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**INSIDE:**

Page 2: The Joy of Christian Journalism  
Page 3: Writer's Toolbox  
Page 4: Discipling Journal

**A Newsletter of The Amy Foundation**



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*"Christian journalists can have great joy by discovering and communicating the reasons that exist for honoring Christ in all things and above all things."*

## The Joy of Christian Journalism

By *Marvin Olasky*

What is the sound of one hand clapping? It's the sound of journalists in a sports press box.

Quick explanation: According to custom, baseball writers in the press box at ballparks don't applaud or cheer. I've noted the sounds of silence as over the past two decades I've covered baseball games from time to time. But once, in the Atlanta Braves press box, I saw one watcher pressing his right hand against the table when the Braves team did well. When I confronted him he fingered a couple of Atlanta reporters who surreptitiously do the same.

I asked those sportswriters about cheer-less press boxes. Some said they were trying to maintain a professional atmosphere in their workplace. Others offered a rationale of "objectivity": They did not want to be "homers," rooters for the hometown team. But I found myself wanting to break the rules by cheering or applauding great plays by either team. Art lovers can see new paintings and rejoice: Why should press objectivity require the silent denial of excellence?

One real reason for silence, I suspect, is tiredness: Reporters who spend every day at the ballpark sometimes lose their sense of wonder about athletic achievement and instead become know-it-alls. They become bored with baseball.

Many media organizations, sadly, include journalists bored with life, which they see as purposeless. Not all secular journalists are that way: David Halberstam, who wrote about wars and politics but also baseball, said shortly before

he died, "The legwork of reporting is critical and most of the fun. Think of it as part of a continuing education; we're paid to learn. It isn't just getting a byline that drives you; it isn't just where the story lands in the paper. Fifty-two years later, I still like what I do."

Christian journalists especially should have that attitude. We know human interest is important because every human is created in God's image. Over 3,000 years ago the Egyptian Ptahotep gave career advice: "Be a scribe! You sit grandly in your house, beer is poured copiously. All who see you rejoice in good cheer. ... Happy is the heart of him who writes; he is young each day." How much more so should Christians relish the joy of journalism, making it part of a life's goal: As the Westminster Catechism states, our chief end is "to glorify God and enjoy Him forever"—and forever begins right now.

To enjoy fully our craft, Christian journalists often need two crucial understandings. One is that the children's song "It's a Small World (After All)" is dumb. It's not a small world: It's a large one, with millions of nooks and crannies and opportunities for adventure. In Robert Boynton's book, *The New New Journalism*, writer Susan Orlean recalls with excitement an article she wrote about a gospel singing group: "It was astonishing for me to glimpse a world that was so fully developed—with its own stars, sagas, myths, history, millions of devotees—that I, in my narrow life, I had no idea existed."

The second necessary understanding comes from pastor Tim Keller's analysis of the parable of the prodigal son. Keller argues (*The Prodigal God*, 2008) that the parable should have a

*(Continued on Page 2)*

## Spread the Word!

The *Pen & Sword* is now published online only. If you or someone you know would like to receive the next issue, send your email address to amyfoundtn@aol.com.

## Pen & Sword

### **Editor:**

Mary Jackson

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## The Joy of Christian Journalism

*(Continued from Page 1)*

plural in its name: sons. We remember that the younger brother, of course, takes his inheritance, runs, and eventually finds that that his existence is truly oppressive. But the elder brother also has a problem: He is self-righteous and lacks joy. He works by the sweat of his brow and is angry with the younger brother for not doing his share, and then angry with the father for celebrating the prodigal's return.

When Christian journalists become solemn like some full-of-themselves pundits, we are not truly following Jesus, who regularly in the gospels flashes His sense of humor. Instead, we're acting like disciples of the 18th century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who saw the moral value of any action as inversely proportional to the benefit we derive from it. Kant argued that we should do what's good simply because it's good, and any benefits we derive lessen the goodness of our action. Good actions are "disinterested." Duty is meritorious. Enjoyment is selfish. The logic of this leads to a hard conclusion: The best actions are those that make us miserable. The elder brother in the prodigal's parable is a Kantian hero.

At a popular level, the secular left's attack on Christianity a century ago was that it led people to suffer in this life for the promise of a future that (according to atheists) would never come: "You'll have pie in the sky when you die." Christians, instead of refuting this concept, have sometimes run with it. That also has contributed to the sense that Christians are killjoys. But at *WORLD*, putting out a news magazine is a lot of fun, and we want our readers to enjoy it. We don't need to yell at readers with headlines such as "Christians, stand up to save America from Comrade Obama."

I remember one letter that came to *WORLD* after we criticized Barack Obama's positions but still asked our readers to keep calm and carry on, as the Brits said in World War II. The letter screamed: "Why are you gutless wimps not shouting through your columns that this nation does not want this filthy garbage as our country's leader? Where is your anger? Where is your HATRED???" Obama voted for infanticide, his corps of friends are some of the most unsavory, hateful, [expletive deleted] in the world!!!"

Hmm. *WORLD* crusades on abortion and other issues, but we try to keep calm by reporting sensational facts with—in most circumstances—understated prose.

We try to have an accurate self-image. An excellent secular reporter, Richard Ben Cramer, said of

himself, "I'm a smith. I occupy the position in our society that a good wheelwright would have occupied in his. Making wheels is a highly specialized skill. I don't consider myself to be an artist. I consider myself to be a skilled workman." That's how we as Christian journalists should see ourselves. We are not saviors. We are little hobbits in a great big world.

But we're also hobbits with a great opportunity to glorify God and enjoy Him immediately. As John Piper notes, "Every joy that does not have God as its central gladness is a hollow joy and in the end will burst like a bubble." Christian journalists can have great joy by discovering and communicating the reasons that exist for honoring Christ in all things and above all things.

Piper points out that we should aspire "to study reality as a manifestation of God's glory, to speak and write about it with accuracy, and to savor the beauty of God in it." The Bible teaches us that God created this world to be His theater, so the more we report accurately what happens in it, the more we will praise Him. A Christian journalist who highlights good news is praising God: Our natural selfishness means that what is good comes from Him. A Christian journalist who reports bad news, showing the results of sin, is praising God because the bad shows how desperately we need Him.

Zeal for God's glory should characterize all of a Christian journalist's editorial decisions. We should praise marriage and hate abortion in the realization that our natural tendencies are toward selfishness—so when a mom sacrifices her freedom to care for a child, and when a dad sacrifices his freedom to provide for his family, that glorifies God. We should cover compassionate ministries because God most showed his glory when Christ lowered himself to live among us and then suffer and die for us. Since Christ so amply displayed compassion, our trying to follow in some of His steps is another way of glorifying God.

All journalists can have the joy of writing provocative and evocative news stories that come out of pavement-pounding rather than thumb-sucking. Christian journalists can have greater joy by standing not only for factual accuracy but also for biblical objectivity, which means trying to see the world as best we can the way the Bible depicts it. Christian journalists can be humble by presenting not our own opinions but God's perspective from the Bible, distinguishing between issues on which the Bible is clear and those on which it isn't.

Christian journalists, in short, can have the joy of offering salt, not sugar, and not acid. We can publish

*(Continued on Page 4)*

## Telling Heroic Tales

By Mary Jackson

Bethany Starin, 28, is the 2012 Amy Writing Awards \$10,000 first prize winner. Her article, "Forged through Fire: A Story of Forgiveness," was published in the *Frederick Gorilla*. The story recounts a man's journey to Christ after years of cocaine addiction and a tragedy that left his entire front body burned.

Starin, a freelance journalist, graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2008 at the top of her class. Now, she covers local news and manages *The Town Courier*, a monthly newspaper in Urbana, MD., while also freelancing as a writer and photographer.

Starin is learning valuable lessons in her budding career, which she shared with us in a recent interview:

**How did you get your start in writing?** I grew up with dual interests: I loved to write, but I also enjoyed playing school and watching any movies involving teachers. I began college with the plan to be a writing teacher.

**But a trip overseas took you in a slightly different direction?** I took nine weeks off of school and went to India. I found myself doing mini-interviews. As I was hearing people's stories, I would go to my leather journal and write down what they said and details about their personalities. I realized when I came home that I had a passion to tell people's stories, especially those who don't have a voice. I became interested in people who had gone through some kind of adversity and had seen God's hand and learned something from it. These are people you can't conjure up. It takes work to come across them. There are heroic people in our own communities. Their stories won't be told unless someone like me or another journalist gives them a voice. I want my stories published somewhere where people who wouldn't pick up a Bible would read them.

**And this led to your Amy Award-winning story?** God brought me to that story. The [*Frederic Gorilla*] editor called me with a couple of different story options. I'm not sure if another writer who wasn't a Christian would have chosen it. It was during a time when I had a lot of other articles I was working on, but these are the type of stories I love writing the most.

**What were some of the challenges?** I had to build rapport with my source. There were a lot of facts, and I had to make sure everything was completely accurate.

Sometimes [the source's] memory was a little vague, so I had to go through crime records and do multiple interviews with numerous people.

### What are some takeaways from this experience?

My biggest encouragement from that experience is to not look down on even small opportunities. I had written a few short things for [*The Frederic Gorilla*]. It helped them see my level and style of writing. I had built that rapport. When I came back to them with this article, it was twice as long as they had wanted, but they ran it in full. I learned to take small writing assignments, and see them as a stepping stone.

### How did you hear about the Amy Writing Awards?

I had stayed in touch with a college journalism professor. I sent him a link to the story, and he sent back information about the awards. I had a lot going on—we were preparing to move. But I entered the story and then forgot about it. It was humbling to win. It was a reminder from God that He is involved in my life and my work. Being a freelancer can be lonely. I am at home a lot...God sees those lonely moments, and He has other work He wants me to do.

**Any tips for writers who need inspiration?** Try to be involved in your community. I have always enjoyed going to coffee shops, introducing myself to people, looking at the bulletin boards, and being a part of various groups, such as a running group. I get myself integrated and keep my ears open. I am not afraid of striking up a conversation. I love journalism because I love people. Most of my stories come from talking to people.

**What about reading recommendations?** I try to find particular authors with a style of writing I am drawn to. I immerse myself in those writers. I also follow particular writers at the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*. When I read their articles, I watch how they play between sentences, their rhythm, and how they start their story. It helps me get more creative with my stories.

To read Starin's award-winning story, visit our website, [www.amyfound.org](http://www.amyfound.org). Stay tuned to Starin's blog, [www.bethanystarin.com](http://www.bethanystarin.com), where she plans to post articles and photos.

## A New Edition of Prodigal Press

In 1988, Dr. Marvin Olasky's *Prodigal Press: Confronting the Anti-Christian Bias of the American News Media*, was one of the first books to explore the liberal and anti-Christian bias of the American news media. Since then, much has happened—including the rise of cable news, the advent of the Internet, and the 24-7 news cycle.

The changes, Olasky asserts, have created an environment in which anti-Christian bias is more pronounced than ever. That's why this fall P&R Publishing released the fully updated 25th anniversary edition of *Prodigal Press*. The new edition includes Olasky's original work, along with new material and revisions by Olasky and Warren Cole Smith, vice president of WORLD News Group.

Syndicated columnist Cal Thomas says, "Marvin Olasky gives new examples of anti-Christian bias, which ought to motivate more Christian young people to consider careers in journalism instead of cursing the growing darkness made worse by their absence."

**Terry "T.L." Hart** is a businessman and freelance writer. He has served on the Amy Foundation Advisory Board for 25 years. He is happily married to Barbara, has five children and ten grandchildren. He is active in his Lansing, MI church where he teaches and serves as an elder.

**Amy Writing Awards Deadline**

Don't miss an opportunity to submit your published work for the 2013 Amy Writing Awards. The Awards are designed to recognize creative, skillful journalism that applies biblical principles to stories about issues and lives. The final deadline for submissions is January 15, 2014. Writers may submit up to 10 articles annually. See <http://www.worldmag.com/amyawards/> for more details.

## Discipleship — A Lifelong Process

By Terry Hart

Jesus famously commanded us in Matthew 28 to "Go therefore and make disciples...teaching them to observe all the things I commanded you." In my case, it took a man 25 years my senior to demonstrate what this looks like.

I first heard Jim Russell from an audio tape of a talk he gave. The teaching deeply impacted my sense of purpose for the trade I was learning. Several years later, I met Jim personally at a local business group. He began helping me with my newly formed painting company.

At 60, Jim began a relationship with me that spanned two decades—until the day of his death in 2005. He had received Christ at a young age and faithfully matured in his walk, building a biblical perspective on work as a calling. Christ was the focal point of Jim's life and work—his purpose was to make it mine too.

As our relationship grew, Jim did not assume a normal business advisory role. He began discipling me in all aspects of my life. It took me 10 years to realize what he was doing. I had devoted my life to Christ in 1974, but God knew I needed to mature. Under the pretense of a business mentor, Jim was intent on imparting into me not only his business acumen, but the Spirit of Christ active in him, and how that impacted his role as a husband, father, and a believer living in a fallen world.

For starters, I began learning the nature of my call. For years I had struggled with evangelism, having

both a desire and a sense of urgency, but showing little fruit. Jim taught me that making disciples is a lifelong process, beginning before a person's conversion and extending long after through relationship. "Evangelism can be accomplished at arm's length," he would say. "Making a disciple requires a long-term commitment." Since that time I have viewed the Great Commission differently, and I have engaged others in the process of becoming Christ-like.

Jim instilled in me loyalty to the local church. The congregation I belonged to at the time was experiencing much turmoil, with both pastors and members leaving in droves. It was a difficult time for my wife and me. Jim was there alongside us, urging us to remain faithful. He and his wife modeled this as their congregation went through many challenges as well.

Jim was a successful businessman, having built his business on biblical principles. Although I was not always the best student and still had to learn a lot of things the hard way, Jim taught me how to manage my company using financial statements and to insist on monthly profitability. He challenged me to look at my attitudes and motives in those disciplines and other business decisions.

More than anything, Jim demonstrated to me a life of sacrificial love. He became my best friend. No one person had ever taken such an interest in me, spent so much time with me, and poured so much of himself into me. Not only that, but I saw him do this repeatedly in the lives of others. No wonder so many others called him *their* best friend. I am what I am today, and will be tomorrow, in large part because of Jim Russell.

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## The Joy of Christian Journalism

(Continued from Page 2)

what we believe to be true, not what we or someone else would like to be true. Christian journalists can have the joy of speaking up for those it's convenient to forget: the unborn, the uneducated victimized by poor schools, and the politically unfashionable. We can know that we are fallen sinners, but sinners who look upward and create a no-scream zone within a high-decibel society.

In the world, this theater created by God, we can enjoy our front-row seats. We can applaud with both hands, praising God by telling the truth.

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