The Life and Times of NY

BY SUSAN PIPERATO

Of all the newspapers that crowd stands around New York and across the country, the New York Times is still the most comprehensive. The Times has news of the city, state, nation, and world. It features health, technology, food, entertainment, lifestyles, law, education, real estate, communications, architecture, fashion, culture, the arts. It is an authoritative guide to an ever-changing city at the center of the world.

"The proof of the paper's success," says military correspondent Drew Middleton, "is that when people ask, 'Have you seen today's paper?' they always mean the Times."

The 137-year-old newspaper attracts more than one million national readers daily; on Sunday, 1.6 million. Times staff members have won 58 Pulitzer Prizes (more than any other newspaper) and several are regarded as international authorities on their subjects.

So it isn't surprising that working at the Times is the dream of many journalists. According to four alumni employed by the Times—Middleton, "On Language" columnist and political writer William Safire, editorialist Diane Camper, and business editor Stephen J. Govoni—there's no job quite like it.

For Middleton, the Times's humanity sets it above the rest. "The character of the newspaper is determined by the people who own, edit, and write for it," he says. "In 46 years on staff I've seen no flagrant deficiencies. Considering the thousands of words that have poured out, and the tens of thousands of editorial decisions made, the standards are very high."

A 1935 SU graduate, Middleton joined the Times's London bureau in 1942 and served as a foreign correspondent in Great Britain, France, North Africa, Belgium, and Germany throughout World War II. He's been chief correspondent at the Moscow bureau and European affairs correspondent. He covered the United Nations and in 1970 was named military correspondent. And, though he retired in late 1985, Middleton maintains an office at the Times and continues to write articles about military and international issues. He's also produced four books, including Crossroads of Modern Warfare.
He sees strength in the *Times’s* newsgathering organization. “When I joined the *Times* in the forties the focus was on national news—the war and how it was being run from Washington. Since then international coverage has increased and the metropolitan desk has made great strides. In recent years the *Times* has pioneered in realizing that New York City is not just Manhattan, but the outer boroughs, Long Island, Westchester, and New Jersey as well.

“The *Times* is a class paper,” he concludes, “not because people with money read it, but because people with education and understanding believe they have to read the *Times*, and they do. Anyone with real intelligence and an interest in finance or national or international news must keep informed by reading the *Times*.”

William Safire is one of the *Times’s* most renowned columnists, and was once one of its most controversial staff additions. When he began working at the Washington bureau in 1973, Safire was known as a former public relations man (he engineered the 1959 “Kitchen Debate” between Richard Nixon and Nikita Krushchev) and speechwriter for Nixon since 1965.

In the wake of Watergate, Safire’s conservative stances did not make him a popular figure. Early columns defending Nixon did not help; some colleagues were so outraged that they requested his dismissal. In August 1973, though, Safire discovered that his home and office telephones had been wiretapped during his tenure at the White House. Safire wrote in a column that he had been “egregiously wrong” about Nixon. Four years later, when Safire won a Pulitzer Prize for his column exposing the dubious financial dealings of White House budget director Bert Lance, Safire headed his own PR firm, beginning in 1979.

Moving to Washington, D.C. in 1968, following Nixon’s election, he continued to split his time between Washington and New York.

“The *Times* is the best newspaper in the world because it has the best staff in the world,” he says. “It also has the dominant position in the world’s most exciting city. New York has the combination of power and sophistication that puts a paper on its mettle. The qualities that make New York different helped create the *Times*; its success lies in its ability to feed those requirements of power and sophistication.”

Safire calls his position there “the world’s greatest job.” As he told a *New York* magazine reporter last August, “I’m sharing the action and passion of my times, and I can say what I think and go where I want and have some influence on what people think of events.”

As the first black woman to join the *Times* editorial board (in 1984), Diane Camper also notices her influence as a *Times* writer. After five years as a *Newsweek* reporter, she finds it interesting she can “get up on a little bit of a soap box as the institutional voice of the *Times*” on a particular issue.

“The *Times*’ opinions are read by the people who set legislative policy, including the President,” says Camper. “Although, as part of the editorial board, I don’t get my name in the newspaper, I do feel that I’ve got substantial influence with my opinions.”

A 1968 SU graduate in journalism and political science, Camper is also a Yale law graduate and served as chairperson of the committee that administers the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Awards to the disadvantaged. While at *Newsweek*, she hadn’t planned on editorial writing, “although sometimes I felt that in my career I’d like to do writing with more impact.” The *Times* approached her and suddenly she had her chance.

The preparation of editorial stances for the *Times* is a team effort. “There are 14 [board] members, all of whom write, and the top three also edit,” Camper explains. “Three times a week we meet and go around the table proposing what we want to write about. People tend to specialize, but there is flexibility.” Camper’s expertise is domestic social issues.

Camper shares the *Times*’ greatest strength lies in its ability to be comprehensive. “The *Times*’ depth of coverage of cultural issues, for instance, is just not done on a routine basis by other papers,” she says.

“The *Times* has managed to retain its reputation and sophistication but has become more accessible,” she explains. “It’s not so daunting as its old ‘gray lady’ reputation has made it seem over the years. With its many new sections the paper has become more consumer-oriented. Yet its principal focus is on being in New York and very much of New York. The *Times* is a New York institution.”

Stephen J. Govoni, a story editor at the *Business World* quarterly Sunday magazine section, joined the *Times* last September after two years as executive editor of *Financial World* magazine.

Govoni received a journalism degree at SU in 1971. He was a reporter at the Stamford *Advocate* in Connecticut and business writer at the Hackensack *Record* before becoming the first staff writer at *Manhattan, inc.*

At the *Times*, Govoni’s job involves editing, rewriting, and assigning. He is impressed with the *Times’s* resources for researching stories.

“The *Times* has far more influence,” he says. “The *Times*’ coverage of the Wall Street crash last October was superior to the *Wall Street Journal*’s reports. It looked better, it was more accessible, better orchestrated, and once again proved how well the *Times* can deploy its tremendous resources on a major news story.

“There’s no question that if you took the same people who work on this paper and put them in another city, they’d put out a great paper,” Govoni reasons. “It wouldn’t be as commercially successful or as powerful in another city; if the *Times* was not in the center of communications, finance, and so forth, it wouldn’t be as successful an enterprise.

“But the *Times* is the world’s greatest newspaper,” says Govoni. “It’s won more Pulitzers and has, over the years, attracted some of the most talented and courageous journalists. As far as I’m concerned, it’s the hometown newspaper for the greatest city in the world.”

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THE QUITE STORM

To wind down after a hard day in the canyons of the city, New Yorkers increasingly turn their dials to radio station WBLS and the velvet voice of Vaughn Harper '68.

His Quiet Storm is the top rated FM radio show in New York, and for the past 11 years Harper has brought to it a sensual voice and lush blend of romantic music—the best of past and present ballads. “I concentrate on music that deals with love in its different forms,” he says.

Harper’s voice is heard on many commercials, and Harper also has a production company that creates situations for new acts. “I’d like to be more involved in creating music and guiding the careers of young artists,” he says. —CNS

ROCK AND ROLL MADAME

The Stars Deli serves something called The Madame Sandwich. It’s a concoction of turkey, meatloaf, sweet pepper, swiss cheese, and Russian dressing and it’s named after Jo Maeder ’76.

Maeder is a disc jockey at New York’s WXRK, known better as K-Rock. She’s the Rock and Roll Madame because she hosts a classic rock show evenings from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. at the same station where notorious deejay Howard Stern plies his trade.

The Madame, who started working at K-Rock in 1984, also does voice-overs for such products as Toll House Treasures, Members Only cologne, Personal Touch razors, and IBM computers.

—MEM

COMMERCIAL FOCUS

Located in the heart of West Soho’s gallery district is a three-story building where pictures get their power: the studio where Eric Meola ’68 creates award-winning photos for such clients as Nikon, Porsche, R.J. Reynolds, Seagrams, IBM, General Motors, and Polaroid.

“arrrs his 16 years as a professional photographer,” wrote Graphis in a recent, 18-page tribute, “he has studiously avoided being pigeonholed into one or another of the various commercial categories, such as beauty, travel, automotive, or still life, preferring instead to let his work create its own impression in the minds of his clients.”

Meola, named Advertising Photographer of the Year by the American Society of Magazine Photographers in 1986, still shoots for his own enjoyment. His personal pursuits have taken him to such places as Kenya and Tanzania, and he is now working on an American photography book.

—MEM
QUESTIONS OF TASTE

While the cast of Saturday Night Live is on stage, broadcasting outrageous parody, live and nationwide, William Clotworthy '48 is cringing offstage. It's his job.

Clotworthy is director of program standards at NBC in New York. In addition to Saturday Night, Clotworthy is responsible for the broadcast standards of The David Letterman Show, The Cosby Show, Another World, Friday Night Videos, and others.

"It can be a challenge, that's for sure," says Clotworthy. "The dirty words are easy. Nudity is easy. Where we get into problems are things like ethnic derogation, religious comedy, drug humor, controversial subjects, and that sort of thing."

While Saturday Night is in production, Clotworthy is on the set from read-through until the show airs. "I may not do anything," he says, "but I'm there to help out and work with the writers. I'm a presence."

Clotworthy must be doing something right. "This is my ninth season at Saturday Night Live," he says, "and I'm still alive." —MEM

NETWORK HONCHOS

Hollywood has most of the studios, but New York is still network central. Anthony Malara '58 is vice president of affiliate relations and distribution for CBS Television Network. He works closely with CBS's 200 affiliate stations around the country. He sees to it that these stations air as many CBS programs as possible, even though they're under no obligation to do so.

"It's the network's job to see they give us maximum shelf space, so to speak," Malara explains. Mark H. Cohen G'58 is executive vice president of the ABC Television Network Group and vice president of Capital Cities/ABC.

Cohen oversees the day-to-day operation of daytime, early-morning, and children's programs. He is also responsible for coordinating various operational aspects of the group such as business affairs, contracts, marketing, and research services.

Broadcast News

For Judith Licht Della Femina G'67, a feature reporting slot at Fox Broadcasting's Channel 5 is the perfect job for a new mother.

"I've been a news anchor and had my own talk show, but this is just right for me at this point," she explains. "It allows me to work part time now and then ease back into full-time work when my daughter is older."

Della Femina, who met adman husband Jerry when she interviewed him, is delighted to be with Fox. "Unlike other broadcast outlets that are contracting, Fox is expanding. There's a real 'can do' atmosphere here. Right now we're discussing my doing a video column." —CNS

Just The Facts, Ma'am

Accuracy is important to any journalist, but for Lisa Lampugnale '83 facts are everything. She's research chief of Spy magazine, the hip Manhattan monthly that lampoons the rich, powerful, and trendy.

Lampugnale's performance probably will determine the longevity of Spy, whose editorial posture invites controversy. With features like "Little Men—How the Runts Have Taken Over" and "Too Rich & Too Thin," accuracy is "ultra-important," Lampugnale says. "We also have a really good lawyer."

Despite Spy's biting tone, Lampugnale insists the magazine is presented in fun. "We like to poke fun at everybody who's anybody," she says. "We would never pick on anybody with hardships. . . . We definitely champion the underdog, and the 'overdog,' so to speak, really gets it."

That includes Spy's advertisers, frequently lampooned in editorial copy. "It's trendy to appear in Spy and you hit the right market," Lampugnale says, "but you're also not going to be safe from ridicule. I don't think anybody's safe except the 20 people who work here." —RGL