

NATIONAL SOCIETY OF NEWSPAPER COLUMNISTS 30TH ANNIVERSARY
MEETING

KENNEALLY: Well, welcome to another edition of Beyond the Book. My name is Chris Kenneally, and as Director of Author Relations for the Nonprofit Copyright Clearance Center, it's our pleasure to move around the country and talk with writers and those in the publishing field about their business, about their writing, and about what makes it all possible, which is the reader.

Today, we're in Boston to be part of the National Society of Newspaper Columnists conference. It's a pleasure to join you. I am from Boston myself, and I tell everyone that it's hard to tell. Perhaps you can hear something of the accent in my voice.

As I was coming into the city this morning, I was thinking about columnists and their role in the publishing field generally. We're here to talk about columnists and their books, and I wonder whether or not at this moment when the newspaper world, particularly, but media of all type, are worried very much about the future and how they're going to survive, whether or not columnists have something very special to, if not teach the media, to at least remind them of.

Reporting is usually thought of as the facts, but I do believe that the facts don't make news, people do, and what is the real substance of every column that I read isn't so much the news itself but the people that the columnist knows and can tell their stories. And I think that engaging readers with people's stories may in fact be the best way forward for all of us.

The other part that seemed important to me is the sense of trust that every reader has to have in the columnists that they read. At a moment when we see far too much mistrust of the media, and the media, and certain members, at least, have been complicit in growing that mistrust, I believe that the kind of relationships that you all have with your readers are an example for others to follow, and perhaps we can chat about that with some of the panelists.

But let's get started. I want to welcome first of all Myra MacPherson, who was for many years reporter for the *Washington Post*. She's here to talk about her new book, which will be out this fall. It's a book I believe you're going to be writing about, if not only reading, and that's called *All Governments Lie: The Life and Times of Rebel Journalist I.F. Stone*. Her previous books are *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation*, which was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Award, *The Power Lovers*, and *She Came to Live Out Loud*. Myra, as I mentioned, was a celebrated journalist for the *Washington Post*, renowned for her penetrating political profiles, and she has written as well for the *New York Times* and numerous magazines, including *Vanity Fair*. Welcome to Beyond the Book, Myra.

MACPHERSON: Thank you.

KENNEALLY: Your subject is I.F. Stone, Izzy Stone, as he was known. And throughout his extraordinary career, and a very long one, he moved frequently between investigative journalism and opinion columns. Does his experience as a 20th-century columnist and writer have application today, when the line between reporting and opinion seems to be so much more blurred than ever?

MACPHERSON: Well, he has an enormous impact when you start reading anything he ever wrote, and actually, he should be taught in journalism schools all over the place, because Izzy was an incredible blend of a funny man, a scholar, and he believed strongly in facts. And he would just – he got all his facts – I mean, he would find scoops in the library. He would find scoops in the back, in the appendix, of some documentation. He was the first journalist in America to blow the whistle on the Gulf of Tonkin three weeks after it happened. And he did so much digging before he did his writing that he was always grounded, and he used to say, “You just can’t sit on their laps and let them tell you crap,” is what he said, because that’s all they will do.

And the second line of my title is a line he wrote in the ’70s, “All governments lie, but disaster lies in wait for countries whose officials smoke the same hashish they give out.” And it was a good line in the Vietnam era, but it still is applicable. He always said, you must be skeptical, you must, must get grounded in what’s happening. If you just go to a source and you get what I call faux objectivity, which is, McNamara said this, or Cheney said that, or someone else said that – There’s always been this age-old problem in journalism of if an official says something, then you have to quote it on deadline, and I think it’s a lot worse now that everything is 24/7 and you don’t have time to check (break in tape) But if you know the facts, you can insert, without an editorial comment, you can insert the fact that this is what the President said, however, these are the facts. And you have to be much more grounded.

I also think, in a very strange way, that what helped Izzy was being nearly deaf and being a Jew, because he grew up in a time where fascism was rampant in America, and he felt as a Jew that he had always been an outsider, and that gave him a certain skeptical perspective. And I think skepticism has to be there. That doesn’t mean that you dig for every single scandal that you can find in someone, but you do have to be skeptical about what they’re saying.

The whole business of government is to manipulate, and the whole business of the journalist is to get behind that manipulation, and he was a classic example of that.

KENNEALLY: Myra, that notion of him as the outsider recalled for me a terrific story in the book about a time when he actually used his deafness to get the story. Can you tell us –

MACPHERSON: (laughter) Yes. David Brinkley always told this story. This was during World War II, and they were waiting to hear what was happening to Charlie Knudsen, who was then the head of – well, it was all about whether or not the automotive industry was going to switch to doing warfare production. And there was a secret, secret meeting, and the press was all standing outside, and Izzy took his earphones off and put it on the door and heard the very comment that they said, “No, Charlie,” to Charlie Wilson who was the head of GM. And he said, “No, Charlie,” so Izzy got the scoop and gave it to everybody who was standing around.

But because he was nearly deaf, he relied on documents, and that is something that is so seldom done today. Walter Pincus, during a horrible – writing about weapons of mass destruction, and the lies, and the stuff that was going on and on and on, Walter Pincus on the *Washington Post*, who had been trained by Izzy, wrote a story saying that weapons of mass destruction, that there were people who doubted it sincerely. The *Washington Post* played it on page A17, and the only reason it ran at all was because Bob Woodward said it should run somewhere, and – which was always Izzy’s great line. He said he loved to read the *Washington Post* because he never knew on what page you’d find a front-page story. (laughter)

But Izzy said, he read the documents and he found people. Another fact that Izzy always said was to go into the middle bowels of government. If you’re going to learn something, don’t get it from the top. Get it from the whistle-blowers and the people who care, and there are a lot of decent people out there who say this is wrong, and we’ve got to find it, he said. That was another point.

And he also said, have fun. Don’t feel like a martyr. He said if you think you’re going to change the world in a meager one or two centuries, of course it’s hopeless. But he said you just have to keep trying and you do it for the love of it. He used to say, “I’m having so much fun I ought to be arrested.” And so –

KENNEALLY: The sense of his fun he conveyed to his readers, and I think that’s the important thing, and a note that I wanted to try to work out with you, which was, how did he take what was some of the most serious topics that anyone can imagine and make them so lively and entertaining? People waited for *Stone’s Weekly* to come out, because they enjoyed reading it. It wasn’t simply that they wanted to find out what awful things were being done in their name.

MACPHERSON: Yeah. He always referred to writing as writing – His great ambition was to write his soufflé. It had to be light as well the substance that he larded it with, and so he worked at it. He crafted. He had sort of a Borscht Belt ability to do a one-liner, but he always larded it with more substance. And I just want to give you very few, but – and also the fact of it, when you read him now, he is so incredibly prescient.

This is a line – “To embark on secret warlike activities against peoples whose government we dislike is to set out on a course destructive of free government and peace. Is it in the national interest to let the government deceive the people?” And the headline was, “When the government lies, must the press fib?” And this was in May 1961, and you hear it today and you think, well – this was about the Bay of Pigs invasion. But he said, “To stay in power has been the fundamental purpose of the Democrats or Republican parties. Parties are no longer an organ of a part of the people. They have simply have become hereditary things like blue eyes and cancer.” Izzy was 14 when he wrote that.

And he said, “A newspaperman ought to use his power on behalf of those who are getting the dirty end of the deal, and when he has something to say, he ought not to be afraid to raise his voice above a decorous mumble and to use 48-point bold.”

And then he could be very funny, like he said about Teddy White, who was writing all these fawning biographies. He said, “Any man who can be so universally admiring need never lunch alone.” And he also said – Well, I just won’t –

KENNEALLY: Let me just pursue the idea of his tremendous independence. It’s a note that I think will sound later with Jeff Seglin about ethics and all. It was a matter of ethical principle for him to be independent, and I suppose that’s why so many people today think of him – and you can argue with this whether it’s true or not. They think of Stone as the grandfather of the bloggers, the ones who today are proclaiming their independence from the mainstream media.

MACPHERSON: Well, I think there are vast differences. For many, many years, Izzy was a very brilliant member of establishment journalism on the left. He was the first and youngest editorial writer on a major paper to write about Hitler. He warned about the Holocaust constantly when Walter Lipmann was saying it was no problem. I twin him with Walter Lipmann in the book because there’s such a difference. He was always independent, but he was also working for other people.

When the McCarthy era came along, and Izzy had been trailed by Hoover, J. Edgar Hoover, I found 5000 pages in his file. It was such subversive things as going to the cigar store, going to get groceries. He had one of these lovely, romantic marriages that would bring tears to a gumshoe’s eyes because they never – They couldn’t find anything on him. And Hoover hated him because he was always knocking him, and he had a place to do that.

And this is what I think is the important part of blogging is, we don’t have those places any more in mainstream journalism. As soon as McCarthyism came in, he was out of a job. All the left-wing papers went, and so he was forced to start his weekly. And he became a millionaire, because he became a hero during both the Civil Rights era and the Vietnam War.

But the difference is that – Izzy always used to get annoyed when somebody called him the first laptop edit writer, because he said, “I had a printer,” and he didn’t mean a printer next to you. He meant going down to an actual printing office, sitting there working, laying the type out, putting it all together, worrying, walking all over the place, getting assistants to run up to the State Department every other minute to find something, poring through things.

My opinion – and it’s really not terribly strong because I don’t read bloggers that much – is that a lot of is just opinion without fact, and it’s a place to sort of just vent for the people, and you have to really know who you’re reading. Somebody once said that bloggers were the karaoke of journalism. (laughter) And they think they can write, and they think they know something. So there is a major difference. I’m upset that there’s no self-policing. I’m not talking about censorship. I’m just talking about self-policing and knowing how to do it, and I think we’re feeling our way.

KENNEALLY: I think what Stone’s life represented to so many in the ’60s and in the ’70s was an inspiration of this kind of single voice that could be so powerful. And that’s something that resonates today, and perhaps what does connect him with the bloggers is the notion that the single voice can change things.

MACPHERSON: Yeah, but then you have the swift boat ads, and you have a lot of things that are terribly wrong that he would never have done. He always joked that he became rich and famous because he was a war profiteer. If it hadn’t been for Vietnam, he had no idea whether that would have happened. But he spoke to a large group of anti-war people, and it was almost like a chain letter. Everybody would go from here to there.

And I’m such an old-fashioned freak that I have – I really love the written word like this, and I think that that was – He was appealing to an audience in an age like that. Ben Bradlee and I were talking the other day, and he said, “There isn’t an editorial meeting in which we don’t talk about losing readership, and what we’re going to do about recapturing readership,” and of course, I think that has led to the fluff and – I’m so glad Angelina finally had her baby because – And you would sit there and say, “Why is this everywhere?” And part of it is this utter grasp for readership that was not there before.

I mean, Izzy was a serious but very well-read writer. He wasn’t fluff, and he could make it funny, but he was serious. And we need a lot more people like that. We have them. We have Molly Ivins, we have Jim Hightower, we have Frank Rich, we have – I think Sy Hirsch is a supreme investigative reporter. But I hope the next generation will bring out more of those.

KENNEALLY: Well, I think not only the next generation, but the current one could do well to read the book, because it’s so engaging itself, and it’s wonderful in that you could almost use it as a guide to writing well, the kinds of insights you have in the

interviews you did with the various people who knew him along the way. And I have to remind the audience, if they're not familiar with Stone, he was engaged in everything from, as you mentioned, the rise of Hitler all the way through the McCarthy period, the Cold War, and past the end of the Vietnam War. It's quite a remarkable stretch.

MACPHERSON: I just want to tell you, Murray Kempton, who was a famous writer and also –

KENNEALLY: And a columnist.

MACPHERSON: And columnist, and was thought of as independent, said that most of us are not comfortable except when we go in a herd. And I think that the herd mentality is difficult. You love it. You love being with your buddies. I would go out and cover politics, and it's great fun. You want to just go home and tell your friends about it and throw the notes away. It was a great night or day. But Izzy was comfortable going alone, and it was difficult and lonely. He was a pariah in the '50s. Journalists snubbed him. People wouldn't talk to him on the street. They wouldn't – he used to say – He told me once, he said, "I used to shake my fist at those people on the Hill and say 'I may just be a goddamned sonofabitch Red Jew to you, but I'm keeping Jefferson alive!'" And his First Amendment – And he never, never said – I mean, he loved America, he absolutely loved America and he felt that dissent was absolutely necessary to keep it clean and to keep people holding true to the tenets of the Bill of Rights.

And what Murray Kempton said, and I think this is illustrative, was that Izzy saw things that other people didn't see, and he often said that the past is rarely used to point out the present or to predict the future. That was one of Izzy's points. And what happened is that, as Murray Kempton said, all of us wrote, eventually, about how bad McCarthy was, but he said, these are the people – he said, there are people who are just along the surface of the pond, the water bugs. And he said, then there are the others who get down and poison the springs from below, and he said, that was J. Edgar Hoover, and Izzy was one of the few people who would constantly dare to risk everything by knocking him.

And I think that it's not just good enough to be a thinker. There's that quality of saying, "What does this really mean in the long run, and who is behind it?" And he was able to do that when a lot of reporters weren't.

KENNEALLY: That ability is something I want to explore with Noah Lukeman in just a moment. But finally, can you tell us about how Stone came to write the book on Socrates. Why would he, someone who had followed every current event throughout half a century, want to write about someone who lived 2000 years earlier?

MACPHERSON: Well, he was a great autodidact. He finished third in his high school class – third from the bottom. He dropped out of college. He was a philosophy major. The lure of journalism was too much. But he really adhered to those roots and wanted to get back to serious writing, so as he said, he became the world’s oldest living freshman and went back to college to study Greek, so that he could read Greek in the original when he – And he said it was just a wonderful experience, but he said that he was in the stacks of the library, and he read somewhere where somebody had read Socrates in the original when he was 4 years old, and Izzy said, “If I’d had a gun I would have shot myself.” He said, “I’m starting this at such an old, old age.” But he was fascinated by it and then he wrote it as – the trial, he went in and he read Plato, and he decide that Plato was just a snob. He was very funny and very controversial with his book. But he had –

KENNEALLY: He brought his opinions to the book.

MACPHERSON: He brought his opinions to the book. But the thing about Izzy is, he also had an enormous ego, and he sometimes said things that everybody else thought was hysterical but he meant it deadly serious. And he was giving a speech about the Socrates book, and he said, “I wrote a speech for Socrates, and if he’d have given that, he would have been acquitted.” (laughter) So he did have a huge ego, and he did have faith in himself and confidence in what he was doing, obviously.

KENNEALLY: Well, thank you very much, Myra. Myra MacPherson.

I want to turn now to Noah Lukeman and tell you just a bit about his background. Noah is author of *A Dash of Style: The Art and Mastery of Punctuation*, the best-selling *The First Five Pages: A Writer’s Guide to Staying out of the Rejection Pile* and *The Plot Thickens: Eight Ways to Bring Fiction to Life*. His op-ed pieces have been published in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Dallas Morning News*, among other places. But he is also – and this is significant for our audience today – president of Lukeman Literary Management Ltd., and has also worked as not only an agent for other agencies but on the editorial side of several major publishers, including William Morrow and Farrar, Straus, Giroux. Welcome, Noah Lukeman.

Noah, it seems to me there’s a lot there in what Myra was just saying about Izzy Stone and you can apply it to the current situation. But can you tell us honestly, how do editors today respond to book proposals from newspaper columnists?

LUKEMAN: Thank you, Chris. Well, editors today, if you submit a proposal from a newspaper columnist, there are some advantages and some disadvantages to that from a literary agent’s perspective. One advantage is that they’re used to deadlines, which is a nice thing. A lot of times you do book deals and the author has one year or two years to deliver, and they’ll be a year or two year late, and that can be a little frustrating for some editors, and that can cause serious problems.

Newspaper columnists tend to be much more disciplined in that regard and usually will say, “Noah, my book is due tomorrow. Is it OK if I’m one hour late?” And I’ll say, “Yeah, it’s fine. If you’re a week late, don’t worry about it.” So that’s good.

They’re used to, obviously, asking tough questions, in most cases. They’re used to doing research. They take their writing very seriously as a job and as a craft and as a discipline. All these are big advantages.

The disadvantage could be that they’re writing style can be a little bit choppy, a little bit geared towards newspapers. They’re used to writing to – condensing things to small paragraphs, to small columns, to making it fit to 700 words or 1200 words. They’re used to quoting people a lot. So as an agent, when I get queries or manuscripts from someone, I can just glance at the page and immediately tell if it’s a columnist, because you’ll see a lot of people being quoted, you’ll see a lot of short paragraphs, you’ll see a lot of short sentences.

So there are some advantages, there are some disadvantages. But ultimately, as far as how editors at book publishing companies will perceive them will ultimately depend a lot on the content of the particular book proposal, what you propose. You could be a wonderful columnist with a bad idea and no one’s going to want to buy it, or you could be not such a great columnist with a wonderful concept which is done in a great way, and they might all want it. So, a book proposal is very much its own thing, and has to be taken on its own terms.

KENNEALLY: And although Jeff Seglin’s going to tell us about a really positive experience with a collection of columns, I believe it’s your view that the collection is something that people should avoid thinking about, and think more about how to take what they have gathered up through all of their writing and build that into a book, that fundamentally a book is very different from a column.

LUKEMAN: Yeah, that’s true. One of the biggest mistakes from an agent’s perspective that columnists make is they’ll send me a manuscript which is filled with a collection of their columns and think, well, now I have enough columns to actually physically fill out 200 pages, so now I have a book deal. Editors don’t want to buy – If I take this on and submit it to editors, they’ll all tell me the same thing, which is that, “I don’t want to buy a collection of random columns just for the sake of having a collection.”

It’s very difficult to sell a collection of columnists unless the person is a celebrity columnist. In that case, yes, you can do it. Even then, you might have a difficult time, and even then, it might be a much smaller advance. Editors – and they’re responding to the way that book buyers respond. There are exceptions where book buyers will buy and a collection will be very successful, but in most cases, the hard numbers tell you that most collections of columns don’t sell as much as single-

topic books, so most editors are reluctant to buy them. It goes all the way down the road.

So as a columnist, you're much better off choosing one column or one great story that could be book-length and writing a book on that one particular subject, as opposed to saying, well, let's just collect everything I've ever done and try to sell that as a book.

KENNEALLY: Right, and that's not a discouraging note, I don't think, because it's not saying throw out everything, you have to start fresh, but to really try to think about what it is as a columnist that you've pursued over time. Perhaps there are some characters that have been important to you, there are some things that can withstand the development necessary for a 300-page book, isn't that –

LUKEMAN: Yeah, absolutely. The main thing is you have to think of yourself as an author, not as a columnist. These are two very different things. So if you're an author of books, you have to think of writing a book as a totally different medium and a different form, and you have to try to become that book author instead of remaining the columnist, which means you have to choose one topic that could sustain 300 pages, instead of choosing a topic that could sustain one page or five pages or 10 pages. And that means finding a story that has a lot of depth to it and approaching it as a book, and giving the form of the book true respect. Saying, well, I can write. I write columns, so I could write a book, that's not the best way to approach it. The better way is to say, well, this is a totally different medium. Let me really study and understand this medium and try to adapt to the medium instead of just feeling like because I write I can write anything. Yeah, for sure.

KENNEALLY: You mentioned the medium and respect for it. Today there are so many medias on offer. What do you think about columnists trying out different media? Do you urge that they do that? Do you really want to see them stick to the printed word? What are your thoughts on that?

LUKEMAN: Yeah, I think that the more media that someone can have at their fingertips, the better, because when it comes to getting a book deal, one of the most important elements to sell your book will be, how big is your platform, how big is your following? If someone's a syndicated columnist and they reach 10 million readers daily, they'll probably get a book deal, even if it's not a very good book. And if somebody has a blog and they have 500,000 people visiting it every day, and they reach millions of readers, and they're on NPR, and they're on national television, when their book comes out, this is what's going to enable them to actually sell the books in the stores. So if they have all this media at their fingertips before they approach the publishing industry, they'll have a much better chance of getting a book deal to begin with. Just like if Oprah decides to write a book, she'll have a book deal regardless of what it's about, because of her platform. The same thing with Howard Stern or anyone who has a huge platform.

So obviously, not all of us have the capacity to have a show with millions of viewers every day, but you do what you can and you slowly build your Internet presence, and you try to build a bigger and bigger readership, and you try to get a radio presence and a television presence, and you wait as long as you can until you approach the publishing industry to have as big a following as you can, to help make the case that if your book comes out, you'll be able to help sell it on the back end. Because otherwise, you walk into Barnes and Noble and your book sits there with 100,000 other books, and it's very hard for someone walking in off the street to just find a particular book and buy it. Usually what sells books is publicity, is a radio show or television show driving a particular book buyer to the store to go in and ask for that specific book.

KENNEALLY: As a matter of sort of practical application, then, the proposal, in order to be a winning one, from a literary agent's standpoint, not only has to explain why this story is something that's going to be engaging to readers over the course of a book length, but also who those readers may be. You need to document all the various parts of the media that you are involved with, and really make it clear to whoever may be buying the book that you have this reach, right? You can't just assume it. You have to really document it, and the editor wants to see that.

LUKEMAN: Yeah, absolutely. You have to make a strong case for who your readership will be, which is part of the reason why it's so hard to sell a collection of columns, because several columns could cover several different topics that are of interest to a whole broad range of people. So in order for a proposal to be successful, an editor has to immediately get it, that oh, I see who the audience for this will be, oh, that there really is a need for this, oh, that nothing else like this is out there. You need a great writer, you need a great concept, you need a great execution.

And you have – there've been proposals I've shopped around from columnists where editors will say, well, wow, that was a great 30-page read. I feel like I've read enough. And that question will come up all the time, that issue. That's probably one of the biggest reasons why you can't get a book deal for a lot of columns, because they'll say, well, I think it's a wonderful story, and I think that it's covered very well in a 20-page article. I don't think readers, after reading 20 pages, will feel compelled to go to a store, spend \$25, and read 400 pages more on the topic. Feel like they've had their fill.

So the challenge for you is, how do you take a – You have to ask yourself, will a reader be satisfied after reading a 30-page article on this topic, or will they be compelled to read another 400 pages, and that's a very hard question to answer. You need a really deep, multilayered story to compel a reader to do that.

KENNEALLY: The subject for a lot of columnists is their lives, their friends, their families, their work, and it sounds like a great preparation for a memoir. And yet, I think you've talked before about some of the pitfalls in trying to be a memoirist and moving from columnist to memoirist. Can you tell us about that?

LUKEMAN: Yeah. In general, nonfiction is much easier to sell than fiction, from an agent's perspective, so it's probably 100 times easier to get somebody a book deal when it comes to nonfiction. So if you're writing nonfiction, you immediately have a huge advantage over novelists.

The one exception to that is memoir. Memoir is basically taken on its own terms, very much like fiction, and it's basically as hard to sell as fiction. And when it comes to memoir, it's all about the execution. So you can have somebody with a quite boring life who writes about it in a brilliant way, and they want to buy the memoir; or someone with an amazing life who just can't really write about it and nobody will buy it at all. So when it comes to the memoir, it's all about your writing skills, and it's all about your skill as a writer, basically. So for a columnist to think, well, I have several columns about my life, I can automatically get a deal for a memoir, again, it's not the case. You have to respect the form that you're entering into and treat it on its own terms.

KENNEALLY: And finally, Noah, what I think is most intriguing about what you had to say is to remind people to be patient with their book proposal, to not rush it, to not feel like they have to get a book out, that a book takes such a long time to develop on its own – Myra's laughing. I think your book was about 15 years in the works.

MACPHERSON: Off and on. I had to wait for FBI files for about 10 years, I mean, you know.

KENNEALLY: But for Noah, that notion that to the aspiring author, to say, take your time, is kind of counterintuitive, in a way, but may be the best advice.

LUKEMAN: Yeah, it might be. I mean, publishing is a long-term endeavor. From the time you sell a proposal, it could take a year or two years until the author actually writes and delivers the book, several months back and forth with the editing process, and then once you have the finished manuscript, it could take another year or more until it actually hits the stores. So from the time I sell your proposal tomorrow until it's in the store it could be easily two-year process. It could be quite longer, actually, for some books. There's a deal I did I think about seven years ago and we're just getting bound galleys right now.

So you're best served taking your time and realizing this is a long-term endeavor, to get your writing skills the best they can possibly be, to find the best concept you possibly can, to really work on respecting the book medium for its own sake, and to build your platform in the meantime. So to line up all your ducks, so when you put your proposal into an agent's hand, you've made the case in all these areas. It'll maximize your chance of getting a book deal.

KENNEALLY: Great advice, Noah. Thank you very much indeed. And now I want to turn to somebody who may or may not contradict some of that advice.

Jeff Seglin is another local here, an assistant professor at Emerson College in Boston, just down the road. He's a columnist for the *New York Times* syndicate. He directs at Emerson the graduate program in publishing and writing, and well able to do so, as he's the author or co-author of more than a dozen book on business and writing, including *The Good, the Bad, and Your Business*, *Choosing Right When Ethical Dilemmas Pull You Apart* and *The Right Thing: Conscience, Profit and Personal Responsibility in Today's Business*. Previously, Jeff was an executive editor at *Inc.* magazine and he's a contributing editor to *Folio*. He's written for a raft of fine publications. He returns to Beyond the Book after a couple of years. Welcome, Jeff Seglin.

You're not alone in this room, I guess, in coming to column writing in a less-than-direct fashion. Tell us about the column you write today, how it's not exactly the column you first began writing for the *Times*, and just how this has all changed your life.

SEGLIN: Well, I've just discovered everything I do is wrong, so – (laughter) One of the things my kids and my students tell me is that it looks like I had a plan for my life and what I do, and most everything has been sort of by chance. When I was an executive editor at *Inc.*, I was lucky enough to have been offered a fellowship at the Center for the Study of Values and Public Life at Harvard. I had written some articles on ethics and business for *Inc.* magazine because, as the executive editor there, I chose which letters we published every month, and invariably the letters – whenever we ran a story about an entrepreneur who would do something that was shady to get his business or her business recognized, we would get all these letters from all these people saying, how dare you write about these people? They're the worst people in the world. And we'd print those letters, and in the next months we would get all these letters from people saying, those letter writers are idiots. Of course you're going to do this in business. So we thought maybe we should write about this.

So I wrote some articles on ethics in business. I was going to do this fellowship at the Center and I got a call from Jim Schackter, who at the time was the editor of the Sunday Money and Business section of the *New York Times*. He had come in from the *LA Times*, and he's since become the deputy culture editor. He called to ask me for a reference for a friend of mine who writes a mutual fund column for *USA Today*, and Jim wanted to hire him to work for the *New York Times*, and John, the friend at *USA Today*, didn't want to leave *USA Today* because all the stuff was there. And so Jim and I got to talk. He said, what are you doing, and I said that I'm going to do this fellowship at the Center for the Study of Values and Public Life, and Jim said, I'm redoing the Sunday Money and Business section. We'd like an ethics column. Do you want to try to write one for the prototype? And I said, sure, so I wrote one for the prototype, and then that became the first iteration. It was much more fascinating and full of excitement than I just made it sound. (laughter) So I wrote the –

KENNEALLY: But it must have surprised you that, just out of the blue like that. Or is that how it works?

SEGLIN: Yeah, particularly since John, my friend at *USA Today*, didn't get anything out of it and he was particularly upset.

So, yeah, it came out of the blue and it came at a good time, because I was going to have a year off to work on a book, and that's the first book you mentioned, which was *The Good, the Bad, and Your Business*, so over the course of that year, I was researching the book, and many of those topics became sort of grist for the column. And then that column sort of went on and on and on, and it was before a lot of the – This was 1998, September of 1998, so it was before Enron and WorldCom and Adelphia, and this – we could stay here all afternoon listing our favorite corruption. And so it became much more popular for people to write about business ethics after that, and pretty much every business writer was writing about business ethics.

And then in December of 2003, the syndicate – This is what Noah was telling me. It sounds like I work for the Mob. Mike Orrichio from the syndicate – (laughter) They called and they asked – They wanted to introduce a weekly syndicated ethics column and they wanted to call it “The Right Thing,” and I said, well, wait a second. That's the name of the column that I write for the Sunday Money and Business section, and he said, well, yeah, we know. We want you to turn your monthly column into a weekly column. And I thought at the time this seemed like a great idea, until I realized writing monthly is a lot easier than writing weekly, particularly when you have another several full-time jobs.

So it became a weekly column on general ethics, so it's still business ethics and workplace ethics, but it also involves my neighbors stealing things from my yard type ethics. Should I go in, sneak and steal them back, should I kill them – (laughter)

KENNEALLY: Report them.

SEGLIN: Report them, right. So anyway, it turned into a weekly column, and that's been going since –

KENNEALLY: 2003.

SEGLIN: Since February 2004, March and February of 2004, and it's been going since then, and it's in papers around the country. What's really interesting to me is that the e-mail has changed. The readership of the Sunday *New York Times* is large, but it's different, and the readership of different papers around the country is really interesting, so the e-mails that I get from readers at the *Orange County Register* think that I'm a liberal mouthpiece for the – something – and that I'm personally responsible for disclosing the Bush administration's techniques. And the people

who read me in the *Charlotte Observer* think that I'm a conservative apologist for George Bush. And I'm thinking as long as I keep annoying both groups, then I'm OK.

KENNEALLY: Absolutely. Well, your experience with your published books, one of which was kind of, if you will, a stepchild of the column, and the other which is a collection of columns, differs a bit from what Noah was describing, but yet I think also confirms some of his points. Tell us about that. How did the collection succeed in a surprising way, and what did you learn from writing the book on business ethics generally that it helped you see better how you would write the column?

SEGLIN: Well, the thing that helped writing the business ethics column first – I had never written a newspaper column before, and when we first started writing the column, we obviously didn't have anything to refer to when I interviewed people, and I don't show people my – like most of you don't – show people my stuff before it appears, partly because – don't make it sound more boring than it is, but partly because I'm one of those people who don't think it's right to do that.

We hadn't written the column before and it was an ethics column, and it always sort of looks at how people faced with tough decisions make those decisions. And early on in the column, I wrote about a woman in Washington, DC, who had donated a kidney to her boss. He had had – he needed the kidney. It wasn't just something she'd given him. (laughter) And I thought it was a really altruistic thing she was doing. I thought it was really a great thing that she did. But in talking to them – and this was maybe the second or third column I had written, so not a lot of them had appeared. In talking to them, I realized that she was a direct report to this guy, and no one, the boss of the company, the owner of the company – it was a small software consulting firm – the owner of the company, the head of human resources, the boss who needed the kidney, the woman who was giving the kidney, none of them ever talked about, well, what happens now? Do I still report to you? Do we have to talk to the other employees and say, just because –

MACPHERSON: I gave you a kidney.

SEGLIN: – just because Nancy gave me a kidney doesn't mean she's going to get better treatment than you? Although I do need – (laughter) But they never talked about it. So I was writing a business ethics column and I said, you know, she did a wonderful thing, and I said that in the column, but that they didn't talk about it sort of presents us with this huge elephant in the room. What happens? Can he ever fire her if she does something wrong? Does she have some – How do you fire somebody who's walking around with your kidney? And I wrote this piece about the fact that it would have been simple enough for someone to say, you know, we have to talk to the employees and say, look, this is something that's not going to change her status in the company, but it's something we should talk – and they didn't. And I wrote about that, and she was devastated, and spoke to my editor,

and spoke to me, and I spoke to her. And she was calmer about that, because I did use words like altruistic and pointed out the positive stuff, but she was devastated about that.

And what I realized was and what it forced me to do in thinking about the column was, when I interview people, or have interviewed people after that, I tell them that I write an ethics column and it talks about how people make ethical decisions. And I think had I told her that, I would have felt better even if she had still been upset. But I didn't tell her that, and I think that's what took her by surprise.

KENNEALLY: But the collection succeeded in a way that's surprising.

SEGLIN: You want me to tell you why I think Noah's wrong?

KENNEALLY: Right. Yeah.

SEGLIN: Noah, who's represented, what 200 books that you've sold?

I think the part that's different is that the collection that Chris is talking about is a collection of business ethics columns broken into categories, so it does exactly what Noah's talking about. It's a very specific topic. And what's ended up happening since they changed – Most of the reasons that business ethics is so popular now is that they changed the sentencing guidelines and said to large corporations that if you have an ethics policy in place – This was in 1991, and they've since changed them again. But in '91, they said if you have an ethics policy in place, and you can show that in doing business with the government, you followed that ethics policy, even though you've been convicted of doing something wrong, we'll sentence you more lightly, leniently, and the judges have this discretion to do that.

So overnight, corporations created an ethics department, and business schools started teaching business ethics, and they don't have a good text. So the book has been picked up as a text to be used in a lot of the business ethics courses.

Some of the companies that I wrote about in the column who didn't do such ethical things, and got caught doing not-such-ethical things, ended up buying bulk copies of the book to use for, I'm told, training in their company, or to try to keep the book out of the hands of other people, but (laughter) But, no, they use them for training for the other company.

And then there's a woman named Susan Awe who writes for the *Library Journal* and is a librarian at the University of New Mexico, who reviewed it and named it one of the best business books of 2003, and she's the sole reason the book has done well, I'm convinced, because libraries sell books.

KENNEALLY: Right. That's a great story. And now you're on sabbatical from Emerson and set to write another book. Do you dare tell us about that, and about how it also, interestingly, works or comes from the business ethics column and the ethics column generally?

SEGLIN: What's the phrase? What's the Hemingway expression?

KENNEALLY: The Hemingway thing about if you talk about it, you lose it.

SEGLIN: Yeah, so my book is about this impotent World War veteran in Paris who – (laughter) My sabbatical starts in September, and I think they give me – I teach three blocks down the street at Emerson, and they give us either a half year at full pay or a full year at half pay, so I'm taking the full year at half pay. I tried to get two years at a quarter pay, but they wouldn't (inaudible) (laughter)

The book is about end-of-life decisions, particularly as it relates to decisions I made about – that sort of hooks on some of my own decisions that I made about my mother when she was ill in 1991, and she and I had a strained relationship. And it talks about end-of-life decisions as it affects most people and the ethical decisions that get made, with the idea that I was born at the height of the Baby Boom, and as most baby boomers will confirm, everything is about us. And so there are a lot of us who are coming to an age where our parents are reaching an age where they're beginning to get ill, and we're being faced with these decisions more and more. So it's a departure for me because it's much more personal than I usually write about.

KENNEALLY: But yet it's clear, and one can imagine the proposal will make it absolutely clear to any editor that you're building on the work you've been up to for the last six, seven years.

SEGLIN: That's the hope. It is. And that's what I – when I teach ethics, whether it's at Emerson, or I teach business ethics at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, I always do it from sort of this – how do we – We can't teach people, we can't change the values people have, but we can help them think about how they make decisions, and just hope that that sort of has an effect. If they think about what the effect of their decisions is on other people, that changes how they make a decision.

KENNEALLY: Well, it sounds like a great book to me. I'd buy it. But I'm not an editor.

SEGLIN: That's one. (laughter)

KENNEALLY: I expect there may be some questions from the audience, and we'd like to take an opportunity to do that for the next 10 or 15 minutes.

RILEY: I have questions, short questions for all three panelists. I'm Rochelle Riley. I'm a columnist for The Detroit Free Press. For Mr. Seglin, I wanted to – Hi, Myra!

MACPHERSON: Hi.

RILEY: I wanted to know what the employee who gave the kidney did think that you were doing if she didn't understand that you were writing a column. And for Mr. Lukeman, I'd like to know what book from a columnist – what book proposal – that you would find on your desk on Monday morning would thrill you. And for Myra – and I used to work at the *Washington Post* years ago – I am so thrilled about the book, but if you could speak a little bit to what led you to Stone for this particular book that would take you 15 years. Thank you.

MACPHERSON: I knew him as a neighbor, and also I used to be on the *Detroit Free Press*, so – hi. I got my start there. But I knew him as a neighbor. I admired him and everything he did, and my husband was very instrumental in it because he'd been reading everything he ever wrote, much more even than I had, and when Izzy died, he said, that's your next book. And I thought, oh, it'll be a snap. In one year I'll write this. Well, of course, Izzy had no private life. Everything he said and thought – That's why when people call him – some of these right wingers try to call him a Russian spy, every – on pain of death he could not have stopped writing what he thought, and he didn't have any secrets, and he didn't have any classified this or that. But he was hounded for his beliefs.

Well, as I got into it, I realized that I just had to write about the whole 20th century, because he spanned so many. I said that next time I do some (inaudible) they're going to die at age five, because this was hell. And everything he wrote had such – it rang with such immediacy today, and that's what all the reviews are saying is it just sounds like wrote it yesterday morning. And part of it is just the unfortunate fact that history repeats itself, but the other is that he really knew what he was writing.

So it became a labor of love. I stopped it – I was thinking of you – I stopped it to write a book called *She Came to Live Out Loud* after my mother died, and it was how people deal with illness, loss and grief, and I went to that book for three or four, five years, and then came back to Izzy. And by then I had all the FBI files, we'd gone into Iraq, we were doing all the things that he had warned against with Vietnam, and so I just said, I want to do this book. And I really have had a lot of fun with it, and I'm lucky that it got a starred review in *Publisher's Weekly* and *Kirkus*, but I also know how very much everything is money-driven today, and I just want to tell you one quick story.

When my Vietnam book was republished in '92, I went to the Anchor Doubleday book party, and there was Brian Moore, this brilliant fiction writer, Elizabeth Hardwick, another fiction writer that was great, me, and several others just all milling around. And all of a sudden you see this huge, huge phalanx of lights and swirls and cameras and everything going on and it was like covering a presidential campaign. And I said, who in the hell is coming in? And somebody said, John Grisham. And I said, oh, my God, here are all these great, great, real great literary

fiction writers and all these people, and this guy comes in! And my editor says, don't knock it. He's paying for you, Brian Moore, Elizabeth Hardwick and this party. (laughter)

So I have to be sanguine about the fact that a book that's serious, even if it's got a lot of fun and humor in it, may not fly, but you have to write what you feel like writing. And I'm really proud of this book. And I'm proud that – I was really scared about – He has a very snarky son, and I thought, oh, he's going to hate all this, and he's the executor, and he's going to have – Today, we were just talking about this before. You have to have so much stuff, just everybody, you have to get it down pat, and you have to make sure you're not plagiarizing anybody and this and that, and a lot of my notes were 15 years old, and I was struggling through all of this. But what happens when you do that is that it does make you have to be a much better writer and thinker.

And so I learned so much from Izzy, and I learned so much about the 20th century. I fell in love with the '30s. I was just going to write one or two chapters, and it became a whole section on its own, because it was the pivotal, decisive decade for so many writers of that era and what formed and shaped their thinking. A lot of Americans, unless they've seen *Good Night, and Good Luck*, they don't have any idea of how fascism, how we were really in the grip of fascism.

The – Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*, he's got Izzy in there being carted off with real live people like Felix Frankfurter and other people off to jail because Lindbergh has become the president of the United States. And it was really there, and Izzy was writing about it all. So it's great. It's just – To me, to have the curiosity, and to want to see things like that and tell everybody about it is what journalism is all about.

KENNEALLY: Jeff, can I skip to you, and what did that woman think you were doing?

SEGLIN: I think she thought I was writing a profile for the business section of the *Times*. She knew I was a columnist. She just didn't know it was about the ethical decisions, but I asked her – I asked repeatedly, who did you tell, who talked about this, so I just didn't think that I'd have to – what's the word? – spoonfeed as much as I would.

KENNEALLY: And finally Noah, to the question about what would be the perfect proposal? Want a short answer.

LUKEMAN: That's an excellent question. Well, to give you an example, I sold a book several years ago called *Sam: The Boy Behind the Mask* by a man named Tom Hallman Jr., who is a columnist at the Portland Oregonian, and he had won the Pulitzer Prize for those articles, so he came to us. And it was a series of articles he had written over many, many months about a young boy with a brain tumor and the fight to save his life. And so not only did it have the Pulitzer Prize behind it, which

– but even if it hadn't, it still would have been a wonderful book proposal, because here's a man who had already has something like 40,000 words written in column form. I think it was four very long articles over a period of a year. And of those 40,000 words, an additional, I think, 60,000 had been cut for space restrictions, so he already had about 100,000 words. And then he – there was so much more to the story. He wanted to go off and write another, I think, 50,000 words, something like this.

So this was a very, very – this story had a lot of depth, because it wasn't just about the boy who was dying from this brain tumor. It was also about the brilliant female surgeon who had risen up to become this brilliant female surgeon, and one of the best surgeons in the world. And I think actually the surgery took place here in Boston. And then it became about the whole unit that fought to save children's lives.

And it was so sad to read about the woman and the unit, and then about the boy, and then about the boy's family and the parents and the community. And this one story basically had like six or seven layers, all equally interesting. And it cried out for a book much moreso than a column, so in that case, we felt that for so many reasons, this would be a good book. And it was. We sold it for a very large advance to Putnam.

I represent two columnists at the *Buffalo News*, Lou Michel and Dan Herbeck, and they approached me, I think this – five years ago, maybe, I'm not sure, several years ago. They had been covering Timothy McVeigh, the whole story, because they were up in Buffalo, and they were friends with his – not friends, but they had developed a rapport with his father, and they had stuck with the story all through, from the beginning to the end, after everyone had left. And they had this unique access, and they spent many, many hours with him on Death Row. And I wrote them a letter which helped them get access – more time with him on Death Row, so they had I think 100 hours with him on Death Row, and they had all this close contact with his father.

And they wanted to write a book about McVeigh, and they wanted it to be a book from a reporter's perspective, and be very critical, of course, of everything, but the first book to tell the story, what really happened from beginning to end, which nobody else had ever done. So I thought in that case – it was a single subject, it was very controversial, it was highly critical, but it was the first book – as *Newsweek* said, the only book that really got the story. And I sold that to Harper Collins, and that was a Number 2 *New York Times* bestseller. That did very well.

So that's a case of columnists that sort of transcended what they do because they had a subject and a story that was a real subject and story. And the same case with Tom Holman. I could go on and on. But basically, the common denominators are you have people who are not just good writers and veteran columnists, but they have either a really strong concept or a really deep story, something that really

merits a book. Again, you have to go back to this very difficult question, why wouldn't someone want to buy a magazine for \$5 and read a 30-page article? Why would they want to spend \$25 or \$30 and spend a whole summer reading 400, 500 pages about this subject? Does it really, really merit that?

And what Jeff was saying before about how his column, his collection was sold, actually makes a lot of sense to me, because even though it is very, very difficult to sell a collection, in his case, he was selling a collection which was thematically linked, on one topic, which is a very important factor, on business ethics. And I assume every column in that collection was about, in one way or another, business ethics, right? And this was also at a time when not that many books existed that were dealing with this subject. So it goes back to the same principles that theoretically, yes, you can sell a collection, but it has to be something where the market's not overcrowded, and it really reads and feels like one book, one theme. I would assume even in that case, Jeff's editor, I would assume, probably wanted him to write an introduction or an epilogue which sort of brought it all together, and probably wanted you to edit a little bit to add a sort of seamless transition to it.

SEGLIN: (inaudible) part openings and (inaudible)

LUKEMAN: Right. Part openings. See, that's exactly right, to make it feel like one book instead of a collection.

KENNEALLY: That's great. We do want to try to get to some more. I know we have to walk over to see Arianna, so we'll try to keep this questions short and answers, too. Thanks. Can you identify yourself before you ask the question?

ZEZMA: Yes, wait a minute. Jerry Zezma (sp?) from the Stamford Advocate. I've been trying to find a publisher who's either foolish or drunk enough to publish a book of nonfiction family humor, and for a long time, I wanted a collection. I was stubborn to the point of stupidity, which is a continuing problem with me. But as Noah had pointed out, collections don't work unless you're already rich and famous.

The advice I've been given by publishers of large houses, you pick a topic, you weave your columns and new material into themed chapters, and it becomes an actual book, and it's better. But as you said, it's the platform, and it's probably the most personal kind of writing, and therefore you have to be a known quantity. So publishers at very large houses have said to me, the material is fine, get your platform. And that's what you have to do.

One tip that has not been given, however – it does take time, as you said. I would advise writers to consult their doctors to find out how long they have to live. Any response?

KENNEALLY: Yeah. Question, back – yeah. And you are?

PEYSER: I'm Andrea Peyser, *New York Post*. I want to ask Myra if you think that I.F. Stone would have written about, as the *New York Times* has, would he have published a column about the government's – what do you call it?

M: Financial record.

PEYSER: Yeah, exactly, the financial records of the terrorists. Would he have done that?

MACPHERSON: Yes, I think so. I think –

PEYSER: Do you think he should have? Do you think it's right?

MACPHERSON: Yes, I do. Izzy was a firm believer in the fact that there should be less secrecy, not more, and he was always saying that the CIA, the FBI, everybody else was sort of in their own little world distributing inaccurate information back and forth. We've seen what the CIA has done wrong. We've seen what the FBI has done wrong. Any historian or any look at it would show it.

His view was that we had one of the few great privileges of any country, which was the First Amendment, and that journalists could write and think and say. He never – Yes, he did not think that selling atomic bombs or anything treasonous was right. Of course he didn't. But he really did believe that you should be able to write and think.

And the concept of what's happening today is exactly what has happened throughout the whole 20th century. We have to remember, Eugene Debs was given 10 years in prison for writing anti-war pieces in World War I. The FBI came in, and the Palmer Raids of 1919 and '20 and scooped up aliens and sent them home. Tortured them, put them in prisons, just like the Abu Ghraib situation. If you don't have dissenting voices pointing out what is being done, then there's no reason for journalism. And this is the way I feel very strongly about Dana Priest, who wrote the articles about the CIA prisons that are illegal. We have to be policemen, and when they're doing something, we ought to be able to report it.

KENNEALLY: There was a question there.

REGAN: Yeah, hi. I'm Tom Regan from the *Christian Science Monitor*. One of the things that bothers me a little bit about what I see happening in the publishing industry right now in terms of columnists is, the more extreme you are, the more you get a (inaudible) book. So like – to be quite honest, I wouldn't buy a book by Ann Coulter if it came with a free lifetime box seat at Fenway Park, OK? (laughter) (applause) But on the other hand, I really find Michael Moore kind of tiresome these days. But it seems to be that if you want to get a book, you have to be really extreme in some way, so that really good writers who I like a lot, like P.J. O'Rourke or Molly Ivins, who do occasionally get stuff, just don't get the kind of –

Ann Coulter's on the front page of *Time* magazine and so on and so forth. So I mean –

MACPHERSON: I just left Molly. I spent three days with Molly in Austin, and we had this very same discussion.

REGAN: As a columnist who sees himself as more of a kind of a moderate person, the thing is to me, I go around thinking I've got a snowball's chance in whatever of getting a book because I'm not willing to go out there and write outrageous things about people, because that's, it seems to me, what the publishing industry wants, particularly if you're a political issues columnist. And I'd love to hear your comments on that.

MACPHERSON: Well, the extremist situation, which is what you're talking about, it wouldn't be so bad if she wasn't such a liar. I call her the Queen of Sleaze in my introduction – that's Ann Coulter, not Molly Ivins – the Queen of Sleaze, because she has disseminated false, false, false stuff that she had to know was truly wrong about I.F. Stone being a spy, and she just says unbelievable things, the Russian spy, this and that, safe in the knowledge that he is safely dead and can't sue her. And I find that the reprehensible part. If somebody wants to be out there and extreme and make money with extreme thoughts and still – But she's just a total liar, and that's what's so horrible. And the fact is that the publishers know it, and they give her a huge, full-page ad in the *New York Times*, which costs a fortune these days, and I think it's very regrettable, and it's one of the most bothersome things that's happening today.

KENNEALLY: Noah, what do you think?

LUKEMAN: Yeah, well, one thing I can say is that if – part of the reason that's happening is sort of you need this extreme angle and these extreme voices because competition in the marketplace. And if you're writing on a topic or you have a concept which has been done, covered a lot, then it's much harder to angle yourself out from the crowd, and you're forced to go in these extreme directions, either left or right.

So one of the cures for that is to come up with a concept which is something that not everybody's writing about. When you try to cover these same political issues that everyone is covering, it's going to be very, very hard to angle yourself. So to try – maybe you can come up with a concept which is totally outside the box.

MACPHERSON: But where's the ethics in that? Where is the ethics in that? I mean, the fact that somebody is writing something that's really wrong and full of prevarications –

LUKEMAN: I think it's completely unethical. I'm not justifying it at all.

MACPHERSON: Yes. But you're saying, but you're suggesting that that's what the publishing world will continue to do this.

LUKEMAN: No, what I'm suggesting is to empower writers. What they should do is, instead of writing a book on the same topic which a lot of people are writing on, to come up – if your goal is to get a book publishing deal – a topic which is not extreme and distorted, but instead, a whole different discussion, different concept outside of the box, so it doesn't force you to jump into the same topic as everyone else and take an extreme slant or distort the truth, to come up with a completely different concept.

The other solution is platform. If you have a radio show and you have two million listeners every week, then you can write on the same things that everybody else is writing about and not take an extreme position, and you'll sell books regardless.

KENNEALLY: Can I just ask Jeff sort of as the last word here about the ethics of extremism in publishing? Do you have an opinion on that? Is it ethical to sharpen the proposal so it just sounds provocative?

SEGLIN: Well, being provocative is a good thing, but I think that – I generally have tried to take the stance that lying on either side is wrong. The thing I wanted to say, though, is that – And I really feel bad; I don't remember his name. The guy at the *Philadelphia Inquirer* who wrote about his dog, and he's on the *New York Times* bestsellers list now?

GROUP: *Marley and Me.*

SEGLIN: *Marley and Me, Marley and Me.* But if you talk about books that aren't controversial – and that came out of his column that he wrote about his dog, and I'm thinking, there's not a lot that's controversial – I don't think; I haven't read the book. I don't know what happened with the dog. But I think there's nothing controversial about that.

I also think that people like Ellen Goodman still sell. Molly Ivins' books still sell. They don't get the headlines, and that's what I think the issue might be with not the publishing industry as much as it is with the editors of the newspapers, which I'm sure that all of you guys as columnists have issues with editors of newspapers. (multiple conversations; inaudible) But I think that's a news decision where newspapers are making those decisions to be provocative. It has something to do with what Ben Bradlee was telling (multiple conversations; inaudible) every meeting, we talk about how we're losing readers. So this provocative stuff, they think, is what's going to sell newspapers, and that's unfortunate.

MACPHERSON: And I just, on what you were saying about that, Molly does get published everywhere still on the Internet, and I do think that we never got into this discussion of what is good about the blogs. And the fact of the matter is that she is

not published in the *New York Times*. She is not published in the *Washington Post*. She is not published in a lot of major papers. You can go on Arianna Huffington or you can go on altnet and you can find her, and you can find Jim Hightower, and you can find voices that are being, really, censored from American newspapers today.

SEGLIN: Well, and I also think – and Noah probably knows this better than I do – I also think that when you think about the – I think that’s how some editors are looking for the next big writer. They’re looking for provocative ideas. They used to look at alternative news weeklies because they didn’t get high exposure. Now I think they’re finding some of them. I know magazine editors do this, where they’ll go out and they’ll find new writers by checking out the Internet and the Web.

KENNEALLY: Well, it’s been a terrific discussion. I’m sorry to have to end it here, because I know you do have to take a short walk over to Suffolk to see your next presenter. But first of all, I want to thank the membership of the National Society of Newspaper Columnists, Suzette Standing, the President, everyone involved in putting together this conference, for giving us the opportunity to join you this morning. I want to thank our panelists, Myra MacPherson, Noah Lukeman, Jeff Seglin. (applause)

And if I can attempt to sort of draw this all together, it seems to me the most striking advice that I heard was to take time to write a book. Everybody who ever has wanted to be an author is in a hurry to do that, and the patience and the perseverance that Myra talked to, the notion of connecting the dots that everyone here seems to really be very – feels is very important is something that I think we can all take home. And then finally, the example of Stone, who had some of the most serious subjects to write about, and yet managed to lighten it up and get some humor in it as well. It’s all great advice for absolutely anyone writing a 700-word column or a 700-page book.

My name’s Chris Kenneally. Thank you very much.

(applause)

END OF FILE