Numerous papers were shut down.

In 1917, Woodrow Wilson passed the Espionage Act. Which, in some cases, made it a crime to tell the truth. Although the Espionage Act was designed to protect our military defense, it also became a way to censor journalists who criticized the government or the military. The stated purpose of the Espionage Act was to prohibit interference with military operations. But the Espionage Act also gave US postal officials the authority to prohibit the mailing of newspapers and magazines that were deemed scurrilous.

This crisis of authority isn't new.

Most of us are uncomfortable with the idea that truth is a relative term. But think about it: when anyone insists they know the truth, and insists on suppressing other viewpoints, that's fascism. The goal of journalism shouldn't be about reporting a singular truth. Journalism is about creating an environment for free expression, where truth can do battle with lies. And in the immediateness of reporting, it will always be unclear which is which.

The U.S. government is seeking to prosecute Julian Assange under the 1917 Espionage Act, for publishing classified documents exposing war crimes, government lies, and illegal spying. While Ellsberg faced 115 years in prison for his classified leaks of the Pentagon Papers (for which he was acquitted), Assange is facing 175 years in prison for what appears to be a basic act of journalism. The government claims that he didn't simply receive classified documents, but solicited them from Pvt. Manning. Ellsberg, who has been supportive of Assange's work, has said, “I can't count the amount of times I've been solicited for classified information...that's journalism.”

The recent release of the Afghan Papers has received almost no mainstream media coverage. These documents prove that the government has been lying to the American people about the Afghan war for almost two decades. These documents are easily as incriminating as Ellsberg's Pentagon Papers. The fact that they are not widely known is a stark reminder of the state of American journalism.

One of our journalism students, Eric, recently asked, what is more dangerous, ridiculous fake news stories like pizzagate, or the ones told by the mainstream media that lead to wars that kills millions around the world?

The story always looks a little different, depending on who is telling it.

The goal of the media is to inform members of the public so they can make informed decisions about their lives. It's our job as citizens to ascertain whether information is reliable. Undermining public trust in the media itself is an abuse of power. As soon as we say the truth is more important than freedom of expression, we empower the government to take control of the narrative.

And governments don't necessarily represent the views of the people.

This is a tremendously complex problem, but the broadest and most fundamental concern isn't whether too many voices are being heard; it's whether our information environment has been corrupted.

More than 1,400 cities and towns have lost newspapers in the past 15 years, but that's not because people don't care about the news. It's because we've changed the way we consume news.

The way we consume news has mostly shifted to a culture of immediacy. We don't have to wait for an evening broadcast or a print press to find out what happened earlier today. The news cycle is 24/7. Moments after an event has occurred, multiple voices present their perspective on platforms like Twitter.

When we talk about the information ecosystem, there are no longer the filters of professional gatekeepers.

We may instead be at the mercy of what grabs our attention the quickest, which is what advertisers latch onto. Advertisers prey on our inability to look away.

According to Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent*, the upper class controls and skews the news to get the masses to believe whatever serves them best:

The media covers events in ways that favor the elite ruling class.

Because of the need for advertising revenue, news outlets focus on stories that will benefit their advertisers. Experts give facts and information that are really just a form of the upper class controlling the media with their money.

Giving factual (and historical) context to world events is critical to understanding them. If you don't know the historical context of current events, as the great American historian Howard Zinn said, "Anybody can convince you of anything."

## Chapter 4 - Whose Story Are We Telling?

"College newsrooms matter. They train the next generation of truth tellers." Eric Lipton

As all our journalism students can recite for you," Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

I taught English literature, poetry, critical thinking, a smattering of composition courses and all the genres of creative writing at all three of our campuses and at the women's prison in Chino before teaching my first journalism course. And while the news has its own code of ethics and its own pyramid, everything I taught prior to entering this department taught me the foundations of what is most essential to reporting.

Before taking over as Adviser to our campus newspaper, *The Breeze*, I shadowed the Adviser Doug Walsh for a year. During which I learned three essential things:

1. it's redundant to use the phrase "here at Chaffey,"
2. comic sans is an embarrassing font
3. as a journalist in pursuit of a story, there are lines you shouldn't cross. But when you walk back into this newsroom, we should be able to see the chalk on your shoes.

We can't report the "truth" without taking risks. Yes, we want facts. But sometimes facts aren't evident. Just because we are told a master narrative doesn't mean that that narrative is true.

Traditional publishing reinforces hierarchies we have all come to see as "normal." Maybe journalism needed to be shaken up and disrupted.

Technology takes a hold when people want what it offers.

There is no such thing as a completely objective voice. Nevertheless, this journalistic myth has persisted and been accepted for decades. Presenting facts and letting readers formulate their own opinion is part of the journalists' code of ethics, but the definition of what a fact is, is genuinely debatable. From where are these "facts" derived? Have they been confirmed by multiple, unrelated, unconnected sources? What facts are presented, and what facts have been omitted?

When people throw out the term, “fake news,” they are likely referring to disinformation, misinformation, questions of reliability, or the widening information environment.

Old technologies don’t disappear. They just transform. While we used to get our news orally, we transitioned to handwritten notes, typography, telegraphs, stenography, television, radio, cable, internet, and social media. We still gossip; we still write each other handwritten notes, we still call to share news, or text, or look to our tvs, listen to our radios or podcasts when we drive. There are just far more options than there used to be.

Journalism is changing, and this isn’t as apocalyptic as many would have you believe. Many of the reporters who capture our interest and inform us of domestic or global issues clearly challenge the hegemonic discourse of long held traditions and/or corporate interests. In an industry full of multi-hyphenate creatives, journalistic content is now part of a conversation, not merely a monologue or one-way broadcast, and journalists are responsible for engaging with their audience in a way that was inconceivable before the ubiquity of smartphones.

Supported by extensive advertising budgets, traditional print publications have required vast resources to produce and deliver, and top editors have almost always come from the elite class, reinforcing the perspective of those in power, which we have come to see as “normal.” Digital platforms can be managed with a much smaller staff and budget, some of which are monetized by subscription services rather than advertising. This can potentially support far more independent news sourcing.

News has been dominated by the stories of the people in society who we have been taught to trust. But those certainly aren’t the only stories. As Fredrick Douglas said, “My part has been to tell the story of the slave. The story of the master never wanted for narrators.”

The question is, who gets to tell their story? And whose story do we listen to?

The old school way of doing things required gatekeepers to maintain the “truth” and “quality” of hegemonic discourse. Wider groups of people are speaking truth to power, and using storytelling as a survival tool, creating a rising tide of citizen journalists. Telling marginalized stories breaks the culture of silence and stigma surrounding uncomfortable topics, including poverty, sexual assault, lack of documentation, and/or communities displaced by gentrification.

Meredith Talusan is a Filipino-American, transgender woman with Albinism, a former writer for Chaffey’s newspaper, *The Breeze*, and an award-winning journalist, all factors that have enriched and inspired her life. Her book *Fairest*, which is being released next month by Penguin Viking, tells the story of her transformations, across multiple intersections of race, gender, colorism, migration, colonialism, queerness, privilege, class and belonging, perspectives seldom captured in our mainstream news outlets. Her albinism often caused her to be perceived as white, and offered her access to privilege often denied other immigrants in America. She graduated from both Harvard and Yale, and is able to tell an outsider’s perspective with the language of insiders. She began on digital platforms, and this is the kind of disruption that has widened the journalistic lens through which we perceive the world.

Let me give you an example of how this translates to the classroom.

Our newsroom at the Breeze is asymmetrical, rimmed by Apple computers cramping the walls at odd angles. An oversized wooden table dominates the majority of the room, and this is where students sit facing each other, as if partaking in an Amish meal.

Pranay, a student new to the college, and to journalism, pulls down a white screen over the dilapidated cabinets that line the one free wall, and points to a picture of a solemn young man trapped in what looks like a cage. He explains how Shane Bauer went undercover as a correctional officer in a privately run prison, to expose the viciously inhumane conditions of CCA, a private organization that runs 61 facilities across the United States, including 34 state prisons, 14 federal prisons, 9 immigration detention centers, and 4 jails.

Pranay informs the students about how, in 2009, Bauer and two friends were accused of being spies, and taken into custody while hiking near the Iranian border. Bauer was held in captivity for over two years, including a 4 month stint in solitary confinement.

Shane Bauer went on to write a 35,000 word expose published in *Mother Jones*.

“Journalists inform us about what we need to know,” he says, “Good Journalism gets our attention, and really good Journalism keeps our attention. But great Journalism creates real world change.”

Was it biased for Bauer to write about prisons, considering his time in one?

This unusual life experience undoubtedly affected his interest in prisons, providing a clear point of reference for recognizing, describing and challenging the harsh conditions of our own systems of incarceration — particularly those that are privately run, which have fewer governmental requirements for transparency.

The students dutifully take notes as Pranay showcases another *Mother Jones* article claiming ten major judicial, governmental and policy changes that have taken place since the CCA investigation broke.

Some of the students seem uncomfortable and ask Pranay if that’s objective reporting. “Isn’t it unethical to go undercover to get a story like that?”

Pranay explains that Bauer didn’t go undercover. He didn’t lie about his name and he didn’t lie about his past work as a reporter, nor his current employment with *Mother Jones*. He just left it out of the narrative.

And they needed guards so badly, the background check only was brief. It showed he had no criminal history. Apparently, no one at CCA even googled Shane Bauer’s name.

In an interview on Longform Podcast, Aaron Lammer says to Bauer, “One of the most incredible details about this story is that you did this, basically transparently, under your own name... Do you think that having had that prior [solitary confinement] experience informed your emotional response to the things you saw?” Bauer responds that he doesn’t know what his life would have been like had he not been held in captivity in Iran, but he doubts he would have considered doing this. “I mean, I hadn’t written about prisons before I was in prison myself, and that experience certainly drew me to investigating prisons in The United States....”

We used to call this a conflict of interest in the field of journalism. But the reality is, Shane Bauer had the necessary motivation, drive, curiosity and skepticism to spend four months as a prison guard under horrific conditions, in order to capture the truth about an institution to which very few reporters have ever had unrestricted access.

Could he, or would he, have done this without a vested interest?

In our newsroom, students are encouraged to follow their personal interests, to engage in curiosity and skepticism, to develop ideas that interest them, and to strive to present culturally relevant, well-researched stories from a clearly-defined perspective. Which, to be fair, is undoubtedly their own. They practice formulating a professional persona, but are also encouraged to adopt a unique voice in their storytelling, instead of regurgitating news in the attempted voice of “just-the-facts, ma’am.” This does not mean they make up news or that they are loose with facts or sloppy in their reporting. It means they are aware of their limitations as reporters and that they are transparent about their perspectives. As critical thinkers, they define their terms synonymously, ostensibly, stipulatively and bi-conditionally, and they support their positions with real events, hypothetical instances, authoritative testimony, statistics and analogies. Journalism no longer requires you to categorically present facts as if they have no vantage point or vested interest.

Objectivity has always been a self-delusion.

The principles of informing the public and acting as a watchdog to abuses of power remain fully intact. But journalistic content is now part of a conversation, not merely a monologue or one-way broadcast, and journalists are responsible for engaging with their audience in a way that was inconceivable before the ubiquity of smartphones. In *Beyond News: the Future of Journalism*, Mitchell Stephens claims, “The Web allows our best journalists — it requires them, I will argue — to return to an older and higher view of their calling: not as reporters of what’s going on, but as individuals capable of providing a wise take of what’s going on....”

Journalism has long upheld the standards of objectivity, fairness, impartiality, and balance, and while these are surely admirable goals for which we should strive, the subjectivity through which we obtain information is clearly not impartial, and should therefore be recognized. In “Hey MSM: All Journalism Is Advocacy Journalism,” from *Rolling Stone*, Matt Taibi argues against the possibility of objectivity or unbiased reporting, advising that “people should be skeptical of everything they read. In fact, people should be *more* skeptical of reporters who claim not to be advocates, because those people are almost always lying, whether they know it or not.” Taibi is clear that the business of journalism no longer requires a neutral perspective: “No matter how it’s presented, every report by every reporter advances someone’s point of view. The advocacy can be hidden, as it is in the monotone narration of a news anchor for a big network like CBS or NBC (where the biases of advertisers and corporate backers like GE are disguised in a thousand subtle ways), or it can be out in the open, [as it proudly is with Greenwald, or graspingly with Sorkin,] or institutionally with a company like Fox. But to pretend there’s such a thing as journalism without advocacy is just silly.”

The vocation of journalism is no longer a form of stenography. Total objectivity is no longer the only tone in journalism, and there is clear value in more transparent reporting, especially online. Many of the reporters who capture our interest and inform us of global or domestic issues clearly challenge the hegemonic discourse of long held traditions and/or corporate interests.

This means that in order to have an informed opinion on anything of substance, students must take the time to consume media in an informed and responsible manner, and that as citizen journalists, we have both the right and the responsibility to contribute to sociocultural conversations and public discourse in a meaningful and transparent manner.

American journalist Jeff Jarvis believes we are witnessing a massive epistemological shift, the veritable end of the Gutenberg era, with its dependence on print and emphasis on authorship, linearity, fixity and closure. Digital technology disrupts such modes of knowing, and the institutions that supported them (which most of us were trained in). No longer will editors and journalists deliver the “products” they think people should have (the Gutenberg era). Journalism will be less about going out and gathering facts and reporting from the field and more about curating other people's contributions and guiding a conversation. The focus will shift from content to the connections it produces.

Diverse citizen journalists are producing content at a rate we’ve never before seen. In many cases, this requires a new role for professional journalists, who then become brokers of knowledge, dialogue and policy.

### **Definitions by MATTHEW C. NISBET and DECLAN FAHY:**

**Knowledge brokers** - Knowledge-based journalists open up the process of expert knowledge production for their readers, examining how and why scientific research was done, sometimes positing alternative interpretations or drawing connections to ongoing debates about a complex problem such as climate change or obesity. The emphasis is on taking the public “backstage,” behind the curtains and the theater that typify press releases and traditional news stories; to focus on the institutions, assumptions, ideologies, political factors, and personalities that influence the production of expert knowledge.

**Dialogue brokers** - As the news industry invests in a range of innovative digital initiatives, a second complementary approach to doing knowledge-based journalism is likely to prove particularly relevant. In this dialogue broker method, an expert journalist uses blogging, podcasts, video interviews, Twitter, Facebook, and other social media tools to convene interconnected, cross-platform discussions among a professionally and politically diverse network of contributors and readers.



**Policy brokers** - In a third complementary role, journalists can help to diffuse polarization in policy debates by expanding, through their coverage, the range of policy options and technologies under consideration by the public and political community. This policy broker model reflects arguments by Roger Pielke Jr., who demonstrates through a series of case studies that the broader the menu of policies and technologies available to decision-makers, the greater the opportunity for decision makers to reach agreement on paths forward. Their findings suggest that perceptions of culturally contested issues such as climate change are often policy and technology dependent and that polarization is likely to be diffused under conditions where the focus is on a diverse rather than narrow set of proposed options.

Engaging in civic discourse is what being an educated citizen is all about. Journalism isn't dead, nor is it dying. It's simply changing. And in many ways, for the better. Telling stories (audio-visually, print or digital, via words or images) gives us more ways to engage in global conversations.

## Chapter 5- Stories Mean Different Things to Different People

“My mission, my religion, is to change those stories, or at least create a crack in them that will let something else grow from them, eventually.” – Samantha Dunn

Our ways of interpreting data and hearing stories are subjective. Which makes many of us uncomfortable. We want to believe that if we just stick to the facts, we'll know the truth. But the truth is more slippery than we might imagine. And the truth is more important to most of us than the facts.

Joe George first identified 52 Blue in 1992 when he worked for the Navy. He measured audio data gathered by a network of hydrophones spread across the ocean floor. These hydrophones had been used to monitor Soviet subs until the Cold War ended. After their declassification, without Soviet submarines to listen to, the Navy started to think about how else the expensive hydrophones could be used.

Navy personnel who had spent years tracking subs started listening to the sounds and songs of whales, rather than threats.

One whale really caught their attention. His sound patterns were recognizable as those of a blue whale, but his frequency was unheard of. The key notes of the song were at a frequency of 52 Hertz. To human ears this is a low bass note, but it is significantly higher than the typical blue whale, which sings between 10 and 40Hz.

They kept track of him for years, every migration season, as he made his way from Alaska to Mexico. His path wasn't unusual. Only his song.

They called him 52 Blue. Because this particular whale sings at a pitch of 52 Hertz.

52 Blue's unusual frequency was interesting for largely practical reasons; his singularity made him easy to track. It allowed for an abiding relationship to 52 as an individual creature, while other whales blurred into a more anonymous collective body.

Joe George collected the recordings, but it was Bill Watkins, a marine mammal researcher at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts, who first realized the significance of Joe's recordings. For Bill, tracking the 52Hz whale became an obsession.

And his findings would eventually make their way to a woman named Leonora.

A few months before his death, Bill completed work on a paper summarizing 12 years' worth of recordings. The paper describes the units of noise recorded from the whale (“calls,” “groups,” “series,” and “bouts”) as well as patterns in his motion: “The tracks for the 52-Hz whale indicated relatively slow, continuous movement” across “the deep waters of the central and eastern portion of the North Pacific basin,” where he “roamed widely” and “spent relatively little time in any particular area,” and, as far as we know, never crossed paths with any other whales.

Joe's recordings and Bill's paper had most of the elements of a great story. We have a renowned and dedicated scientist, years of collaboration on classified military recordings, and when the material is declassified, publication of those findings.

Which is where Leonora comes in.

When Leonora had the bulk of her intestines removed, she was put into a seven-week coma to facilitate her recovery. When she awoke, it was hard for her to speak because of all the scarring from her trachea tubes. She felt adrift, and one night, while struggling to rediscover her sense of self and to express what she was thinking and feeling, Leonora came upon the story of 52 Blue.

The story of the whale had been floating around the Internet for several years, but it spoke to Leonora with a particular urgency. "He was speaking a language that no one else could speak," she said. "And here I was without a language. I had no more language to describe what had happened to me....I was like him. I had nothing. No one to communicate with. No one was hearing. No one was hearing him. And I thought: I hear you. I wish you could hear me."

She remembers thinking: I wish I could speak whale. She found a strange kind of hope, a sense of certainty that he must know he wasn't alone. "I was like: Here he is. He's talking. He's saying something. He's singing. And nobody's really understanding, but there are people listening. I bet he knows people are listening. He must feel it."

As Leonora recovered, she described her coma and its aftermath as a "resurrection," "rebirth," "second birth." She had been bleeding for years. And at the end of all that blood, when she came back from death, she gave birth to herself.

Sometimes we need to be heard so badly we hear ourselves in every song the world sings, every single noise it makes.

To Joe, the sounds of 52 Blue were fascinating to monitor. They could be measured, and so he measured them. Bill took those facts and tracked them more extensively, creating the beginning of a narrative, that 52 Blue sings with a frequency divergent from most whales. Leonora made the whale worth looking for. And a team of documentary filmmakers are doing so as I write this.

To Leonora, the sounds of 52 Blue brought her back to life. For Leona, feeling is a kind of fact. And that's essential in our storytelling. Leonora's emotion is more persuasive and "true" to the story of 52 Blue than Joe's measurements. It's Leonora's story that has made 52 Blue a story shared by millions. Is Leonora's interpretation worth less than Joe's?

Joe enjoyed measuring the sounds. But it didn't change the way he sees the world. What changed the way he saw the world was Leonora's response to his research. When Joe George heard about Leonora, he said all his work with the hydrophones was worth it.

We talk about facts, but the truth is, no one has ever seen 52 Blue. Many people have heard sounds we now attribute to a certain whale, an unseen whale we have named, but 52 Blue isn't a fact. It's a story created to explain unusual measurements of sound.

What if the facts are only a part of this story? Can we accept that? What if we can't answer the question of why this whale matters. Can we let the whale cleave in two? Can we accept the sounds of his actual form as one version, and the apparition of what we need to hear as another? What if we watch them cut two paths across the sea, and accept both as valid.

## **Chapter 6- The Crisis of Authority**

"There is nothing so fretting and vexatious, nothing so justly terrible to tyrants, and their tools and abettors, as a free press." --Samuel Adams, 1768

Every story is framed.

The story always looks a little different, depending on who is framing it.

There's no truth outside of the lens through which we record it. And there's no truth we attach to more fully than narrative.

As Joan Didion says, *We tell ourselves stories in order to live.*

Those who tell us to be objective, as if they themselves are objective, are not being honest. If you look very carefully you will see that they are the same people who are quite happy with the situation as it is.

What they are saying is don't upset the system.

Maybe journalism and the information ecosystem needed to be shaken up and disrupted.

## **Chapter 7 - What Has Disrupted Us May Now Begin to Save Us.**

“Misinformation is not like a plumbing problem you fix. It is a social condition, like crime, that you must constantly monitor and adjust to.” - Tom Rosenstiel

For decades, much of corporate media has presented facts as if they were stenographers for the powerful. But journalists have also been whistleblowers, revolutionaries, and instruments of change.

And publicly funded, independent, investigative journalism is growing and expanding across platforms.

Take the most recent story of Curtis Flowers.

In 1996, three employees and the owner of Tardy Furniture were shot to death in Mississippi. There were no witnesses, no murder weapon and no obvious suspects.

26-year-old Curtis Flowers had been fired from the store 13 days prior to the murders, and he owed the company \$30 for a cash advance on his paycheck. So he became the lone suspect.

All evidence was circumstantial. Some people in town said they saw Flowers near the front of the store on the morning of the shootings. No gun was ever found and no direct evidence tied Flowers to the murders. But the head prosecutor Doug Evans was aggressive, and Curtis was convicted and sentenced to death.

In 2018, journalist Madeleine Baran based the second season of her investigative podcast *In the Dark* on the Flowers case. She reported on the past 23 years, including six trials in which Curtis was convicted, and six times those convictions were overturned. She detailed retracted confessions by numerous witnesses, potential misconduct by the prosecutor, and the mysterious disappearance of a gun after it was turned over to the police.

Journalistic investigations of criminal trials are nothing new, but in this case, Madeline uncovered misconduct, including jury selections that were racially-motivated, that affected the case so significantly, the Supreme Court agreed to hear it. Flowers' lawyers quoted Madeline's podcast in their appeal, and Curtis's conviction was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court. During the podcast, thousands of listeners sent in questions via tweets, Facebook messages and emails, informing the direction of *In the Dark*.

And Curtis Flowers has been let out of prison on bail, for the first time in 23 years.

This story is appealing because the work Madeline did on her podcast made a difference in the life of Curtis Flowers, and hopefully, in the lives of other incarcerated individuals who fall into categories we find suspicious. But also because the easy and immediate availability of podcasting made Curtis Flowers, a poor Black man from Mississippi, relevant.

I think of my own experience teaching in CIW and CIM and the stories the incarcerated students wrote about their lives, the vast majority of which will never be shared outside of prison walls. For example, few years ago, a woman incarcerated for killing her pimp wrote a story in *The Chaffey Review* under a pseudonym. California had passed a new law about victims of domestic violence and crimes of self-defense, so her sentencing was

being re-evaluated. Her story assesses the effects of trauma, blocked memories as a defense mechanism, and what it means to be guilty.

There is a lot we don't talk about.

Leaders often fear the media because effective journalists draw attention to truths which, when disseminated widely, can no longer be ignored.

## **Chapter 8 - Can This Marriage be Saved?**

“Be careful. People like to be told what they already know. Remember that. They get uncomfortable when you tell them new things. New things...well, new things aren't what they expect. They like to know that, say, a dog will bite a man. That is what dogs do. They don't want to know that man bites a dog, because the world is not supposed to happen like that. In short, what people think they want is news, but what they really crave is olds...Not news but olds, telling people that what they think they already know is true.” — Terry Pratchett

When I was growing up, the only reading material I could find besides the Bible was my grandmother's collection of women's magazines she placed on her coffee table for the mothers of her piano students to read as they waited, without cell phones, for their children to receive their lessons.

Once I had finished the Bible, I read every magazine my grandmother placed on that table.

I learned the performance of gender, but I also learned a lot about perspective.

The long-running *Ladies' Home Journal* column called "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" featured real-life couples and the juicy details of their marital issues.

The columns were split into three parts: a wife's perspective, her husband's take and then final judgment by a counselor from the American Institute of Family Relations. Looking back at old issues of this column, like most journalism of the “golden era,” I see the judgment of the expert counselor reified the hegemonic discourse of social order.

When wives complained of their husbands having affairs with their secretaries, the counselor would tell them they had obviously let themselves go, and it was their job to make themselves more attractive. When a woman wanted more help with household chores or the children, the counselor reminded them of the duties of their role as housewife.

Like the column, when we have heard “the other side” or alternative perspectives in the news, most of the stories of marginalized groups have been summarily dismissed, overwritten or outright vilified by the interests of the dominant culture.

## **Chapter 9 - The Story of *Forager***

*Forager: Field Notes on Survival*, recently acquired by Algonquin, is the memoir I thought I'd never write. I've been running away from writing this book my entire life.

I walked away from a book contract many years ago, because I didn't want to betray my family. I was embarrassed I had wasted everyone's time, so I became a teacher and gave up writing. Then last year, during the Christmas holiday, I submitted an essay to *The New York Times Modern Love* column. I knew it wouldn't be published, but that was the point. As a way of encouraging my students to get out of their comfort zones and take risks, I asked them to collect rejection slips over the break. And since I practice what I preach, I submitted to a notoriously selective editor to retrieve my first one.

I wrote about a relationship that felt unresolved and shameful. And as I unraveled why I had loved someone who couldn't love me, I was taken back to the mountain of my youth. The man in question stood in for the home I couldn't go back to.

A week later, Dan Jones called me. A week after that, my essay appeared in *The New York Times*. A week after that, agents began emailing me. I chose one, drafted a proposal and it sold.

And then I was confronted with the reality that I had backed myself into a corner. Now I had to write the book I've never wanted to write.

I left the Mountain of my youth long ago, but I am still my mother's daughter. When I am hungry, I know where to look to find what I need: shelter, fire, signaling, water, food. Signal when you have hope of rescue. Avoid drawing attention when you don't. Don't feel sorry for yourself. Don't cry. Pain is inevitable. Learn to move through it.

Build a shelter. Gather what you need to build a fire. Construct a signaling apparatus. Find a source of water. If you are not rescued, you will have time to find food later. For now, you must focus on what will sustain, not satiate you.

Focus on what's in front of you, not on what you want. Focus on what you can see. Survey the landscape. Triangulate to pinpoint a location to build your nest. Identify the materials that will provide the best shelter. Do this before nightfall. Do this now.

Use everything. Waste nothing. Remember that rules are guidelines, not absolutes. Get to know the intricacies of the land, like the intricacies of your body. You can take what you need and leave the rest behind.

Mother taught us to cull from the forest floor, how to identify and consume yerba santa, yucca, prickly pear, nettles, elderberry, snow plant, dandelion, rose hips, chokecherry, gooseberry, and the seeds, pollen, bark, and sap of Jeffrey, pinyon, sugar, Coulter, and knobcone pine trees and black oak trees. I know what you can eat raw and what you have to pound, grind down, dry, or bake. I know the ratios to dilute, how far to dig during a drought, what is worth fighting for.

Mother told us her father spoke the voice of God, and she still insists that his words were true, and that his vision was our birthright, our legacy, and our responsibility to carry forth, like a torch in the darkness of this world.

When she heard I was writing a book, she forbade me from criticizing her father or the Field. "I will not allow you to destroy the organization our family has spent lifetimes building. How could you do this to me? I forbid you from writing this. I won't allow it."

I assured her that my book isn't really about Grandpa, and that I won't reveal her secrets. The story I'm writing is mine.

"This is your family," she admonished. "You have to keep our secrets safe. It's your duty."

Where does her story end and mine begin?

## **Chapter 10 - Invention, Inclusion, Innovation**

Sandra Slattery is a current Chaffey journalism student who worked in our pilot I3 program last summer. We talked about Shane Bauer, and how, "Journalists inform us about what we need to know. Good Journalism gets our attention, and really good Journalism keeps our attention. But great Journalism creates real world change."

Sandra decided to use journalism to affect real world change. Here's how:

*Sometimes that real world change can be large-scale policy and legislation. Recently, an investigative news source called "Reveal" sued the federal government - and won - for the release of workplace injury records for thousands of major companies. Because of this, a coalition of labor unions and lawmakers are actively tackling labor rights and work protection issues.*

*But - sometimes that real world change can be small scale. A change in a city. A community. A neighborhood. A school.*

*Last year, Chaffey College participated in the first year of a joint invention internship with Lemelson-MIT, called the I3 program (Invention and Inclusive Innovation Initiative). I3 is a state-wide invention program designed to encourage students to not only broaden their minds and use the tools given to them throughout their education - but to also realize that invention and innovation is not just for the physicist and the engineer - invention is for everyone.*

*I shadowed one of the teams in I3 all summer, thoroughly documenting the learning process and watching the students come together as a team. There was a mix of brilliant minds - artists, engineers, designers, physics majors. And the one thing that stuck out to me, was that the teams that had the most compelling ideas and the most innovative thought processes were not necessarily the most STEM-oriented teams. They were the teams that had a mix of people from different backgrounds and circumstances, with different academic disciplines.*

*Invention is a tool - but it is also a frame of mind. It is a process - a way of looking at the world, and being able to recognize a "problem". And that thought process - the process of knowing how to design a solution - that is invention. And that can be taught. It can be learned. And I think that students of all disciplines should have access to invention education. That's how compelling the invention mindset is.*

*Humans are creative by nature. Invention education is just harnessing that creativity.*

*And that's also why pursuing intellectual property rights was a compelling issue to me. That, and the fact that journalism is about creating real world change. Yes, you can report about news. You can report about facts. But what does your news piece accomplish? Does it spark a discussion? Does it help to ignite change?*

*On the first day of the I3 program, mixed amongst all of the upbeat and colorful slides about the invention internship, there was one austere slide in the lecture about intellectual property at Chaffey College - that, essentially, everything that the students did during I3 would belong to the college.*

*The point of this whole conversation is about the students. And student rights.*

*Some students said that this was understandable, given that Chaffey College was providing the opportunity. Other students were less than happy, and said that the IP policy put a damper on the invention initiative. They didn't feel like giving away their best ideas. And so the teams*

*That's not to say that there was ill-intent on the college's part to benefit from student inventions. It's just that - no one had actually bothered to ask.*

*So I did.*

*And that set into motion a response from the college.*

*Lawyers got on the phone. Intellectual property rights documents were looked over. My advisor Michelle helped connect me with people that would have real answers and real solutions. And slowly, the governing bodies started to realize that there was an inherent flaw in the rules. A flaw that existed because no-one stopped to think ... "A community college student can be an inventor."*

*I'll say that again. "A community college student can be an inventor."*

*And that's one of the things I learned from my time shadowing the I3 initiative. You do not need an Ivy League degree to invent. You do not need a mechanical engineering degree to invent. What you need is the frame of mind. You need a team. You need an idea. And you need protection - intellectual property protection.*

## **Chapter 11 - Reframing the Narrative**

"If you want a happy ending, that depends, of course, on where you stop your story." - Orson Welles

We navigate our lives in the interplay between order and disorder. Every story is framed in an attempt to make sense of it.

I'm scared of public speaking. I'm also scared of heights. But I know that getting out of my comfort zone is how I grow. I tell my students the same thing.

On New Year's Day, I met Raven, an Airforce Fighter Pilot out near Edwards Airforce Base. A mutual friend of ours had built a plane, and Raven graciously offered to take me up in it, and to serve briefly as a co-pilot. It was windy that day.

When we teach our students and ourselves the skills we need to listen to a story, assess whether it's true, and determine what to do with it, we're building the airplane we will eventually take off in.

There's no truth outside of the lens through which we record it. And whether we record it in words or images, whether we print it or it pops up on our electronic devices, news comes from a specific perspective, curated by a person who enters the story to create a beginning and exits to create an end.

But that is only a slice of the story. The story can always go back further. And will continue after the audience exits the theater.

Just like Keith Jarrett and the unplayable piano, we are confronted with obstacles we can't just make go away. There's not another piano available for this concert. We can complain that the piano is broken, but right now, it's the only one we have.

Good reporting is slow and expensive, readers mostly don't want to pay for it and will resort to clickable headlines and quick answers.

This is a problem.

But we didn't advance as a species until we began to share what we know. Until we began to form communities and swap stories. Consistently. Every creative act, every scientific development, every technological disruption, every lecture and lesson we share in our classrooms, is the result of some brand of storytelling collaboration.

Platforms are just a tool. Digital storytelling is still storytelling. And audiences still hunger for it. It's up to us to create the ethics needed to help audiences decipher a multitude of perspectives.

Journalism isn't dead. Nor is it dying. It's simply changing. Digital storytelling is already expanding whose stories we tell. And telling the stories of more people is a powerful and necessary egalitarian tool to engage in a 21st century global conversation. We've created new tools to reach a wider audience, and there's no going back.

We tell stories to make sense of our world. Right now, we are hearing more voices than we've ever heard. It's confusing. But it gives us the opportunity to create a more inclusive narrative.

It's up to us to equip our students, the citizens of this brave new world, with the critical thinking and ethical guidelines to make good use of the "media monster" that has been unleashed. Most citizens don't have the tools to navigate the complicated media environment. It takes an extra layer of due diligence to authenticate accuracy in the information ecosystem and it's up to us to help them recognize the responsibility of knowledge and coalesce the myriad facts into coherent narratives.

Do we have the courage to step up to an unplayable piano? To gauge the parameters of the obstacles, to decide which impediments can be avoided and which we can choose to amplify?

This pandemic has made us rethink journalism, but also our educational narrative. We can't go back to who or what we were. The story has broken. There is nowhere to go but forward. Right now, this is the piano we have to work with. We can shut down our social media accounts, put down our phones, and walk away. Or we can consider our audience, approach the piano with a measure of risk, and play the music.

## **Chapter of *Forager***

### **Field Note #1**

#### **Yerba Santa**

*Yerba santa, also known as holy weed, grows 3 to 4 feet tall. Its leaves are 3 to 4 inches long, and often sticky with resin. Its flowers are white, lavender, or darker purple, and shaped like little trumpets.*

*The leathery, lance-shaped leaves can be chewed fresh, and they taste sweeter the longer you chew them. Dry or fresh leaves can be mashed into a poultice or used to brew tea. Yerba santa has been used to treat respiratory conditions, including coughs, colds, and swelling of the airways, as well as fever and dry mouth. Some people use it to relieve muscle spasms and to loosen phlegm.*

*To make tea, place 3 leaves (fresh or dry) into a cup with boiling water and let it steep for 15 minutes before drinking.*

"Don't tell anyone, but your cousin is with God now."

We are driving in a snowstorm and Mother is speaking to us from the helm. It's a January evening, and we've been on the road in our Buick Estate for almost three hours, making our way from the Field to the Mountain, where we live.

We can barely see the road, and Mother is tense.

"What cousin?" I ask. All of our cousins live at the Field, and all of them were alive a few hours ago.

"You know, Gary," she says. "But it's for the best."

We've met Gary only once. He's Great-Aunt Bernice's grandson, which I think makes him like a second or third cousin or something, and he's had leukemia for years. He's much older than us, like maybe even twenty. In any case, he was a full-grown man, and already saved by Jesus, so he's living in a heavenly mansion now and there's no reason to feel sad.

All of us are hungry, and we are listening to Mother in the dark, because she says the light inside makes it hard for her to see. She hates driving, even on a good day, but since Dad is already up on the Mountain, caring for the Field boys, who are all there learning about God, away from the temptations of the world, Mother has to drive.

She doesn't say anything else on the subject, so the four of us go back to shoving one another and whispering through our teeth, until she turns around and yells, "Stop!"



The Buick spins and plunges into a snowbank.

We aren't wearing seat belts, so some of us are thrown onto the floor; others, over the front seat into the windshield, with a thud. Mother shouts out, "Roll call!" and our voices ring out in succession: "One." "Two." "Three." "Four." I am ten years old, and this is not my first crash.

The road is dark, but we are still on it, shoved sideways into the bank of snow, all the way up to the front windshield. We sit quietly, because Mother doesn't like noise. "We'll hike up," she says. "Bring everything with you."

We try to look at one another, but it is too dark to read expressions.

"I'm hungry," our five-year-old brother whines.

"Pack your stuff," Mother orders.

Headlights blind us. A car has turned the bend and is driving toward us, close enough to plow into us, as we watch. But it stops, headlights pointed boldly through our side windows, flooding the car with light. The engine stays on, but someone is getting out of the car. We can't tell who it is. The lights are shining in on us, and the figure is out there, moving forward.

"Lock the doors," Mother says, and we each reach for the door closest to us, manually pressing down the knobs. Then we duck, every one of us, lying on the seats or the floor, breathing quietly, as if we can hide.

We have been taught to be wary of Outsiders, and we are used to hiding. But I can tell: this time it won't work.

I hear a knock. I am still up front, propelled from the impact. I look up from where I am huddled on the floor and see the figure knocking on the passenger window. Mother doesn't speak, so we don't either.

A man's face is pressed against the glass, and he can clearly make out that there are bodies inside this car. "Are you okay in there?" his voice booms. "Is everyone okay in there?"

We wait in silence. He tries to pry open the door, jiggling the car. I hope we look dead and he will go away.

He doesn't.

Mother's head is down. The man is still knocking.

"Michelle," she whispers, "go get help from your father. We'll wait here."

I lift my head to look at her, and the light floods her face. "Go," she says. "Lock the door behind you." I glance at the man without moving, then reach up to unlock the door. I use my body weight to slam it into him hard, to push him back far enough to allow me to slide out of the car, then quickly lock the door again before I slam it shut and scramble away from the car.

The man is not as large as my father, or, really, any of the men I have grown up around, but he is quick. "Wait," he says. He grabs my jacket. I almost slip out of it, but the voice is gentle. "Child, wait. I'm here to help you."

His tone stops my momentum, and I land on my knees in the snow. We aren't more than three feet from the family car, but I know I am in this alone.

"Let me help you."

I am used to the culture of army men, direct and gruff. I'm not sure how to respond to this man's kindness. Surely, Mother is watching, judging my choices. The road is quiet. I wonder if she can hear us, or if she is blocking this out, as she often does when she doesn't want to see what is happening around her.

I stand up and try to show some confidence. "It's okay, sir. I can go get our father. We don't need help." And I walk toward the far right side of the road, snow up past my tennis shoes and rubbing against the flesh of my ankles with each step.

"Wait!" he calls out." But I am ahead of him now, hurrying up the dark road.

I know this mountain. And even on this cloud-covered night, in the white blur of snowfall, I know my way. I don't look back.

But I haven't made it very far when a light shines behind me. The man is following me in his car. He pulls up beside me, almost pinning me to the bank, the passenger-side window open, and I see him leaning toward me.

"Get in," he says. "Tell me where to go, and I'll take you to get help."

I look back, but can no longer see the family car. I feel trapped between the snowbank on the right and the car to my left. I know I can scurry below his bumper and keep going, but I don't. I'm tired and hungry, and I don't want to walk this road. I have seen scarier men.

I open the door and get into his car.

"Stay on Highway Two until you see the ranger station," I tell him.

He drives slowly, and I look out the window. I leave the door unlocked and keep my hand on the handle, knowing I can roll out of a moving car. We've practiced this.

We drive a couple of miles in the dark, as the snow falls on the windshield, and he slows down as we approach the empty station.

"Now what?" he says.

I tell him he won't be able to drive up the dirt road, so he'll have to drop me off here. He stops the car and leaves the engine on. I open the door to leave, and as he grabs my arm, I instinctively cower, waiting for the blow.

"Are you sure you'll be okay out there?" he says warmly. "Do you know where you're going in the dark?"

I could navigate by the stars if they were visible. But even in this storm, where I can see only a foot or two ahead of me, I am not worried.

"I know where I'm going," I tell him. "Thank you for the ride."

As he drives away, he yells, "I'll call Highway Patrol at the next stop, just to make sure you get help." But I don't respond. I am walking up a road I know so well I could find my way blindfolded or backward, with my hands tied. The snow is soft, and now that I am off the highway, it is noticeably higher. I sink to my knees with every step. My feet and ankles are numb, but I can feel the burn on my calves and thighs as I make my way up the mountain.

I know snow isn't good hydration, so I pick leaves of yerba santa that grow on the side of the road, and suck on them to relieve my thirst. Mother taught us that our bodies work harder to create the heat necessary to melt snow into a hydrating liquid, meaning you'll lose more water than you're taking in if you eat it. The only way to use snow for survival is if you have the tools necessary to melt it.

As I turn the final bend, I see the light of the mess hall, and I feel momentarily hopeful, until I am battered in the face by a snowball. It is rock-hard, and I reach up to feel my face begin to swell. “It’s a girl!” someone yells, and the anonymous boys who have mistaken me for their opponent run away, afraid of remonstrations from a leader who is sure to find out.

I want to cry, but I don’t. I trudge up the last hill, enter the mess hall, and speak to the nearest leader, a man I have known since birth. He says Mr. Dowd has gone down to get wood, but he will go tell him what has happened, and I should warm up and wait. One of the younger leaders steps up and guides me to the large metal heater in the corner and brings me a cup of warm water. I hear the World War II-era Kaiser Willys Jeep start up. It has a plow attached. So I assume Dad is on his way to pick up Mother and my siblings and transport them up the hill. I take off my shoes and remove my dripping socks.

I wait. It takes a long time. Probably they are stuck. I take off my jacket and shake myself like an animal, flinging water from my hair. Boys begin to circle and stare at me. They aren’t allowed to talk to a girl, so I lower my eyes and shiver as I begin to thaw.

Eventually, the heat kicks in, I stop shaking, and I sit in the corner and watch the boys play Bible Basketball, a boisterous game with five players on each team. They sit across from each other while a leader asks them questions, passing the answers like a ball between them, from center to the hoop on either side of the imaginary court. Then I hear shouting, and the boys around me scatter.

“What are you still doing here? Look at me. I’m talking to you! Do you hear me?” Dad is standing in the middle of the room, taller than the rest. It takes me a moment to realize his anger is directed at me.

Dad is in my face now. “Look at you. You should be ashamed of yourself!”

I fumble, trying to gather my shoes and coat.

“Get going girl, you hear me? Now!”

He grabs my wet shoulder so hard it will leave a bruise. “Get down to the house!”

I reach for my shoes, but he backhands me in the face before I can grab them. “I said, get to the house!”

I still have difficulty thinking the house the boys have built us is our home now, but I run there from the mess hall, barefoot in the snow. The rest of my family isn’t there yet. Dad must be on his way to get them only now. I head straight to the bathroom, because there is a space heater there. I close the door and crawl into the corner and wait.

The house is quiet until I hear the Jeep again. As my family enters, I cower against the sounds they make, my breathing so fast and shallow I think I will pass out.

Mother enters the bathroom without knocking and turns on the bathtub faucet before she speaks. She looks at me like I am a wild animal and doesn’t touch me. She must notice my swollen face, but she doesn’t mention it. She extends a brown paper sack.

I take it from her and open it. It’s empty.

“Put it over your mouth,” she says. “Breathe into it.”

I breathe into the bag and remove it to exhale.

“Keep it there,” she whispers. “Breathe in and out through the bag.”

I breathe in and out through the bag. I feel dizzy, but I keep going. She watches me until my breath slows.

Mother doesn't thank me for going on ahead, and she doesn't apologize for Dad's violence. Like all of these incidents, I know we won't speak of them again.

She turns off the water. "Get in, and keep breathing into the bag."

She leaves. I wait until I hear her footsteps recede before I peel off my wet clothes. I can't recall the last time she has seen me naked. It must have been when I was too young to remember.

I climb into the water, so hot I think it will scorch me. I reach for the bag. I keep my arms high to keep it from getting wet. I breathe in and breathe out. I try not to notice my breasts poking above the water. Mother has not yet mentioned binding, though that will come soon.

The water begins to cool. I sit in the tub with the paper bag, breathing in and out until I stop shivering and my breath calms.

Mother doesn't come back to check on me, so I make my way to bed with the bag. She has given me a new tool. And I will use it.

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