



City of Cambridge

R-17.

IN CITY COUNCIL

April 3, 2000

COUNCILLOR SULLIVAN
COUNCILLOR BORN
COUNCILLOR BRAUDE
COUNCILLOR DAVIS
COUNCILLOR DECKER
MAYOR GALLUCCIO
VICE MAYOR MAHER
COUNCILLOR REEVES
COUNCILLOR TOOMEY

WHEREAS: It has come to the attention of this City Council that Cambridge resident Bill Kovach is the recipient of the Goldsmith Career Award for Excellence in Journalism; and

WHEREAS: Mr. Kovach's philosophy is to be the voice of the voiceless; and

WHEREAS: Mr. Kovach covered topics such as freedom of information laws, civil rights struggles and politics and worked as a New York Times reporter, editor and bureau chief; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the City Council go on record extending its congratulations to Bill Kovach on receiving the Goldsmith Career Award for Excellence in Journalism; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Clerk be and hereby is requested to forward a suitably engrossed copy of this resolution to Bill Kovach on behalf of the entire City Council.

In City Council April 3, 2000.

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:- 

D. Margaret Drury
City Clerk

Councilman Sullivan

R-17

Whereas: Whereas it has come to the attention of this City Council that Cambridge resident Bill KOVACH is the recipient of the Goldsmith Career Award for Excellence in Journalism, and

Whereas Mr Kovach philosophy is to be the voice of the voiceless; and

Whereas: Mr Kovach covered topics such as freedom of information laws, civil rights struggles & politics and worked as a New York Times reporter, editor and bureau chief; now therefore be it

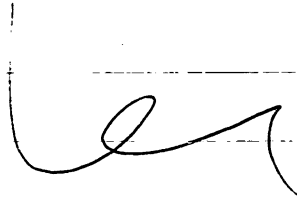
Resolved That this City Council go on record extending its congratulations to Bill Kovach on receiving the Goldsmith Career Award for Excellence in Journalism; and be it further

Resolved SEC to John Kovach

4044

91-
180
250
320-

120-
160-
49
329-
100-
100
74
294



3/27/00 @ 9400

MS

Map / ~~Wiesberg~~ (Thurs)

Donelli (Female) / ~~Globe~~

Tab - last wheel

1 5/24/00

Journalism Award

Kovach honored as

Outgoing Nieman Foundation curator shares his thoughts on journalism, newspapers, movies

BY BILL KURTZ
SPECIAL TO THE TAB

The conscience of American journalism.

Bill Kovach has a strong claim to that title.

Recently, the 67-year-old Cambridge resident received Harvard's Goldsmith Career Award for Excellence in Journalism.

Previous winners have included Bob Woodward, Mike Wallace and Lesley Stahl. In accepting the prestigious award, he preached his usual gospel: Journalism's highest purpose is to give "the voiceless" in society a voice.

The son of an illiterate Albanian orphan has been challenging his profession ever since he quit his first job because the Johnson City (Tenn.) Press-Chronicle refused to let him cover civil rights. During six years at The Tennessean, Kovach covered the civil-rights struggle and politics, and sparked groundbreaking freedom-of-information laws. Then came 20 years at the New York Times, as a hard-charging reporter, deputy national editor and Washington bureau chief, and as a serious contender for the editor's job.

In 1986, he began 23 tempestuous months of reviving the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, which he led to two Pulitzer Prizes, but whose owners (Cox Newspapers) were offended by what one executive called his "take no prisoners" philosophy of reporting.

In the footsteps of his childhood idol, crusading editor and civil-rights advocate Ralph McGill, Kovach got management to increase the news budget 38 percent. In what some veterans considered a newsroom purge, more than 50 of about 400 newsroom employees left the paper. Kovach replaced them with

Warner's purchase by America Online?

A. More and more, journalists are part of the elite socially and economically of the country. That gap between them and the mass of citizens who rely on them and depend on them makes you nervous. The distance between the reporters who depend on them has grown so wide. The thing I loved most about my career in journalism was that you could get out among all people and learn something new every second. It's the greatest education in the world. We took it as our responsibility to spend time with blue-collar workers, people on the assembly line. My responsibility is to observe society. I have access to things no one else has access to. I can get into places no one else can, but why do I get in there? So I can tell the rest of the people what they can't see. How do I decide what they need to know unless I know them, mix with them, understand their needs and their daily life? If I make that decision based on what my elite friends tell me, then I'm going to be telling "them" what "we" want "them" to know.

Q. Can you count on "them" to read newspapers?

A. I've always been frustrated with [the belief that] readers abandoned newspapers. If you look from the 1970's, the decline in circulation among newspapers, you'll find that newspapers abandoned their readers and not vice versa. The Atlanta newspapers cut off all of southern Georgia because it was too costly to drive them down there to deliver them. Chicago cut off southern Illinois. The Philadelphia Inquirer cut off western Pennsylvania. Newspapers all over the country abandoned



To: Donna

Fax: 4269

From: Cambridge Public Library
Reference - Bliss Matteson.
349-4044

Here's the article - unfortunately the text covers
the full page and it was difficult to get on ~~one~~
a page. I had to reduce the print on the lower
section - I hope it's still readable!

Main Library 449 Broadway Cambridge, MA 02138 617-349-4040	Boudreau Branch 245 Concord Avenue 02138 349-4017	Central Square Branch 45 Pearl Street 02139 349-4010	Collins Branch 64 Aberdeen Avenue 02138 349-4021	O'Connell Branch 48 Sixth Street 02141 349-4019	North Branch 70 Rindge Avenue 02140 349-4023	Valente Branch 826 Cambridge Street 02141 349-4015
---	--	---	---	--	---	---

Journalism's watchdog



and I flew out there and met with him a couple of times and — again — great conversations, really interested, then couldn't get the script they wanted and went on to something else. And that's what's happened every time.

Q. Why were all those stars interested?

A. Everybody thought the storyline was great. In Atlanta, I just happened to be standing in a spot where that chasm began to open between my belief in journalism and the commercialization of the newsroom. And I was straddling that gap, and each year that passes makes it clearer and clearer what that divide has become. The potential for a story is there, but if they ever do it I hope it would be an honest story.

Q. So what's Hollywood's problem?

A. It's hard to make a film of an editor sitting in a newsroom making decisions. It's not exciting. They wanted a greater love interest. My wife and I have had a great life and there's not the love interest [She's] my best friend and that's not such a big deal if you want the hero to be really exciting to the women in the audience. So those were the problems.

Q. Will the film ever get made?

A. It's possible, I think, but I don't think it's going anywhere. I don't completely understand Hollywood. I don't think anybody does. But I've had enough exposure to it now to know that nothing is ever completely dead.

Q. What's next for you?

A. Tom Rosenstiel and I will continue to head the Committee of Concerned Journalists, and I'll be doing most of the work on developing the curriculum. I also want to help on the advisory board of the Center for Public Integrity. I helped organize the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. I'll work on the board of the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Q. Anything you're particularly proud of during your career?

A. When I was covering the state legislature for the Nashville Ten-

Cambridge resident Bill Kovach was recently given Harvard University's Goldsmith Career Award for Excellence in Journalism. The 67-year-old will be stepping down as curator of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard.

against a lawyer.

Q. You're concerned about technological changes in the media. Why?

A. The values of a visual communications system and a print communications system begin to merge somewhat. You see it happening all the time now. News organizations that have both visual and print outlets are putting them together in one unit. That's the trend of the future.

Q. What's the challenge in this new era?

A. How you maintain the standards of quality print journalism communication because we're now appearing in an environment that makes anyone a publisher, anyone a reporter, but does not make anyone a journalist. What we have to do is to make sure that the way we conduct our business celebrates the principles of journalism and makes those principles acutely well-known to the public, so the public recognizes the difference between journalism and other forms of communication — and help them understand why it's important to come to us when they need to know something.

Q. As one of the founders of the Committee of Concerned Journalists, you've been holding conferences and making these points for years. Has the committee's efforts have had any real effect, or are you just preaching to the converted?

A. I'm an optimist. That's the way I'm cut out, and you can't keep trying to do things if you're not an optimist. The most encouraging thing I see is from a lot of young journalists that we hear from. Just recently, we sent out a letter to over 1,000 people with a copy of the principles of journalism as we've been able to identify them after two years of forums with journalists all over the country. We've articulated what these principles are and as a reaction to that, I get e-mails almost every day from young journalists who are saying, "What can I do to help? I don't see the principles being followed so closely in my news organization. How can I help spread the word here?"

What can they do?

A. They're volunteering to write pieces. I'm most encouraged by young journalists.

Sort of a from-the-bottom-up

movement?

A. That's the way democracy works, always.

Q. How do you relate quality to the bottom line?

A. At the beginning of the century, yellow journalism was considered to be the only way that you could reach a mass audience and make money. Hearst and Pulitzer were fighting it out. Adolph Ochs and E.W. Scripps said, "No. I'm going to market a newspaper based on quality," and they did.

Q. Can the so-called civic journalism movement improve newspapers' quality?

A. When civic journalism brought a renewed interest in getting out into the streets and talking to live people — something we'd moved away from — I supported [it]. I have become concerned over time with the way some news organizations use civic journalism to justify boosterism and to become part of the ruling oligarchy in a community, which I think is dangerous. The extent to which civic journalism becomes an excuse to rule a city, which some news organizations do, is a dangerous trend. But the original concept to find out and to report back to the community what was on its collective mind, I think it's an important thing.

there. But it's even worse when the editors let them write about it: that sort of self-referential "attitude" of blase, cynical, frustrated journalists covering this "oh-so-tiresome" campaign ... [The reporter's] job is to help me as a consumer, as a voter, to understand their campaign, not to understand their psychological situation.

Q. Why is the Nieman Foundation important to journalists?

A. We increasingly live in a virtual world: we all know the world as it's brought to us by the media, and hopefully by a strong press corps. Harvard has in the form of the Nieman program an ability to help advise, shape and monitor that development. [With] the authority of Harvard and the proven journalistic integrity of the program, there's a real opportunity for the Nieman Foundation to become even more vital for journalists all around the world who are concerned about standards and practices.

Q. For the past eight years, ever since your former Times colleague Linda Obst (producer of "Sleepless in Seattle") brought it to Warner Bros.' attention, there's been talk about making a film, "Above the Fold," about your life. Everybody from Al Pacino to Harrison Ford has been mentioned as screen

"I have become concerned over time with the way some news organizations use civic journalism to justify boosterism and to become part of the ruling oligarchy in a community, which I think is dangerous."

Q. Any thoughts on presidential campaign coverage?

A. I'm really concerned about the extent to which it's become acceptable practice to fill hard news stories with a reporter's "attitude." It's kind of frustrating to me to read a New York Times article [whose] second paragraph says, "There was an audible groan from the reporters." It's bad enough that reporters groan audibly when they're covering a political event. It's not there for their entertainment. It's their job to be

Kovachs. What's the status of that project?

A. It's been a kind of a frustrating roller coaster. Robert Redford was first interested, and I met with him two or three times, and I really enjoyed it because what we talked about was journalism. He went on to other things; he lost interest when he couldn't get the kind of script he wanted. Paul Newman was interested briefly, and then they couldn't get the script they wanted. Then Dustin Hoffman became really interested,

room during Senate committee votes. We took it into federal and it became a big case. When the state on under the First Amendment. The judge decided under the freedom of the clause of the First Amendment was the first time a federal court done that, and it became a footnote in First Amendment history and the beginning of what are called the Sunshine Laws.

Q. And at the New York Times

A. Covering the anti-Vietnam war movement when I headed New England regional bureau. May Day demonstrations in Washington ... the Berrigans war priests broke into FBI files, turned a bunch of the documents over to me to write about. I may real brush with a great story when (Times reporter) Neil Shiffman came up here in the middle of the night and called and needed help in going to copy the Pentagon Papers. I arranged to get those copied. I paid the place and paid the guy, and the FBI started investigating, was the only name they had been I'd written the checks.

Q. Any big regret?

A. Atlanta. There was just completely no trust between [management]. I was going to leave [but] I wish I had been enough to figure out a way to leave, to disengage easier, one of the editors and reporters who come there to work for me. There were a lot of people there. When I left, I left them, and I'll always bad about that. I urged them to leave because I still believe that the quality of the news resides in the staff. Editors can shape and change things, but the soul of journalism lies in each individual reporter.

Q. With all the problems cited, if you knew then what you know now would you have entered the profession?

A. I have absolutely no regrets about coming into this business rather than marine biology, which was headed. I would do it again with a heartbeat ... The job of the journalist and the relationship of a journalist to society is the nearest thing I have to a religion.

Q. And your advice to someone just starting out?

A. Understand what the principles are that separate journalism from other forms of communication and fight like hell to maintain those principles.

He filed Atlantans outside the newsroom as well, with stories about banks restricting loans in black neighborhoods and about Grand Jury investigation of local icon Coca Cola, an Atlanta bastion.

After repeated fights with management, Kovach's stormy resignation as editor triggered staff marches and Hollywood interest. Eventually it led him to Harvard, first as a Nieman fellow and, since 1989, as curator of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism.

From that prestigious perch, he regularly charges newspapers with losing readers because they pursue profit instead of serious coverage, heads the Committee of Concerned Journalists and criticizes owner Steve Brill, as ombudsman of Brill's *Comment* magazine, of press criticism.

At the end of June, Kovach will leave Harvard for his suburban Washington home — but hardly to retire. And hardly, it seems from recent conversations, to halt his pungent criticism of today's journalism.

Our talks started on a snowy Cambridge morning. Flanked by American Society of Newspaper Editors reports, the Random House unabridged encyclopedia and the Bible, Kovach sat between a computer whose screen saver scrolls the First Amendment and the portable typewriter he uses for personal correspondence. Trim in corduroys and sweater, he leaned back and chatted about the media, mistakes and the mysteries of the movies.

Q. How did you break into journalism?

A. I'd graduated from East Tennessee State College, with a degree in biology. I'd minored in English and was going to Duke University to take a master's in animal behavior and I needed a summer job, at the Johnson City Press Chronicle. A month into the work, I called Duke and told them to find someone else for the fellowship, that I had found my life's work. I just fell in love with the work, covering breaking stories and general assignment work. By the end of the first month, I had been given the main political beat on the newspaper, covering county government.

Q. Back then, in 1959, with a wife and three children to support, you started at \$65 a week. So how do you feel as *Time* employees calculate the seven-figure value of their stock options as a result of *Time*

their distance in order to maintain a level of profit that has consistently been higher than other industries in the United States, they abandoned readers.

Q. Can we get them back?

A. Once you break the habit of reading the newspaper — and it is a habit — it doesn't just crank up again. If the time comes when the world is a little more uncertain, people are going to need to know a little bit more about how the world really works today and what these decisions mean to them. They're going to come looking for a source of that information. And newspapers, or some version of newspapers, can fill

"I have absolutely no regrets about coming into this business rather than marine biology, where I was headed. I would do it again in a heartbeat."

that void. There'll always be a need for quality information on which you can make decisions. The trick is to make sure they recognize you as the one providing that, and once they do that, then you make it available to them.

Q. You've advocated a set of "best practices" for covering people caught up in highly newsworthy public events. Wouldn't such standards be a blueprint for plaintiffs suing the press?

A. Certainly. Any time you announce publicly the standards by which you want to be judged, a good lawyer can turn that into a brief in a libel suit or in any other kind of a case. I think that's a risk you always run with standards. But I think the other side of the question is: if you want to develop the kind of relationship that I think is absolutely necessary for the survival of independent aggressive journalism, I think you HAVE to be open and honest with your audience about who you are, what you're doing, and why you're doing it the way you're doing it. I think they have a right to know. So, yeah, it could be risky, but anything worthwhile in this life is risky. And your standards could just as well serve as a blueprint for your defense.

Cambridge resident Bill Kovach on Journalism. The 67-year-old

against a lawyer.

Q. You're concerned nological changes in Why?

A. The values of a communications system and a communications system begin somewhat. You see it has the time now. News outlets are putting them together. That's the trend of the

Q. What's the challenge new era?

A. How you maintain standards of quality print communication, because appearing in an environment makes anyone a publisher, but does not make a journalist. What we have to make sure that the way our business celebrates principles of journalism and principles acutely well-known public, so the public recognizes the difference between journalistic forms of communication and help them understand important to come to us need to know something.

Q. As one of the four Committee of Concerned Journalists, you've been holding these years. Has the committee have had any real effect, just preaching to the converted?

A. I'm an optimist. I way I'm cut out, and you trying to do things if you optimist. The most encouraging thing I see is from a lot of journalists that we hear recently, we sent out a letter to 3,000 people with a copy of principles of journalism as we able to identify them after of forums with journalists the country. We've articulated those principles are and as to that, I get e-mails almost every day from young journalists saying, "What can I do to don't see the principles followed so closely in my new generation. How can I help with word here?"

Q. What can they do?

A. They're volunteering, open-ended pieces. I'm most encouraged by young journalists.

Q. Sort of a from-the-trenches

Press-Chronicle refused to let him cover civil rights. During six years at The Tennessean, Kovach covered the civil-rights struggle and politics, and sparked groundbreaking freedom-of-information laws. Then came 20 years at the New York Times, as a hard-charging reporter, deputy national editor and Washington bureau chief, and as a serious contender for the editor's job.

In 1986, he began 23 tempestuous months of reviving the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, which he led to two Pulitzer Prizes, but whose owners (Cox Newspapers) were offended by what one executive called his "take no prisoners" philosophy of reporting.

In the footsteps of his childhood idol, crusading editor and civil-rights advocate Ralph McGill, Kovach got management to increase the news budget 38 percent. In what some veterans considered a newsroom purge, more than 50 of about 400 newsroom employees left the paper. Kovach replaced them with aggressive newcomers.

He riled Atlantans outside the newsroom as well, with stories about banks restricting loans in black neighborhoods and about Grand Jury investigation of local icon Coca Cola, an Atlanta bastion.

After repeated fights with management, Kovach's stormy resignation as editor triggered staff marches and Hollywood interest. Eventually it led him to Harvard, first as a Nieman fellow and, since 1989, as curator of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism.

From that prestigious perch, he regularly charges newspapers with losing readers because they pursue profit instead of serious coverage, heads the Committee of Concerned Journalists and criticizes owner Steve Brill, as ombudsman of Brill's Comment magazine, of press criticism.

At the end of June, Kovach will leave Harvard for his suburban Washington home — but hardly to retire. And hardly, it seems from recent conversations, to halt his pungent criticism of today's journalism.

Our talks started on a snowy Cambridge morning. Flanked by American Society of Newspaper Editors reports, the Random House unabridged encyclopedia and the Bible, Kovach sat between a computer whose screen saver scrolls the First Amendment and the portable typewriter he uses for personal correspondence. Trim in corduroys and sweater, he leaned back and chatted about the media, mistakes and the mysteries of the movies.

Q. How did you break into jour-

places no one else can, but why do I get in there? So I can tell the rest of the people what they can't see. How do I decide what they need to know unless I know them, mix with them, understand their needs and their daily life? If I make that decision based on what my elite friends tell me, then I'm going to be telling "them" what "we" want "them" to know.

Q. Can you count on "them" to read newspapers?

A. I've always been frustrated with [the belief that] readers abandoned newspapers. If you look from the 1970's, the decline in circulation among newspapers, you'll find that newspapers abandoned their readers and not vice versa. The Atlanta newspapers cut off all of southern Georgia because it was too costly to drive them down there to deliver them. Chicago cut off southern Illinois. The Philadelphia Inquirer cut off western Pennsylvania. Newspapers all over the country abandoned readers. As newspapers moved their demographics up and as they shrank their distance in order to maintain a level of profit that has consistently been higher than other industries in the United States, they abandoned readers.

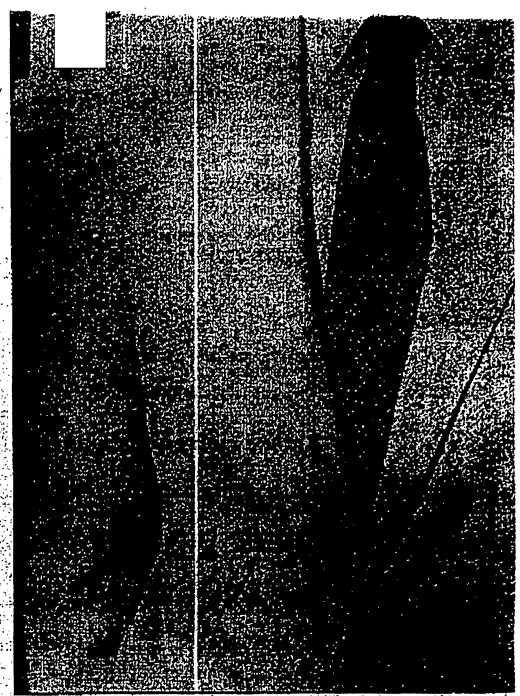
Q. Can we get them back?

A. Once you break the habit of reading the newspaper — and it is a habit — it doesn't just crank up again. If the time comes when the world is a little more uncertain, people are going to need to know a little bit more about how the world really works today and what these decisions mean to them. They're going to come looking for a source of that information. And newspapers, or some version of newspapers, can fill

"I have absolutely no regrets about coming into this business rather than marine biology, where I was headed. I would do it again in a heartbeat."

that void. There'll always be a need for quality information on which you can make decisions. The trick is to make sure they recognize you as the one providing that, and once they do that, then you make it available to them.

Q. You've advocated a set of "best practices" for covering people caught up in highly newsworthy



Cambridge resident Bill Kovach was recently given Harvard University Journalism. The 57-year-old will be stepping down as curator of the N

against a lawyer.

Q. You're concerned about technological changes in the media. Why?

A. The values of a visual communications system and a print communications system begin to merge somewhat. You see it happening all the time now. News organizations that have both visual and print outlets are putting them together in one unit. That's the trend of the future.

Q. What's the challenge in this new era?

A. How you maintain the standards of quality print journalism communication, because we're now appearing in an environment that makes anyone a publisher, anyone a reporter, but does not make anyone a journalist. What we have to do is to make sure that the way we conduct our business celebrates the principles of journalism and makes those principles acutely well-known to the public, so the public recognizes the difference between journalism and other forms of communication — and help them understand why it's important to come to us when they need to know something.

Q. As one of the founders of the Committee of Concerned Journalists, you've been holding conferences and making these points for years. Has the committee's efforts have had any real effect, or are you just preaching to the converted?

A. I'm an optimist. That's the way I'm cut out, and you can't keep

movement?

A. That's the way it works, always.

Q. How do you relate the bottom line?

A. At the beginning of it, yellow journalism was created to be the only way could reach a mass and make money. Hearst and E. W. Scripps said, "going to market a newspaper on quality," and they did.

Q. Can the so-called journalism movement improve reporters' quality?

A. When civic journalism brought a renewed interest out into the streets and tall people — something we away from — I supported become concerned over the way some news organizations use civic journalism to journalism and to become parting oligarchy in a community I think is dangerous. The which civic journalism become excuse to rule a city, where news organizations do, is a trend. But the origin to find out and to report community what was on the mind, I think it's a thing.

"I have become"

get in there. So I can tell the rest of the people what they can't see. How do I decide what they need to know unless I know them, mix with them, understand their needs and their daily life? If I make that decision based on what my elite friends tell me, then I'm going to be telling "them" what "we" want "them" to know.

Q. Can you count on "them" to read newspapers?

A. I've always been frustrated with [the belief that] readers abandoned newspapers. If you look from the 1970's, the decline in circulation among newspapers, you'll find that newspapers abandoned their readers and not vice versa. The Atlanta newspapers cut off all of southern Georgia because it was too costly to drive them down there to deliver them. Chicago cut off southern Illinois. The Philadelphia Inquirer cut off western Pennsylvania. Newspapers all over the country abandoned readers. As newspapers moved their demographics up and as they shrank their distance in order to maintain a level of profit that has consistently been higher than other industries in the United States, they abandoned readers.

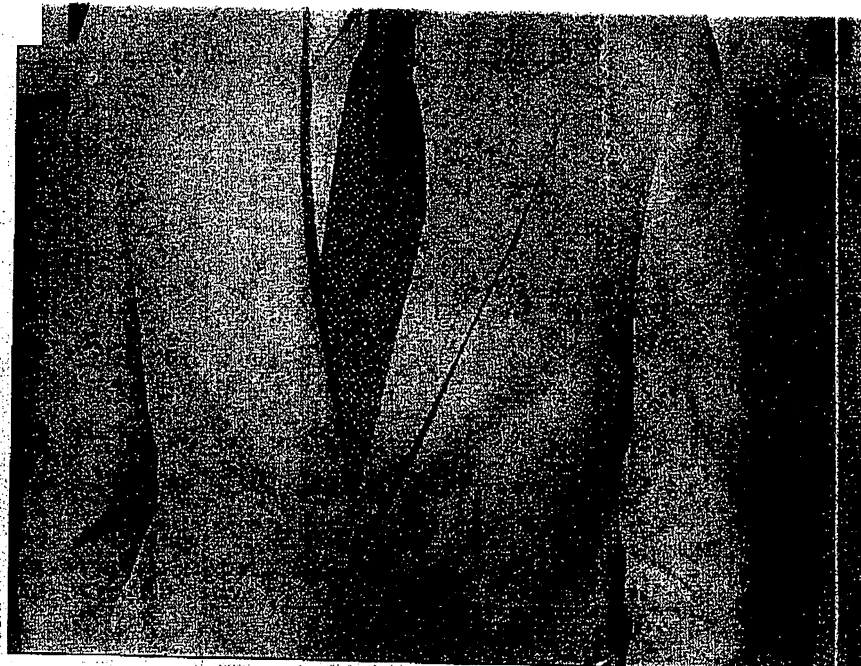
Q. Can we get them back?

A. Once you break the habit of reading the newspaper — and it is a habit — it doesn't just crank up again. If the time comes when the world is a little more uncertain, people are going to need to know a little bit more about how the world really works today and what these decisions mean to them. They're going to come looking for a source of that information. And newspapers, or some version of newspapers, can fill

"I have absolutely no regrets about coming into this business rather than marine biology, where I was headed. I would do it again in a heartbeat."

that void. There'll always be a need for quality information on which you can make decisions. The trick is to make sure they recognize you as the one providing that, and once they do that, then you make it available to them.

Q. You've advocated a set of "best practices" for covering people caught up in highly newsworthy public events. Wouldn't such standards be a blueprint for plaintiffs



Cambridge resident Bill Kovach was recently given Harvard University's Goldsmith Career Award for Excellence in Journalism. The 67-year-old will be stepping down as curator of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard.

against a lawyer.

Q. You're concerned about technological changes in the media. Why?

A. The values of a visual communications system and a print communications system begin to merge somewhat. You see it happening all the time now. News organizations that have both visual and print outlets are putting them together in one unit. That's the trend of the future.

Q. What's the challenge in this new era?

A. How you maintain the standards of quality print journalism communication, because we're now appearing in an environment that makes anyone a publisher, anyone a reporter, but does not make anyone a journalist. What we have to do is to make sure that the way we conduct our business celebrates the principles of journalism and makes those principles acutely well-known to the public, so the public recognizes the difference between journalism and other forms of communication — and help them understand why it's important to come to us when they need to know something.

Q. As one of the founders of the Committee of Concerned Journalists, you've been holding conferences and making these points for years. Has the committee's efforts have had any real effect, or are you just preaching to the converted?

A. I'm an optimist. That's the way I'm cut out, and you can't keep trying to do things if you're not an

movement?

A. That's the way democracy works, always.

Q. How do you relate quality to the bottom line?

A. At the beginning of the century, yellow journalism was considered to be the only way that you could reach a mass audience and make money. Hearst and Pulitzer were fighting it out. Adolph Ochs and E.W. Scripps said, "No. I'm going to market a newspaper based on quality," and they did.

Q. Can the so-called civic journalism movement improve newspapers' quality?

A. When civic journalism brought a renewed interest in getting out into the streets and talking to live people — something we'd moved away from — I supported [it]. I have become concerned over time with the way some news organizations use civic journalism to justify boosterism and to become part of the ruling oligarchy in a community, which I think is dangerous. The extent to which civic journalism becomes an excuse to rule a city, which some news organizations do, is a dangerous trend. But the original concept: to find out and to report back to the community what was on its collective mind, I think it's an important thing.

there. But it's even worse when the editors let them write about it: that sort of self-referential "attitude" of blase, cynical, frustrated journalists covering this "oh-so-tiresome" campaign ... [The reporter's] job is to help me as a consumer, as a voter, to understand their campaign, not to understand their psychological situation.

Q. Why is the Nieman Foundation important to journalists?

A. We increasingly live in a virtual world: we all know the world as it's brought to us by the media, and hopefully by a strong press corps. Harvard has in the form of the Nieman program an ability to help advise, shape and monitor that development. [With] the authority of Harvard and the proven journalistic integrity of the program, there's a real opportunity for the Nieman Foundation to become even more vital for journalists all around the world who are concerned about standards and practices.

Q. For the past eight years, ever since your former Times colleague Linda Obst (producer of "Sleepless in Seattle") brought it to Warner Bros.' attention, there's been talk about making a film, "Above the Fold," about your life. Everybody from Al Pacino to Harrison Ford has been mentioned as screen

to be really exciting to the women in the audience. So those were problems.

Q. Will the film ever get made?

A. It's possible, I think, but I don't think it's going anywhere. I don't completely understand Hollywood. I don't think anybody does. But I've had enough exposure to now to know that nothing is completely dead.

Q. What's next for you?

A. Tom Rosenstiel and I will continue to head the Committee of Concerned Journalists, and I'll be doing most of the work on developing the curriculum. I also want to help the advisory board of the Center for Public Integrity. I helped organize the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. I'll be on the board of the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Q. Anything you're particularly proud of during your career?

A. When I was covering the state Legislature for the Nashville Tennessean, reporters had to leave the room during Senate committee votes. We took it into federal court and it became a big case. We took the state on under the First and 14th amendments. The judge decided under the freedom of the press clause of the First Amendment, was the first time a federal court had done that, and it became a footnote in First Amendment history and was the beginning of what are now called the Sunshine Laws.

Q. And at the New York Times?

A. Covering the anti-Vietnam war movement when I headed the New England regional bureau ... the May Day demonstrations down in Washington ... the Berigians [anti-war priests] broke into FBI files and turned a bunch of the document over to me to write about. I guess my real brush with a great story was when (Times reporter) Neil Sheehan came up here in the middle of the night and called and needed help trying to copy the Pentagon Papers. I arranged to get those copied. I set up the place and paid the guy, and when the FBI started investigating, mine was the only name they had because I'd written the checks.

Q. Any big regret?

A. Atlanta. There was just completely no trust between [me and management]. I was going to have to leave [but] I wish I had been cool enough to figure out a way how to leave, to disengage easier, on behalf of the editors and reporters who had come there to work for me. There were a lot of people there. When I left, I left them, and I'll always feel bad about that. I urged them to stay because I still believe that the real quality of the news resides in the

"I have become concerned over time with the way some news organizations use civic journalism to



City of Cambridge

R-17.

IN CITY COUNCIL

April 3, 2000

COUNCILLOR SULLIVAN

WHEREAS: It has come to the attention of this City Council that Cambridge resident Bill Kovach is the recipient of the Goldsmith Career Award for Excellence in Journalism; and

WHEREAS: Mr. Kovach's philosophy is to be the voice of the voiceless; and

WHEREAS: Mr. Kovach covered topics such as freedom of information laws, civil rights struggles and politics and worked as a New York Times reporter, editor and bureau chief; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the City Council go on record extending its congratulations to Bill Kovach on receiving the Goldsmith Career Award for Excellence in Journalism; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the City Clerk be and hereby is requested to forward a suitably engrossed copy of this resolution to Bill Kovach on behalf of the entire City Council.

285R

Resolution #17

Congratulations to Bill Kovach
on receiving the Goldsmith
Career Award for Excellence in
Journalism.

Councillor Sullivan

In City Council April 3, 2000

ORDER ADOPTED