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For ASJA members in
Alaska, British Columbia, Idaho, Oregon and Washington

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asja
American Society of
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Our Next Meeting

Our next chapter meeting will be Wednesday, November 18, 2026 11:00 AM Pacific Time (US and Canada). We are using a new online meeting platform that is browser-based. Direct your browser to this URL:

http://meet.jit.si/ASJAPNW-meeting-room

This is the same platform (but different room) that the ASJA Coffee chat (via ASJA HQ) uses every Tuesday at 1:00 PM Eastern.

From the President

Rosemary Keevil



Mentoring

By most accounts, getting old sucks. However, one opportunity at this stage in my life shines as a source of great satisfaction: mentoring. I am currently working with three individuals.

First, there is the 40-year-old American soldier who wishes to remain anonymous. He is interested in writing when he is discharged from the army next year. We were chatting at a recent social event, and I offered him the trope, “The sure-fire way to get pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard, is to have a deadline.” He nodded his head enthusiastically, so I gave him one. His first piece was about his fall pilgrimage into the woods to hunt.

Man, this soldier can write!

“The time of plenty was over, and a hint of subconscious uneasiness or uncertainty had entered the zeitgeist.”

My second mentee is 15-year-old Taylor, an aspiring author. Her mom is my granddaughters’ nanny, who knew I was an author and journalist. When the nanny told me about her daughter’s writing ambitions, I offered myself up as a mentor. Again, deadlines! And, like the soldier, Taylor sure can write!

“The room was cold, a dry, discomforting one. Not like the Christmas holidays, when he’d run up to Grandma with open arms and a painfully pink nose.”

Last, but certainly not least, I am also mentoring the brilliant 40-year-old Christopher, a friend of a friend. He has written a fascinating memoir/self-help manuscript about viewing the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous through a unique lens: physics (he was a science teacher). Can you guess what I’m going to say next? This guy can write!

“There was relief. Deep, simple relief. The kind that comes when you finally stop pretending you are something you are not. In this case, the sovereign of your own universe.”

I really want to include a passage from a former mentee, who is now a published author, but I am nearing my max word count. Alas, I must kill my darlings.

As a final note, perhaps another advantage to being old and experienced is that I have the honor of acting as president of the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the American Society of Journalists and Authors. I just hope I can live up to this lofty title.

Rosemary Keevil is a freelance journalist and the author of ***The Art of Losing It: A Memoir of Grief and Addiction***. *She has been a TV news reporter, a current affairs radio show host, and managing editor of a professional women's magazine. In another life she was a can-can dancer in Dawson City, Yukon. Rosemary lives in Whistler, British Columbia, with her partner, Doug, and their two doodles, Romeo and Hamlet*. rosemarykeevil.com

An Editor's Note

Randy Stapilus



Contributions, please

If the headline puts you off after the months-long political online beg-a-thon most of you (like me) have endured this season … no, I'm not talking about that kind of contribution.

I'm talking about the kind of contribution you write.

I'm a little more encouraged to make the ask because in the last month I was hit up for a contribution to the ASJA's blog (see the next article). But we're just as reliant on contributions as the main organization.

And that hit-up told me something else: We're being watched elsewhere. People around the country are keeping an eye on what we do, and your contribution here might get an audience you don't expect.

What you're working on. What you plan to work on. What obstacles you encounter, and what solutions to them you find. What you see along the way that simply seems shareable with other members.

It's all welcome here. Drop me a line.

Randy Stapilus is editor of the ASJA Pacific Northwest Chapter newsletter. He is a writer and publisher based in Carlton, Oregon, and contributes a weekly column to the Oregon Capital Chronicle. He can be reached at stapilus@ridenbaugh.com.

The Confidential

Randy Stapilus



After all those years seeing breathless books about the seamy side in books and even movies using the word "confidential," from "Hollywood Confidential" to "LA Confidential" to "High School Confidential, I never thought I would be featured in – or want to be featured in – anything like that.

I'll make an exception for the ASJA Confidential, now more properly described as the ASJA blog. I commend it to your attention, not least because it took my being featured in it to get me there to check it out.

The overall ASJA website has gone through considerable change in the last year, and taken as a whole it's a highly useful resource. The Confidential, as it was called for quite a while, has been given a new look and feel, with what seems like a broader mission.

Which I made a point of discovering after getting in mid-October a message from Cat DiStasio, a fellow ASJA member and a Northwesterner as well, who said:

"I'm a fellow member of the ASJA PNW chapter but haven't attended a meeting in a while due to scheduling conflicts. Michelle Rafter, also a chapter member, let me know you've taken over as editor of the chapter newsletter and tipped me off to your political writing. Along with Holly Leber Simmons,

I'm taking over from Michelle as ASJA Publications cochair and that also makes me coeditor of the ASJA Confidential (which we're earnestly trying to stop calling a blog).

“Would you be interested in doing a Q&A about your career arc, current projects, and experience with ASJA for a "Meet the Member" profile piece?”

I replied, and the profile piece was up a few days after that.

The blog – actually a perfectly decent description of it – has been richly populated in recent months with a wide range of pieces, from how to’s to event notices to heads up about changes in the industry, and a significant number of profiles like mine. It’s being updated regularly, as any good blog ought to be. Check it out.

Tech tip: Text-only News and YouTube

Bruce Miller

Text-only news sources (for faster loading, no images, great on cell phones) still exist, but the remaining few are just that: few. Here are probably the prominent few:

https://www.cbc.ca/lite/news
https://www.csmonitor.com/layo
https://lite.cnn.com/
https://text.npr.org/

The link below provides headlines -- most without images -- but links to source pages with the images. Good for a quick scan. Mostly tech topics.

https://skimfeed.com/

- - -

Watching YouTube videos for insights or instructions? Taking too much time?

Nearly all YouTube videos have a setting to speed up the playback. Click on the Gear icon, select Playback speed.

Bruce Miller finds blip to be useful when he wants to move a big file without using a USB stick, or putting a big file into Dropbox, or fighting with cross-platform network failures.

Tech tip: Mining pdfs with AI

Bruce Miller

Using AI to help summarize and analyze documents can seem easy on the surface. But to get the maximum value of the AI tool human strategy helps. Here's an example.

In 1954 the Society of Magazine Writers (now American Society of Journalists and Authors) published a book called *A Guide to Successful Magazine Writing*. The first sentence of the Introduction by Mort Sontheimer (SMW member) is this: “The article writer is forever chasing a greased pig.” How to get the bacon? The book, through various chapter topics, attempts to answer that question. Many of the principles back then can still apply today.

In Chapter 11 – "Business" – there are two case studies illustrating two different methods for writing about a business. Each case study also includes the resulting article. The first was on the Automat, now considered a food vending machine. The second was on the salt industry.

Getting AI to help decode the differences required several steps. First, the chapter needed to be in some form to allow a computer to recognize characters. The easiest method was to scan the chapter and then run OCR (optical character recognition) on it to make it a searchable chapter. (Finding a book already in searchable PDF form can eliminate these steps.)

Because the chapter really has four parts and the actual articles are less important than the discussions on how the articles were developed, it makes sense to split the chapter into four parts: discussion, article, discussion, article.

With the chapter now with isolated parts, AI can focus only on the discussions. There are several advantages for this type of isolation:

- Feeding the entire book into the AI tool to focus on just two smaller parts is a waste of processing power.
- Isolating and providing only the two discussions to the AI tool forces the AI tool to focus only on the discussions.

I uploaded the two discussions to Google's Gemini notebook. I gave it this prompt:

"create a side-by-side comparison matrix of the investigative strategies used in sources 1954-a-guide-chap11 -a (by authors Mahoney & Weisinger) vs. 1954-a-guide-chap11 -c (by author Froman)"
Here are the first of seven "Dimensions" the AI came up with:

Investigative Strategies Comparison Matrix

Dimension	Mahoney & Weisinger: "Outside-In" Method	Robert Froman: "Deep Immersion" Method
Subject Access & Stance	**Faced an "Iron Curtain" of corporate secrecy**; the target company explicitly refused all magazine publicity, queries, and interviews.	**Enjoyed open corporate access**; worked with executive PR departments, plant specialists, and government officials across multiple states.

The other six dimensions provided by the AI:

- Initial Research Thesis
- Primary Information Sources
- Overcoming Obstacles
- Technical & Domain Mastery
- Interviewing Strategy
- Outlining & Synthesis

Gemini notebook also included a short summary on Core Methodological Takeaways

- The "Outside-In" Strategy demonstrates that corporate hostility is rarely an absolute barrier to a thorough feature story. When an organization refuses to talk, a writer can construct an accurate narrative by synthesizing public paper trails, legal disclosures, trade union sources, and public-query channels.
- The "Deep Immersion" Strategy illustrates how to digest vast, highly technical industries. By combining broad field interviews with elementary textbook self-study, a writer can translate complex technical subjects into clear, accessible prose for popular magazines.

Applying human strategy to AI tools can help you get more -- or the results you want -- from your tool. In this example, it can be summed up: break up and isolate the important parts to reduce noise and overhead for the AI tool.

And by the way, each article in the chapter were examples of great writing: The Wondrous Automat and 14,000 Uses and 2 cents Per Pound.

Seattle resident Bruce Miller tries to use AI for focused tasks.

Did You Know: Ethics and Practices

Bruce Miller

A Code of Ethics for ASJA was first formally proposed in Spring of 1952 when member Jim Poling raised concerns about publishers demanding free reprint rights under the guise that they “bring glory to our names”. In response, a two-man committee consisting of Murray Teigh Bloom and Mort Sontheimer was appointed to draft the Society’s first Code of Ethics, appearing later in 1952.

Mort Sontheimer noted later in 1952 that even though the Code would not be legally binding on individual members, its existence would "strengthen each individual's position enormously" by giving writers standard principles to cite when negotiating for pro-rated pay on killed assignments.

Member Paul Deutschman, writing from Paris, urged the committee to use the Code to standardize ambiguous assignment jargon used by editors, such as "looks good" or "tentative green light". Donald Robinson also urged members to report improper "side-deals" or kickbacks directly to Ethics Chairman Murray Teigh Bloom.

Bruce Miller has been looking into ASJA history.

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