

# WALLACE HOUSE JOURNAL

Knight-Wallace Fellowships for Journalists  
and the Livingston Awards

Summer 2021

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## A New Perspective Supporting journalists in a year of uncertainty and change

BY LYNETTE CLEMETSON AND ROBERT YOON

**Looking forward has never felt so good! The past year tested our patience and resilience in ways we could never have imagined. But it also ignited our creativity. As former Knight-Wallace Fellows, we're aware of what a gift it is to run Wallace House, a place that has given us so much. But running a place that you cherish can come with challenges.**

Hallowed traditions can feel untouchable. Shaking things up can be fun. But like a snow globe, when the shaken bits settle, folks expect the focal point to reappear, undisturbed.

Well, 2020 didn't care about traditions, schedules and routines. The globe crashed to the floor, and our precious customs that typically danced whimsically in midair when rustled up fell lifeless to the ground – 35 year-olds holding court in campus lecture rooms with kids barely old enough to vote, late night gab sessions in a rustic lodge Up North,

**Wallace House Director Lynette Clemetson and Associate Director Robert Yoon are eager to reopen the doors of Wallace House.**

middle seats on international flights, long family-style dinners, shoulder to shoulder for maximum togetherness.

We were forced to think about our basic purpose and philosophy and building something that looked and functioned differently. We were forced to think about our vision. What do we stand for? What are our goals? If we make it through this, what do we want to have accomplished?

The ability to support the work of journalists is a luxury, and we leaned into it. We decided to restructure the Knight-Wallace Fellowship – historically a campus-based sabbatical for working journalists – into a remote fellowship to foster in-depth reporting projects. In a year rife with layoffs, furloughs and closures, we put out a call for reporting projects that needed time and financial resources, reporting that probably wouldn't get done if we weren't supporting it.



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Hundreds of journalists answered the call. In many ways, the remote format presented us with opportunities to expand the program's reach. We received applications from many journalists who would not otherwise have been able to participate in an eight-month residential program. We picked 11 Fellows, spread out from Colorado to Puerto Rico. In previous years the Fellows came to Wallace House for transformation. Now it was our job to work the Wallace House magic through a Zoom connection.



**Wendell Pierce, highly acclaimed artist and actor, best known for his role on HBO's drama, "The Wire," joined the Fellows to speak about the intersection of arts and journalism.**

This enabled us to support the Fellows on the ground in their own communities as they found new ways to do traditional reporting in decidedly untraditional times. Whether it was detailing the effects of the pandemic on students from underserved communities, or investigating the root causes of Puerto Rico's water shortage, or creating a new beat on race and health for STAT, or chronicling the low-income housing crisis for The New York Times Magazine, our Fellows pursued some of the most urgent questions of the moment. The Fellowships have always been about supporting journalists; this year, it's been incredibly rewarding for us both to more directly support their work as well.

Despite the challenges of a remote program, we held lively virtual seminars with a variety of distinguished guests – a key aspect of any Fellowship year. Dr. Sanjay Gupta spoke from his home in Atlanta about the extraordinary experience of covering the pandemic for CNN. Stage and screen actor Wendell Pierce joined us on location from Belgium on the important role of both the arts and journalism in society. Kemp Powers '03 described his journey from Knight-Wallace Fellow to Oscar-nominated and Golden Globe-winning screenwriter. (More on that on pages 6 & 7). LSA Dean Anne Curzan spoke about understanding and challenging the many assumptions built into language in times of social change. The conversation was so robust that the Fellows invited her back for a follow-up session.

We worried that we might not get to know our Fellows and that they might not form bonds with one another. But the truth is

that most people crave human connection and bend toward it like plants toward light. Our Wednesday seminars became a fun and comforting touchpoint in a year of unpredictability.

When it became clear that the pandemic was going to stretch into 2021 we reimagined the Livingston Awards as a virtual event that danced with warmth and energy and allowed us to elevate parts of our work that are hard to showcase in a large banquet room.

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The coming academic year still presents new challenges. Life is slowly returning to something that feels like normal. Kind of. Sort of. We will repeat the reporting fellowship for a second year, but we'll bring the Fellows to Ann Arbor for in-person visits each semester and experiment with blending the old and the new.

We've learned to think more nimbly and to be more comfortable with experimentation. We've learned to take the lessons for growth and transformation that we push our fellows to adopt each year and apply them to our leadership. We're certainly ready for things to calm down. One year of radical reimagining is enough, thank you. But it's been liberating in a dozen good ways.

Snow globes are pretty to play with. But no one wants to be stuck in one.



**Dr. Sanjay Gupta, chief medical correspondent for CNN and practicing neurosurgeon, spoke to the Fellows early in the fall to share his thoughts on the state of the pandemic.**



# 2021-2022 KNIGHT-WALLACE REPORTING FELLOWS



**KNIGHT-WALLACE  
REPORTING FELLOWSHIP**

**1 Assia Boundaoui**

Independent Journalist  
Chicago, Illinois  
*Redacted Stories:  
Reexamining FBI  
Surveillance Records  
of a Muslim-American  
Community*

**2 Nichole Dobo**

Writer and Senior Editor  
for Audience Engagement,  
The Hechinger Report  
Wilmington, Delaware  
*A Reckoning: Higher  
Education and Rural America*

**3 Daphne Duret**

Investigative Reporter,  
USA Today  
Lakeworth, Florida  
*Breaking Silence: The Plight  
of the Police Whistleblower*

**4 Jose Feroso**

Contributing Senior Reporter,  
The Oaklandside  
Oakland, California  
*Oakland's Deadly Roadways:  
Reckoning with Inequities in  
Urban Design*

**5 Andrea González-Ramírez**

Independent Journalist  
New York City  
*A Watershed Moment for  
Addressing Sexual Violence  
in the U.S. Military*

**6 Erika Hayasaki**

Independent Journalist  
Southern California  
*History, Hate Crimes and  
Police Brutality: A Tale of  
Black and Asian American  
Lives in Two Cities for  
The New Yorker*

**7 Jaeah Lee**

Independent Journalist  
San Francisco, California  
*Medical Fact vs. Fiction in  
Fatal Police Encounters*

**8 Surya Mattu**

Investigative Data Journalist  
and Senior Data Engineer,  
The Markup  
Brooklyn, New York  
*Watching the Watchers:  
Investigating How  
Smartphone Apps Are Used  
to Track Us*

**9 Simon Ostrovsky**

Special Correspondent,  
PBS NewsHour  
New York City  
*Modern Mythology: How  
Disinformation Bends Reality  
and How to Stop It*

**10 Elizabeth Scheltens**

Senior Editorial Producer,  
Vox Media  
Columbus, Ohio  
*Climate Resilience in the  
Great Lakes Region*

**11 Kat Stafford**

National Investigative  
Writer, Race and Ethnicity,  
The Associated Press  
Detroit, Michigan  
*From Birth to Death:  
How Generations of Black  
Americans Have Faced  
a Lifetime of Disparities*

# 2021 LIVINGSTON AWARD WINNERS

The Livingston Awards for Young Journalists honors outstanding achievement by professionals under the age of 35. Winners are recognized as the best young talent in local, national and international reporting for work published in 2020. All winning stories and podcasts can be found at: [wallacehouse.umich.edu/livingston-awards/winners/](https://wallacehouse.umich.edu/livingston-awards/winners/)



LOCAL REPORTING

## Joshua Sharpe

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

**Joshua Sharpe**, 33, of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution for “The Imperfect Alibi,” an exhaustive re-examination of a 35-year old double murder mystery that debunked the alibi of a long-overlooked suspect and proved the innocence of a man wrongly imprisoned for 20 years.



NATIONAL REPORTING

## Hannah Dreier

The Washington Post

**Hannah Dreier**, 33, of The Washington Post for “Trust and Consequences,” a portrait of Kevin Euceda, a teenage asylum-seeker fleeing Honduras, who was held in U.S. custody and required to see a therapist only to have notes from those confidential sessions turned over to ICE and used against him in court hearings.



INTERNATIONAL REPORTING

## Chao Deng

The Wall Street Journal

**Chao Deng**, 32, of The Wall Street Journal for “On the Front Lines in Wuhan,” a remarkable series of reports which, despite the Chinese government’s attempts to silence her, tells the complex and rapidly evolving story on the ground at the epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic in the early stages of the crisis.



THE RICHARD M. CLURMAN AWARD

## Susan Chira

The Marshall Project

This year, the Livingston Awards honored Susan Chira with the 2021 Richard M. Clurman Award for her newsroom commitment to counseling, nurturing and inspiring young journalists. Chira is the editor-in-chief of The Marshall Project and former deputy executive editor of The New York Times. Current and former colleagues of Chira’s praise her warm and compassionate encouragement for generations of young journalists.

**The Clurman Award** honors superb on-the-job mentors who improve journalism by exemplifying excellence in nurturing, critiquing and inspiring young journalists.

**Watch the Livingston Awards Virtual Event**

This year we presented our Livingston Awards ceremony online with all of the young talent, established leaders and inspiring journalism of our annual celebration. Host Christiane Amanpour joined our judges and sponsors to meet the winners and celebrate the future of journalism. Watch the full event at: <https://wallacehouse.umich.edu/livingston-awards/virtual-event/>

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# Remote Fellows Meet Face to Face

BY CHRIS OUTCALT '21

One of the reasons the Knight-Wallace Fellowships first appealed to me back in the winter of 2019 was its emphasis on forging new connections, both professionally and personally. I imagined myself taking courses on fiction writing and music history and getting to know the other Fellows on a trip abroad. But just as it did with so many other things, Covid-19 forced the program to adapt quickly to a new reality. The version I agreed to join was a pandemic-induced reimaged model.

I didn't know what to expect. I wondered whether I'd be able to foster any meaningful relationships in a completely digital environment. I was embarrassed that my tiny studio apartment left me few choices but to sit at my kitchen table, placing my sink and dish-drying rack squarely in my Zoom background. Not exactly a best foot forward. What's more, our group was geographically far-flung. I was in Denver. The other Fellows were everywhere else, from Lincoln to Brooklyn, Columbus to San Juan. But everyone seemed to make the best of it.

There were times when it did feel like we were missing out on something special. Some of the former Fellows we met with at seminars couldn't help but mention how exceptional their time on campus had been. They talked about the long-standing tradition of cooking dinner for the group. Oscar-nominated screenwriter Kemp Powers let slip that Wallace House has a wine cellar. I fantasized about walking into that cellar, sans mask, selecting a couple bottles, and pouring each Fellow a glass. Over time my thinking changed. I came to appreciate the uniqueness of our class, embracing the idea that the singularity of our circumstance was our shared experience. It's a narrative no other Knight-Wallace Fellowship class can claim – bizarre, at times awkward, but lovely in its own way.

I did connect with people, too. I bonded with other Fellows same as I might have while sitting next to them on a couch at Wallace House: by swapping freelancer horror stories, geeking out over narrative structure, sharing a mutual fondness for furry pets, and debating the finer points of the English Premier League. One Fellow started a biweekly virtual happy hour that became a part of my regular schedule. Before long, even though I hadn't met anyone in person, I would not have hesitated to call each one of them my friend. I think they'd all say the same. During our final gathering in late April, as burned out as I was on pandemic Zooming, I froze when it came time to click the red "leave meeting" button. This had become a group I didn't want to leave.

This spring, two weeks after my second Moderna shot, I planned a trip to the Adirondack Mountains in upstate New York to visit my parents. I was thrilled to spend some quiet time with my folks, whom I hadn't seen since December 2019. At the same time, I was thinking about whether I might have cause workwise to stop in New York City. I mentioned this somewhat nonchalantly to my fellow Fellow Mazin Sidahmed, who lives in Brooklyn.



**Classmates Mazin Sidahmed, Chris Outcalt and Lisa Armstrong of the Knight-Wallace Reporting Fellowship Class of 2021 met for the first time in Brooklyn, NY after their fellowship year concluded.**

Mazin texted back right away: "Mate, u def have cause to stop in NYC! U gotta come thru. u can crash at our place." I'd thought it would be fun to get together with Mazin, but I'd tiptoed around the idea because, well, we'd never actually met. The excitement and confidence he exuded in those texts quickly dissolved any hesitation.

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**Before long, even though I hadn't met anyone in person, I would not have hesitated to call each one of them my friend.**

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So I took the train from Albany to Penn Station and navigated the subway out to Brooklyn. I texted Mazin a heads-up as I got close. "Walking your way..." "Amazing!" he wrote back. When I knocked on his door, the guy who answered was very much the same guy I knew from all those Zoom sessions. Maybe a little taller. He took my bags, poured me a glass of water, offered me a beer, and that was that. We started catching up like I would have with any other friend. I spent two and a half days hanging out with Mazin in the city. The whole time was easy and comfortable. The governor had just declared New York "reopened," so we went out for dinner and drinks one night with another Brooklyn-based Fellow, Lisa Armstrong. We took a train into Manhattan. Walked through Washington Square Park. Grabbed a slice. Hit a jazz club in the West Village. We talked about journalism and soccer and life.

The morning I left I had an early flight at JFK. I packed my things quietly so I wouldn't disturb Mazin, his partner, or their new puppy. Before I left, I paused, felt myself smile, then gently closed the door of my friend's apartment.



# Q&A with Kemp Powers: Red Carpet Year for Former Fellow

BY LYNETTE CLEMETSON



Photo Credit: Amazon Studios



Photo Credit: Disney/PIXAR

Kemp Powers arrived at Wallace House in the fall of 2002 as a business reporter with Forbes Magazine. During this fellowship he took a screenwriting class that changed the trajectory of his life and career. Fresh from the kind of year writers dream about, he talked with Lynette Clemetson about Hollywood success and what comes next.

**Clemetson: You've had quite an exciting year! Widespread critical acclaim and a Golden Globe for the movie "Soul," which you co-wrote and co-directed, an Academy Award nomination for best screenplay for "One Night in Miami" and you've been invited to become a member of The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. What's the strangest thing that's happened to you since the release of "Soul" and "One Night in Miami"?**

**Powers:** To be honest, the entire experience has been surreal! To go from working on these two very exciting projects to finding both of them in jeopardy of not being completed due to a global pandemic to very unexpected streaming releases to attending the Academy Awards for both films? I consider myself a pretty imaginative guy, and I couldn't have dreamed up something like that. It has been really humbling having artists whose work I've admired for many years suddenly reach out with compliments about my work. This was a community I never expected to be a part of in any serious way. It feels good.

**Clemetson: You're likely getting bombarded with ideas these days. Do your journalism skills come in handy for weeding through story pitches and managing your time?**

**Powers:** They do, but not as much as those skills come in handy for the actual creation of the work. Research is a tremendously important component of the screenwriting process. It's also an element that some writers hate. I credit much of my transition into screenwriting to the research and reporting skills I gained as a journalist. As for good time management, that has always been a moving target for me. I've gotten better at it, but it remains something I struggle with.

**Clemetson: Can you tell us what you're working on this summer and what future projects you are excited about?**

**Powers:** I'm one of the directors of the animated sequel to Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse, which is currently scheduled to be released in October, 2022. It's a very exciting project. I was a huge fan of the first film and its creators, and I've been a lifelong fan of Spider-Man. I also have several other projects in development, but since none of them have been announced yet, I'm afraid they're all still top secret!

**Clemetson: Can you watch films for enjoyment now or does everything feel like work?**

**Powers:** Oh, absolutely! I couldn't imagine doing something like this for a living if I didn't love cinema. In fact, I've found myself watching more films than ever. Several of my contemporaries from this recent awards season created some of my favorite films of the past year. I loved "Sound of Metal,"



**Kemp Powers '03 spoke to the Reporting Fellowship class of 2021 via Zoom about his fellowship year and his post-fellowship journey.**

“Minari” and “The White Tiger” in particular. However, I have found it difficult to watch my own work once it has been completed. I haven’t seen “Soul” or “One Night in Miami” again since their respective opening nights.

**Clemetson: What’s the one thing you miss most about Ann Arbor and fellowship life?**

**Powers:** The sense of community among the Fellows. And of course, those weekly dinners! We all took those meal preparations pretty seriously, and I can still remember some of the incredible meals we had that year. I moved to Los Angeles right after my fellowship year, so I definitely miss the seasons and the lack of traffic.

**Clemetson: Fellows often finish their fellowship year lamenting that they didn’t do everything they wanted to do. What would that be for you?**

**Powers:** Writing classes were in really high demand, and I didn’t have an opportunity to take all of the courses I wanted. The one I most wish I could have participated in was the screenwriting rewrite class. Thankfully, I learned the art of rewriting on my own, but I could have gotten there a lot faster if I’d have had that class. There were a few other writing classes on my list as well.

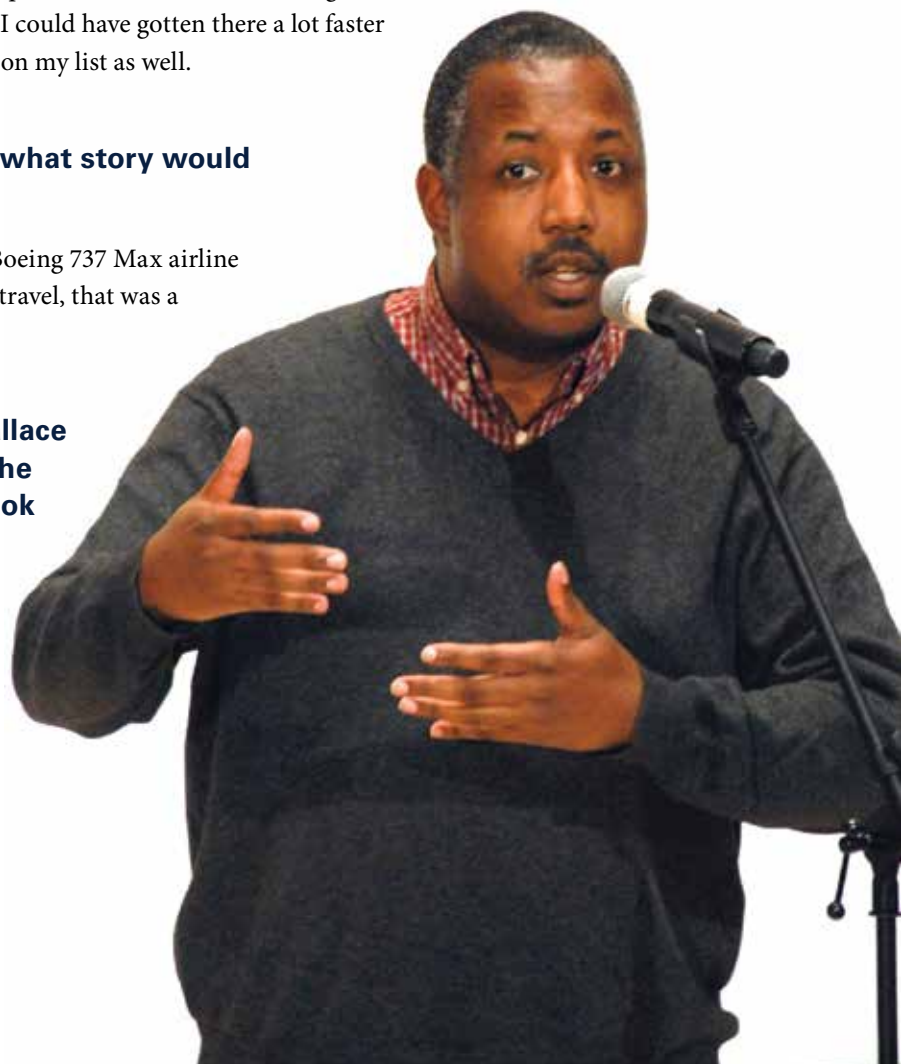
**Clemetson: If you were still a business reporter, what story would you be chasing now?**

**Powers:** I’d probably be following the reintroduction of the Boeing 737 Max airline into fleets here and abroad. Before the pandemic shut down air travel, that was a story I’d been following pretty closely.

**Clemetson: Fellows haven’t shared a meal at Wallace House in well over a year. If we let you loose in the Wallace House kitchen, what meal would you cook (or order) for us and your fellow fellows?**

**Powers:** Probably the same thing I made when I was there... my homemade creole gumbo, as well as red beans.

**Powers addressed the audience at the 2014 Knight-Wallace Fellowship reunion.**



# Sound Practices Reveal Social Injustices

BY TRACIE MAURIELLO '20

Families were streaming out of Venezuela by boat and on foot, fleeing an authoritarian president who was enriching himself while the economy collapsed and violent crime flourished. Even the landscape now bore the scars of the corrupt regime, which failed to protect pristine parkland from gold miners who ravaged it.

Venezuelan journalist Marielba Núñez '20 wanted to tell these stories, but she felt silenced. Most news outlets in her country were shuttered and those that remained were under government control. And anyway, she thought, words can't adequately convey the refugees' all-consuming fear and uncertainty. In Ann Arbor, she would find a way.

Núñez is a pioneer of Collaborative Investigative Composing, a trailblazing method of storytelling that combines journalism, music and filmmaking.

The concept of CIC was born on the second day of the 2019-20 fellowship year. U-M visiting carillonneur Pamela Ruiter-Feenstra welcomed the new class of fellows to Burton Memorial Tower where she offered them a concert of original carillon compositions that told stories of social justice issues. Núñez and her classmate Jet Schouten, a Dutch investigative journalist, were immediately taken with the power of the musical storytelling and approached Ruiter-Feenstra about learning to play the carillon. Korean reporter Kwang Young Shin, another member of their class, began studying with Ruiter-Feenstra later in the year.

With a growing team of collaborators, CIC now has projects about violence against women in Mexico, censorship in Belarus, gun violence in the U.S. and—its most ambitious project—an oratorio



**As co-developer of Collaborative Investigative Composing, Marielba Núñez '20 and the CIC team use music to tell underreported stories of social injustices across the continents.**

Photo Credits: Elliott Woods '20



**Jet Schouten '20 (left) and Pamela Ruiter-Feenstra at the Burton Memorial Tower. Their collaborative composition, "Healing Bells," was played on carillons worldwide to bring global connectedness at a time of isolation at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic.**

depicting stories of Mexican immigrants before and after they crossed the border.

CIC has team members around the world – journalists, musicians and filmmakers – including additional Class of 2020 Fellows Eileen Truax, Ana Avila and me.

I had been among the swarm of journalists who descended on Newtown, Connecticut, after the Sandy Hook shooting. In time, the public's insatiable interest in the shooting faded, but the parents' pain didn't. Neither did their stories, and I returned to Connecticut to document them. Scarlett Lewis, mother of murdered 6-year-old Jesse, showed me that forgiveness and healing can co-exist with pain.

Now Ruiter-Feenstra is translating her story and my reporting into an evocative carillon piece that transcends erudition.

"Sometimes you feel there is something that is not possible to transmit in writing," Núñez said. "Music adds layers to the story. Music adds complexity," but the journalism always comes first.

"It's very important that we maintain this idea of journalistic investigation very firmly and solidly," Núñez said. "When I write I am very accurate, and that's something I am trying to translate to my work with Pamela. Sometimes when I'm listening to the music I might say, 'Pamela, we have to change this because I think in this part the sound is not like the image I'm trying to transmit.'"

Collaborators meet several times to refine each piece.

"I like working with journalists. They delve courageously into tough issues and listen intensely and compassionately," Ruiter-Feenstra said.

For Núñez, the goal is to uncover deeper meanings of contemporary issues.



“We take [journalism] and transform it into another kind of language, another register of speech,” she said. “We have the potential to [transcend] the ephemeral moment of the breaking news.”

Ruiter-Feenstra, a Grammy-nominated composer, brings innate compassion and curiosity that elicits the best in her collaborators.

Working with her “was like opening a different door in my brain that I didn’t know was there,” Schouten said. “I was so energized and amazed with the creativity burst.”

That door was flung wide open in March 2020 when Schouten was supposed to be packing for her return trip to Amsterdam. Inspiration struck, and instead she found herself creating a new composition about coronavirus with Ruiter-Feenstra.

“You had all these people in isolation because of the pandemic, and this instrument is there that can reach people. Now people just had to open their window and they could feel connected,” Schouten said.

What’s more, Schouten knew that some cultures believe bell vibrations are healing.

Schouten and Ruiter-Feenstra composed quickly and sent the score around the globe. Two months later carillonists in 13 countries played “Healing Bells” simultaneously on the UNESCO World Day for Cultural Diversity and Development.

“It was magical,” said Schouten who listened from the roof of one of Amsterdam’s oldest bell towers as the city carillonist below played music she co-created. “I knew at that same moment “Healing Bells” was being performed all around the world and that a message of hope was being spread.”

CIC is seeking grants and private donations to fund new compositions, films, arrangements for other instruments, and educational outreach that will allow others to do this kind of work, too.

“My dream is to continue to meet more journalists from around the world who have stories they want to tell in this creative, artistic way,” Ruiter-Feenstra said. “We want them to have this cross-disciplinary means of storytelling to engage audiences in new ways. With awareness comes a call for action to remediate injustice.”

**To learn more, please visit:**

<https://pamelaruiterfeenstra.com/investigative-composing>

## Class of '96 Reunion

BY MARILEE ENGE '96

**W**e came from Manhattan and Seoul, Bucharest and Anchorage, Tokyo, Santa Ana and Paris. Washington, Rio and New Baltimore. The Fellowship class that arrived in Ann Arbor in the late summer of 1995 drew from far-flung newsrooms, but most of us were old-school reporters and producers. We’d come up through newspapers, public radio and TV magazine shows and we looked forward to this year away, to reset and take a deep dive into subjects that obsessed us, like fiction and women’s issues and black history. Charles Eisendrath told us our main mission was to reinvent ourselves, but we didn’t know quite yet that the landscape was shifting so fundamentally we’d never go back to the same newsrooms, or practice journalism in the same way.

We didn’t say so at first, but most of us were in transition from jobs or cities or careers. We were a little bit adrift, trying to figure out the next thing. I remember Dan Froomkin talking about this internet thing and how he was going to find a way to make it a job. Some of us wanted to write books and secretly worked on drafts. Terril Jones studied the automotive industry. Liz Kastor took still photography. Jack Fischer buried himself in the rare books collection. We were – perhaps – the last fellowship class of the pre-internet era.

We got personal email accounts that year, some for the first time, and created a list called “Justfellows” to make plans and chat, out of the view of Wallace House. It seemed subversive. In early spring, we finally gelled. On email, we joked that the fellowship was really coming together. By the time the short Michigan academic year ended in April, we felt connected. Then we went home.



**First row, left to right: Marilee Enge, Terril Jones, Jacqui Salmon and Tim Wendel, Laurentiu Ili, Merrill and Karen Gozner, Tom Stanton, Loretta Hieber, David Hilzenrath, Dan Froomkin, Betsy Kavetas, Leoneda Inge-Barry and Liz Kastor.**

We kept Justfellows alive over the years, checking in about new jobs and marriages and babies and the sad untimely passing of two fellows: Jack Fischer and Randy Smith. Mid-pandemic, a few of us realized our 25th anniversary was coming up and Zoom provided an easy way to reunite. So we cobbled together a list of most of the still far-flung fellows and scheduled a call.

As faces popped onto our screens, there were laughs and gasps and questions. The biggest revelation? Nobody had changed much. We’re older and grayer, for sure, but everyone was completely themselves. No one works for a newspaper anymore and everyone has had to reinvent themselves. We teach writing to college students and run non-profits and have quietly settled into retirement. Tom Stanton and Tim Wendel write books. Dan became one of America’s most cogent journalism critics. Leoneda Inge-Barry reports on race in America for public radio. Laurentiu Ilie started the Williams-Sonoma of Romania.

The Michigan Fellows Class of '96 stayed on that call for three hours. It was hard to say goodbye.

# IN MEMORY OF JOHN COSTA '93

BY CHARLES EISENDRATH '75

John Costa applied for a Fellowship from one of the top positions at one of the leading regional newspapers in the country, the kind of job most people don't leave. However, Costa then 48, aimed higher than "one of" where his personal position within any organization was concerned.



**John Costa with the coveted Hovey plaque after delivering the lecture in 2008. The plaque hangs in the entryway of Wallace House.**

He spent the 1992-93 Fellowship year preparing to be number one although not at the St. Petersburg Times, where a good friend had taken over shortly before Costa's arrival in Ann Arbor. In such competitions, anger often infects regret; not in this one. In our first counseling session Costa made very clear how I might help, and it had nothing to do with "healing." In words to

this effect, he said: "Introduce me to people who study leadership, management and business. Never mind journalism. If I don't know journalism by now, I shouldn't be here."

Paul Tash, who won out for the top job at The St. Petersburg Times, called Costa "a hard-charging editor...who recognized obstacles but always saw the opportunities that lay beyond them." Editing a small team in suburban counties, he led it to a Pulitzer Prize in local reporting. Assigned to lead an unlikely initiative into the home territory of the rival daily in Tampa, he disproved the nay-sayers.

The hard-charging carried well beyond journalism. At the height of the Vietnam War, First Lieutenant Costa had volunteered from a desk job in intelligence for combat infantry duty during the enemy's Tet Offensive. Back home reporting for The Reporter-Dispatch (White Plains, N.Y.), Costa found himself with colleague Denise Beardsworth covering the potential disaster of a chlorine truck teetering from an overpass. They filed the story, then repaired to a bar. Beardsworth had made plans to spend a year in England with her boyfriend. Instead, she accompanied Costa for the rest of his life.

Costa made sure Denise was included in everything thereafter, the Fellowship very much included. "The Fellowship was a rejuvenation for us," she said, "but the most important thing was that we stopped what we'd been doing for years and took a look at ourselves in the company of smart people who shared many of our inclinations and goals."

Coming to Wallace House as a leading figure in a large newsroom, Costa contributed a senior voice in Fellowship discussions, and I took note of his judgment. He eventually served on the Fellowships' admissions committee and then its board, a voice of incisive good sense often leavened with wry humor.

Costa's Fellowship study plan became the rest of his professional life, and he made the experience available to others. He hadn't been top editor for Boise's Idaho Statesman for long before nominating political columnist Dan Popke '98 to Wallace House. While transforming the sleepy Bulletin (Bend, Oregon) into a leading western daily, complete with bureaus in the state capital and Washington, DC, Costa suggested an array of applicants who showed his range of ambitions and willingness to risk precious staff resources.

Lily Raff '10 for example, was a suburbanite East Coast rookie who proposed retooling herself into a hunting and fishing reporter with little experience in either. Costa let her introduce a major beat on her return and encouraged her book "The Call of the Mild: Learning to Hunt my own Dinner." She noted that "Several times a week he would take at least one reporter or editor out for drinks after work (he always took white wine and picked up the tabs), to discuss stories or just life. He wasn't afraid to tell stories about his own mistakes."

Markian Hawryluk's '13 project was designed to help serve The Bulletin's audience in health care, a major community interest, and Costa was clear about his hopes. "He pushed us to take on the types of stories most community papers wouldn't touch. He never allowed us to use the small size of the paper as an excuse."

Where others might have thought the idea of The Bulletin poaching editorial talent from The Wall Street Journal a fool's errand, Costa merely considered it common sense to acquire polished talent along with developing it. How else to explain his enthusiastic, extended recruiting of Kate Linebaugh '08 a seasoned foreign and domestic correspondent he met on the KWF admissions committee. The proposal: Take a big pay cut to move to a paper several times smaller, to a place she had never been for a job (editing) she had never tried?

"It wasn't right for me," said Linebaugh, who later took up editing at The Wall Street Journal, "but I was stunned and flattered nearly enough to take him up on it. And somehow I always regretted not taking the chance to work with John."

*Charles Eisendrath was director of Wallace House from 1986 to 2016.*



**John Costa and Charles Eisendrath with the shepherd's hook fashioned for use in limiting questions at events that sometimes became lectures. Never actually used, its existence sufficed.**

**John Costa died on March 21, 2021. He is survived by his wife Denise, sons Anthony and Timothy, daughter Claire Costa-Foley, five grandchildren and sister Ann Bull.**

# ALUMNI UPDATE



## **Lisa Armstrong '21**

Joined the faculty at University of California, Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism.



## **Alec MacGillis '11**

Granted a Berlin Prize Fellowship for Fall 2021 awarded by the American Academy in Berlin.



## **Molly Ball '10**

Won the Everett McKinley Dirksen Award for Distinguished Reporting of Congress from the National Press Foundation.



## **Tracie Mauriello '20**

Named senior reporter at Chalkbeat Detroit and Bridge Michigan.



## **Sindya Bhanoo '21**

Received an O. Henry prize for her short story "Malliga Homes," first published by Granta in 2020.



## **Elena Milashina '10**

Awarded the Prize for Courage by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) for her work with the Moscow tri-weekly Novaya Gazeta.



## **Claudia Collucci '10**

For the fifth consecutive year, she won the Specialists Award in the Health category granted by the Business Communication platform from Center for Communication Studies.



## **Marcia Pledger '14**

Named opinion and engagement editor at The Florida Times-Union.



## **Tracy Jan '15**

"George Floyd's America," a six-part series by a team of Washington Post reporters, won a Polk Award for Justice Reporting.



## **Sergio Rangel '15**

Won the 2020 International Sport Press Association Award in the investigative journalism category for O'Globo (Brazil).



## **Kim Kozlowski '09**

Named Journalist of the year by the Detroit Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists.



## **Laurent Richard '17**

Recipient of a Special George Polk Award for "The Cartel Project" investigation, based on the work of the late journalist Regina Martínez and produced by Forbidden Stories.



## **Steven Litt '88**

Recipient of a \$50,000 award for visual arts journalism from the Dorothea and Leo Rabkin Foundation of Portland, ME.



## **Karen Rouse '20**

Named Newsroom Editor for New York Public Radio station WNYC.





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### Mazin Sidhamed '20

As co-founder of Documented, won a Deadline Club award in Radio or Audio Investigative Reporting for "At the Mercy of the Courts," with Latino USA and Type Investigations.



### Bernice Yeung '16

Won a George Polk Award for Health Reporting as part of ProPublica's team chronicling the meatpacking industry.



### Delece Smith-Barrow '17

Named Education Editor at Politico.



### Katie Zezima '12

Named assignment editor on the Health/Science desk at the Washington Post.



### Nick St. Fleur '21

Named general assignment reporter and associate editorial director of events at STAT.



### Patrick Symmes '20

Awarded a Fulbright Scholarship in Communication and Media Studies to teach in Lisbon for three months.

## KNIGHT-WALLACE ALUMNI 50TH ANNIVERSARY REUNION

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