

### Journal of the Knight-Wallace Fellows at the University of Michigan

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### Mike Wallace up close and personal (1918–2012)

— By Charles R. Eisendrath '75

Mike Wallace died April 7, having worked in broadcasting until he was 89 and having helped found two national programs in journalism at the University of Michigan. The Livingston Awards for Young (under 35) Journalists are the largest all-media, general reporting prizes in the country; The Knight-Wallace Journalism Fellowships program is one of the only fully-endowed programs at the university. Above all, Wallace was an inspirational, aspirational model for journalists worldwide because of his fearlessness. His work, however, contained equal measures of literacy and wit. He was born in 1918 to Russian immigrants, grew up in Brookline, Mass., graduated from the university in 1939 with a so-so grade-point average and an entirely immodest amount of talent, which he spent in service to his network and the American public.

met Mike Wallace through the Livingston Awards but I got to know him by being told what an idiot I was about raising money for what was then called The Michigan Journalism Fellows program.

I had been cued by a mutual friend that Mike liked my direction of the prizes (he was one of the judges) and might want to help the fellowships as a way of giving back to his alma mater.

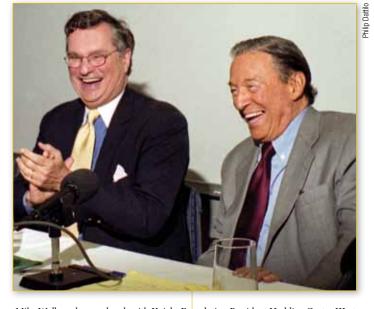
"Mike's ready," said Dick Clurman, who had been my boss/mentor at *Time* and had originated the idea for the Livingstons as a "Pulitzer Prize

for the young." With the precision of the "60 Minutes" stopwatch, he telephoned Mike immediately after the show each week to critique it. Like those critiques, Dick's instructions to me were famously cryptic: "Just call him," he said.

"What's this about?" Mike did not like wasting time, either. "If it's about money you must have been talking with Clurman." I confessed, to which he added, "What would you do with it?"

This was my first direct "ask" as a fund-raiser, so I guessed at a number and kept things simple: "Half a million to endow a fellowship in your field, investigative reporting." It was a Friday. "60" was in final editing and there was no discussion. If Mike delayed, it was imperceptible.

"Here's my accountant's number; tell him half now, half when I die," he said. I was off the phone so fast that I decided to wait until Monday, and to call Mike back before talking to the accountant. I needed to check that so much money could involve so few seconds.



Mike Wallace shares a laugh with Knight Foundation President Hodding Carter III at Mike and forced the the ceremony officially naming the program the Knight-Wallace Fellowship in 2005. improvisation of a fund-raising

On Monday, Mike said in the tone millions heard when the grand interrogator lost patience on-camera, "Charles, you are a pain in the ass. I told you the man to call. I gave you the number. If you don't get the money out of the account by noon I'll tell him to not take it out at all." It was like being handed a pound of caviar on orders to chugalug it.

The two conversations together lasted less than two minutes, but they introduced me to the essential "professional Mike" and forced the

improvisation of a fund-raising technique that resulted in a \$50 million

endowment for the program we worked on, together, for 20 years.

Another essential Mike appeared later, coming into focus gradually until December 2000, when I realized with the suddenness of the plane crash my whole family somehow survived that this remarkable journalist had insights of equal measure in the unrelated field of friendship.

Mike rarely missed the opportunity to tease me about how little I deserved Julia, and how much better she could have done. I always argued; Julia never did. It became a riff for three. Since Mike's death, I've been realizing how amazing it was that he sensed that even in a new, sick-room setting, the kindest approach would be to change nothing.

So in the 18 months during which Julia grew steadily worse, increasingly crippled by 17 fractures and mounting pain until she spent her days alone and barely mobile, a special kind of therapy began arriving by phone, always during university business hours.

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# From the Head Fellow

— By Charles R. Eisendrath '75

#### MEET THE NEW EDITOR

eet Journal editor Kyle Poplin, whose first issue was published earlier this year. I hope you noticed a fresher look and a slightly different story mix. You'll see more of the same this time, and the changes will keep coming. Kyle is an editorial idea machine.

We met five years ago. The occasion was a Wallace House seminar featuring a handful of people experimenting with Internet news in particularly interesting ways. Joel Kramer of MinnPost was among them, as was Troy Thomas Mallory of The San Diego Union-Tribune. Although they were better known than Kyle and his Bluffton (S.C.) Today (BT), we found his approach the most promising, because of the way his staff arranged for the print and website to complement one another instead of competing or following. BT's staffers used the website to solicit story ideas and, often, to gather comments providing context and background to articles written by professional journalists in the print paper.

As I do at such moments, I made a mental note to invite Kyle to apply for a fellowship. Neither of us knew why it would make so much sense until just a few months later, when Morris Communications cut *BT*'s budget below Kyle's tolerance level. It was time for Kyle and his wife, Myra, to look north, to a place they actually knew about, as it happened. Their memories of Ann Arbor were powerful—powerful good, powerful bad.

A University of Michigan doctor had been their best hope in 1994 to save their



Kyle Poplin

infant son, Tyrus, born with a severe heart defect; they were thrilled with the chance the doctor and Mott Children's Hospital gave them, even though the effort failed.

That was only the first indication I had of their resilience. Late in Kyle's 2009–10 fellowship, which he devoted to "social networks and online communities," he asked for an appointment to discuss his future. The answer had us meeting at 8 a.m. several times weekly at a round table in the back of Café Espresso Royale on Main Street. The topic: A new magazine with a *Bluffton Today*-style website for Ann Arbor.

By the beginning of May, with input from a variety of UM faculty, including the dean of the Art School and the UM professor who co-designed the popular Weather Underground website, we had a dynamite design and a financial partner whose big problem was too much advertising—yes, too much advertising.

His chain of legal weeklies needed more general interest content to justify legal notice advertising.

Alas, that miracle didn't happen and I guessed that the Poplins were headed back down South. Wrong. A few weeks later, Kyle reported that he and Myra would stake their savings on a magazine called *The Ann*, with no other backing. In addition to being the magazine's accountant and ad salesperson, Myra would sell real estate. The publication would be a print-only monthly. There was no money for the slick website. Then the bottom fell out of real estate and the Poplins lost their planned lifeline second income.

So how do things stand 18 months later? Well, Myra still hasn't sold a house, even though her combination of smarts and charm spell "sales" in any language. *The Ann*, however, is taking off. *annarbor.com*, the offspring of the defunct *Ann Arbor News*, inserts *The Ann* once a month inside its Sunday print newspaper, and for the past year the *annarbor.com* staff has been selling ads into the magazine. Five months ago, *The New York Times* offered to add *The Ann* to the 6,000 Sunday papers delivered locally for a minimal sum. The last several issues of the magazine have made a profit.

Small wonder that Kyle reports "serious interest" from a new financial partner. I've been betting on him since that Wallace House seminar in 2008.

Ough A- English

#### **SOUNDBITES**

here's a book at the Wallace House that contains "the collective wisdom of former Knight Wallace fellows and spouses." Here's a sampling of the offerings by recent class members:

Fara Warner '06 "My biggest misconception about the fellowship was that it was only for eight months. I've realized that the real power of the fellowship is what happens after. You'll always be a fellow; that never ends."

Jamaal Abdul-Alim '08 "Never despair at how good or bad a particular speaker was or wasn't. You never know when in your post-fellowship life their wisdom, or lack thereof, will come into play."

### Fellows add value to the classroom

— By Ralph Williams

The author, Ralph Williams, is a professor in the Department of English, Language and Literature at the University of Michigan. He has studied 15 languages including Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic, and uses Italian, French and Latin, especially, frequently. He specializes in Medieval and Renaissance literature, Shakespeare, literary theory, comparative literature and biblical studies.

n this matter I can wear my heart on my sleeve and be coolly analytical at the same time. I love having the Knight-Wallace fellows in my classes; their presence guarantees added current and currency to the discussion of any subject whatever.

The "current" is meant in terms of the energy of thought and discussion during a class hour: The fellows are engaged, intent, not interested in piffle, critical, lively. They are, to borrow a phrase from Shakespeare, not only wits in themselves, but the cause that wit is in others.

The "currency" they bring derives from the fact that they come fresh from full-time engagement with issues as they are contested and lived in the wider societies of the world. Undergraduates—or graduates—here who study language and literature and the art of words more generally, or who study history, sociology or religion, most often focus on what and how words mean, are lovely or ugly. The fellows engage those issues too, but they are urgently aware besides of what words do—how they operate in the world.

It is that insight about words and the practices—political, social, moral, religious, economic—of nations and peoples all over the world that the fellows perhaps most importantly bring to my classes. And they share willingly, contributing their experience to our enquiry.



I have pondered why I have consistently found the fellows such extraordinarily exciting people to be with, both as a group and as individuals. I think that the process of selection is responsible in a major way.

The invitation to apply is directed toward people who have the courage and intellectual drive to be willing to take a year of their lives away from the salary and perquisites built up over years of professional activity, to relocate to Ann Arbor, and to engage in intellectual restocking and retooling. Those who come are, then, typically *poised*, but not locked into settled positions either intellectual or professional. They come with stated projects, but they are not held to what they had foreseen: They are urged to be inventive, to grow, to follow where their

minds and enthusiasms lead. They are free to be excited.

That makes them a joy to be with, and marvelous as models for my students. They are people in early middle years usually, who are still wholly passionate about ideas—their own and others'—and are glad to share them.

Each I have known has had, too, an unpretentious but unrelenting sense of social justice. Charles Eisendrath, who heads the program, has an exceedingly penetrating mind and is nimble with words: He sees things in a raking light and is a master of irony. But he is ultimately a serious man, in full earnest, and he conveys to the fellows a freedom which is to be used, not abused.

I have benefitted from and hugely enjoyed the presence of fellows in my classes; I continue to be in touch with some (and urge all who might read these words to fill me in on their best ideas and experiences: fiesole@umich.edu).

In short, my contact with the Knight Wallace fellows is an integral part of what makes life exciting and pleasing for me here at Michigan, and it is difficult for me to think of my experience here without the stimulation of their presence and participation. These few words I give in part as a small thanks for a great and ongoing benefit to me and my students.

#### SOUNDBITES, continued

**Geoff Larcom** '09 (under the heading "Five favorite things about Ann Arbor") ▶ "Get to a University of Michigan hockey game. Yost is the most exciting arena in the country, and a great place to watch hockey."

David Hawkins '10 (under the heading "Our favorite things in Ann Arbor) ▶ "Playing catch with my son at Burns Park; football at the Big House; any UMS production; fellowship dinners; Zingerman's Roadhouse."

Justin Pope '11 (under "advice") Don't overdo it murmuring (inviting) journalists and writers to speak. Some of them are great, but the most pleasantly surprising speakers are often experts in very different fields."

## Turkey's messy model of democracy

— By Evan Halper '12

warned. By locals, by former fellows, even by one of our own, who said his experience inside one of these places decades earlier left him psychologically scarred.

We entered the Turkish bathhouse anyhow.

One of us would wind up in the hospital. The massage "therapist" was a little overzealous.

The authentic bathhouse experience was a reminder that despite the sensuous, inviting exterior, Turkey can be an unforgiving place. Especially for journalists.

Strolling through the cobblestone streets of Istanbul, with its eclectic restaurants, stylish residents and stunning cityscape, one might forget this is a country where reporters still get thrown in jail for asking the wrong questions.

It was a dizzying week. The business of ascending into an economic and diplomatic powerhouse, we learned, is untidy. Keeping track of the various alliances and animosities proved a challenge. Depending



Ferhat Boratav of CNN Turk hosted the fellows in Turkey.



KWF fellows with locals at the Suleymaniye Mosque, Istanbul.

upon whom you ask, there are more than 100 journalists in jail or as few as four. Tens of thousands of others are awaiting trial on terrorism charges. Mention the Kurdish question and people twitch.

Yet many of the intellectuals, policy wonks and financiers we met held familiar worldviews, lending credence to the state's official line that Turkey is a prototype of political pragmatism for the region.

We were in our mother's arms with our host, Ferhat Boratav of CNN Turk. No sooner had we completed our 20 hours of travel from Ann Arbor to Istanbul than he whisked us to a culinary institute for food so painstakingly prepared that it was a shame to stick a fork in it. Soon after, he had a group of us on the fourth floor of what can only be described as a Baklava-orium. When one hapless fellow remarked that he "thought Baklava was Greek," Ferhat frowned as only a Turk could.

Ferhat's knowledge of Turkish history and his Rolodex are as big as his appetite. His connections allowed us to romp through the magical set of a popular Turkish television drama set in Ottoman times. There, our own Aisha Sultan of *The St. Louis Post Dispatch* was excited to learn her namesake plays prominently in the script.

The next day we were treated to a Q&A with a local mayor who did some skillful filibustering in the face of our uncomfortable questions about political patronage and an ostentatious chandelier at a local job training center.

We parachuted into Ankara to visit America's fortress of an embassy, talk EU admission politics with Turkey's lead

negotiator, and be engulfed by the gargantuan Greco-Roman monument where Ataturk is entombed, surely large enough to be seen from space.

True to billing, each meal was better than the last, building up to a final celebratory dinner with separate courses of chicken, fried liver and lamb, plus a swarm of Turkish-style tapas.

— continued on page 8



On guard at the Ataturk Mausoleum in Ankara.

### Different perspectives on trip to Israel

After the fellows visited Turkey in March, several class members continued on their own to Israel. Here are insights gained on that trip by two journalists, one a Muslim and the other a German.

#### POSSIBILITY OF WAR BRINGS CONTEXT

By Susanne Koelbl '12

Being a German journalist in Israel means walking a tighrope. The tricky thing is, there's no way to do it right. Your best bet is to listen and try to understand a little bit more of what is going on in this most contested country in the world.

It is an auspicious occasion to meet someone like Ronen Bergman. He is a tall, well-put-together guy in his late thirties, a friend, investigative journalist and author of great books about the Iranian nuclear program and Israel's covert operations of targeted killings. I owe Ronen profound appreciation for something that is rare in



Susanne Koelbl

He told us how Israelis, whatever political group they belong to, believe deeply that the Holocaust could happen to them again at any time, and that they are convinced that no one would protect them but Israel.

this place: his deeply reflective, well-informed thinking on how things look from the Israelis' perspective. He met the fellows at a restaurant in north Tel Aviv and not only introduced us to the very real danger of an Israeli strike on Iran in the coming weeks or months, but also gave us a tangible sense of why the Israelis feel and behave the way they do. He talked about his own family and upbringing as the son of Holocaust survivors, and he told us how Israelis, whatever political group they belong to, believe deeply that the Holocaust could happen to them again at any time, and that they are convinced that no one would protect them but Israel.

I first visited a concentration camp, Dachau, when I was 7 years old, and later I visited Auschwitz with a group of Israelis as part of a German-Israeli program. Still, I never understood their collective fear as much as I did at the moment when Ronen put it into the context of a possible war—a war which could fundamentally change this world.

#### MEMORIAL PROVIDES INSIGHT

By Aisha Sultan '12



Aisha Sultan

I had not truly grasped how the trauma of the Holocaust continues to be an omnipresent force in Israeli national identity . . . and how a place born of great human suffering continues to be entangled in violence and occupation.

It was not during, but in the moments after confronting a brutal chapter of history that I fell apart. The tour of Yad Vashem, the largest repository of information on the Holocaust and a memorial to its 6 million Jewish victims, is like walking through the pages of history learned in school.

I expected an emotional impact, a sense of being overwhelmed, and girded myself as I listened to video testimonies from survivors, read notes left by those before they were taken and recoiled from the footage of Hitler riling his masses.

In the last room Jewish leaders attempted to answer

the existential question raised by visitors: Where was God during the Holocaust? The first two answers were simple: We don't know. We can't understand. But it was the third that hit me. The scholar said he didn't believe God intervened in human history. God doesn't direct life, God simply provides a purpose for it. So, in the last 10 minutes before a person is about to be gassed, God is not going to respond to prayers. But when a person chooses how to spend those last 10 minutes, that's where God resides.

I came to Israel as a believer and a skeptic, as an American and a Muslim, a tourist and a journalist. Much of what I witnessed and experienced deepened and broadened what I already knew. But it was my visceral reaction to Yad Vashem that revealed the greatest insight. I had not truly grasped how the trauma of the Holocaust continues to be an omnipresent force in Israeli national identity, how it shapes and directs its current foreign and domestic policies in ways that appear incomprehensible to outsiders, and how a place born of great human suffering continues to be entangled in violence and occupation.

# Class of 2012



ere's the Class of 2012, with their "takeaways" from their KWF experience.

#### Back row, left to right:

Alencar Martins Izidoro (Folha de Sao Paulo) • "It gave me valuable lessons about journalism I didn't learn in college, ideas I had not thought about in my 15-year career, an amazing and diverse cultural background, lots of laughs and fun and great new friends."

Julian Gorodischer (Ñ, Clarín, Buenos Aires) ▶ "After my experience in the Knight Wallace fellowship I'm reconsidering the course of my career, because I could connect myself, in this exciting context, with a future in a longer scale."

**Charlie Frago** (*Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*) • "To concentrate on improving two or three things in eight months and to resist the impulse to settle for what is safe."

Jung-wan Jo (JoongAng Ilbo, Seoul) ▶ "I dare say KWF has changed my life. Now I have a much more global point of view which is, I believe, necessary for my future."

#### **Charles Eisendrath**

**Roger Harrabin** (*BBC London*) ▶ "Respite for the body and spirit, food for the mind."

**Steve Friess** (freelance writer) ▶ "There's a time to work hard and intensely and

there's a time to step back, clear your head and think. Both are important and invaluable but usually society and our business only value the former."

#### Middle row, left to right:

McKenzie Funk (freelance writer) • "I expected to have lots of quiet time this year, and the best part is, I didn't. With this group, there was always too much else to do."

Andrea Hsu (NPR) "I knew this place was special the day my adviser invited me in to watch a robotic laparoscopic surgery. I knew it was my kind of place the day we all shared our fist meal."

Susanne Koelbl (*Der Spiegel*, Berlin) ▶ "It is a unique opportunity in life to look back, to assess where you stand at the moment and to find out where you want to go in the future. You are provided with the time and the resources to figure things out, which is the greatest gift of this generous fellowship."

**Tim Marchman** (freelance writer) • "The key to getting what you want is acting as if it's obvious that you should have it."

#### **Birgit Rieck**

Vanessa Gezari (freelance writer) • "Back from Istanbul at midnight, back from the Bosphorous overflowing its seawall, life feels big and wild like all that water: open, moving, durable and new."

Phillip Morris (*The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer*) "I write this while listening to a brilliant ragtime pianist at Wallace House on the last Thursday seminar of the 2011–12 fellowship. As is the case with most of the other geniuses I've been exposed to in the past year, I'm left wanting more—more of this amazing fellowship. Alas, it's someone else's turn."

Sarah Robbins (BBC World News America) "Wallace House radiates an entrepreneurial essence that highlights independence as a critical component of the lifeblood of journalism. The fellowship also advances the idea that, as citizens of the world, our work is critical to the common global good."

Adam Allington (St. Louis Public Radio) 
"I've learned to embrace the chaos of being a journalist. The path forward is anything but clear, and that's OK. If I develop my own style and voice, I'll end up right where I need to be."

#### Front row, left to right:

Evan Halper (Los Angeles Times)

"Never before have I grown so much in such a short period. I'm returning to the newsroom enlightened in ways I hadn't imagined—and with an extremely talented, inspiring network of lifelong friends."

Aisha Sultan (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*) Mat times, one's career path can seem set on an inevitable course. The Knight Wallace fellowship allows one to reimagine possibilities and purpose."

Marcelo Leite (Folha de Sao Paulo) • "Fellows are friends—of bright people, new ideas, reading time and great food."

Katie Zezima (*The New York Times*) • "My take-away is confidence; I can walk into any room and not feel as though I'm out of my league."

## Selecting fellows is hard but rewarding

The Knight Wallace Selection Committee serves as the program's gatekeeper. Prospective fellows will tell you that a few minutes in front of this intimidating group during "interview weekend" can seem like an eternity. But for the committee members themselves, the work starts long before they meet the candidates in person. They spend hour after hour poring over scores of applications from around the world. Oh, and we forgot to mention that they don't get paid. Why are they willing to make such a commitment to the program? Here's why, in their own words:



Carl Simon • "The Knight Wallace journalism fellows may very well be the most interesting group on the University of Michigan

campus. They have walked through Iraqi and Israeli war zones, Brazilian slums, Mexican gang turfs, London and Paris boulevards, Wall Street boardrooms, football dressing rooms and Detroit ghettos. At UM, they share their stories and help us with ours. I treasure my connections to the fellows and their fellowship. My role on the admissions committee cements those connections. It can be tedious to do nothing but read files for two weeks, but there are gems among them that make it worthwhile. I especially treasure the Friday night dinner with the graduating fellows and the wonderful give and take and give again with John, Ford, Ellen, Bobbi, Birgit and often Charles—who have become true friends. Then, there's Julia!"



Sarah Robbins • "Because sharing in the enthusiasm for renovation and innovation in journalism is huge fun. The originality

that I saw in each of the applications was a testament to the passion out there that we can improve our world by constantly refining our ability to probe and question. The fellowship group supports each member long into the future and to be part of the process that creates the conditions for that dynamic is an honor of the highest kind."



Bobbi Low • "The Knight Wallace fellows are a really interesting bunch: smart, interested in a variety of topics (even some obscure

ones I'm fond of) and wonderful people to learn from. I have been part of the Selection

Committee and later the board longer than I can remember—and indeed, it is a real job (e.g., a few years ago, more than 140 applications to rank and compare). But the variety of intellect and curiosity, and sheer accomplishment we find is truly rewarding. And, from a purely selfish point of view, I often discover fellows, like Tom Clynes from 2009–10, who know so much more about conservation and environmental issues than I do, that I learn even more! Worth the work, intellectually!"



Ellen Soeteber "The year that my husband and I spent at UM was the best of our lives, professionally and personally. We know

what this incredible opportunity means, and we want it to go to folks who will gain the most from it. Years back, an acquaintance described her fellowship experience in a sunnier clime as 'the year of the body.' She bought a convertible, worked out and developed the suntan of her life. Studies? Bah! What a waste. I try to identify fellows who, while having much fun along the way, look for something more ambitious than a snow-burn."



John Costa "It does take a lot of time, energy and thought, but most good things do. That said, my reasons are pretty simple. I

care a lot about the program. It reinforces the best instincts of our business. It's forward looking, intellectually based and aimed at improving our society. And in a professional world in continuing flux, its core concept hasn't changed since its inception. KWF gives extremely talented and accomplished people a chance to think about our future outside the grind of daily

work. Selfishly, as a delegate of an extraordinary alumni group, I have a proprietary interest in making sure that our future legions live up to, and even expand, that legacy. To me, it was a career- and lifeenhancing experience. I would like our successors to have that opportunity."



Ford Fessenden • "The depth and breadth of talent and personality that exist among those who apply for journalism fellowships is

awesome, a continuing wonder. If Charles asks, I'm going to say no? And besides: Have you been to Zingerman's Roadhouse?"

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#### — Mike Wallace, continued from page 1

"Is that you, Julia?" The voice was the famous purr Mike used in the non-inquisitorial interviews with amazing artists and fabulous women. "Julia," he would say, "this is Mike. Is Charles home?"

Then, with his perfect timing, "Julia, what are you wearing?"

It became an unprescribed long-term care. We have been married 45 years at this writing and Julia fully recovered from the crash a decade ago. As for me, however, I will never get over the tone in Julia's voice that she reserves still for those calls from Mike Wallace As she puts it, "He made me feel beautiful."

**Note from Charles Eisendrath** In the four days following Mike's death, I received more than 100 messages from KWF alumni and friends of the program, all of them welcome, many of them deeply touching. To represent them all, here is the one from Elena Milashina '10, who won the Human Rights Watch award for her reporting in Novaya Gazeta in Moscow and was sent on a coast-to-coast tour representing courage in journalism. She was savagely beaten in Moscow on April 5 while walking home with a friend.

"My condolences to all of you. Great journalist and great man is gone. He connected all of us together and I can say sometimes the most important thing is the feeling that you are not alone.

Thank you, Mr. Wallace, for all my friends I made in the fellowship you had created for us. Will continue to do what you considered as the most important things in our profession."

#### — Turkey's messy model of democracy, continued from page 4

We wrapped up on a sobering and instructive note, meeting with a pair of journalists alarmed by the government's heavy-handedness. But the more we learned, the murkier things got. The newsmen were in the employ of a media empire owned by the



Fellows at Izmit TV Studios, Izmit, Turkey

Gulenists, a religious sect with millions of followers that has managed to gain control of significant factions of the state police force. In fact, just before our arrival, two reporters who were thrown in prison after reporting on Gulenist infiltration of the state security apparatus had been sprung pending trial, after languishing in their cells for a year.



Phillip Morris '12 at Hagia Sophia, Istanbul

Conventional wisdom has it that Turkey is a model democracy. But on this trip our eyes were opened to how messy democracy can be.