

# Update

## The Dart Centre Australasia newsletter



# Beginning to make a real difference

## Trauma and our newsrooms

### Special report



THE DOG stars during a quick break (l-r): Gary Tippet (*The Age*), Brett McLeod (Nine, Melborne), John Crowley (Fairfax NZ), Melissa Sweet (freelance medical/health writer and author), Bruce Shapiro (Dart Center, US), Andrew Meares (*Sydney Morning Herald*), Jessica Adamson (Seven, Adelaide), Sharon Marshall (Ten, Brisbane), Bill Pheasant (*Australian Financial Review*, Melbourne), Lisa Millar (ABC, Sydney), Phil Williams (ABC, Canberra), Suzy Smith (ABC, Sydney), Leigh Winburn (*The Mercury*), Kimina Lyall (former foreign correspondent and author), Rob MacColl (*The Courier-Mail*), Cait McMahon (Dart Centre Australasia), Trina McLellan (*The Courier-Mail*). Tippet, Williams and Sweet have been Australia's first three Dart Ochberg Fellowship recipients.

IT'S not often that news media personnel get to sit down with their peers and discuss in depth the particular professional and personal challenges presented by covering traumatic news stories.

Nor in their busy work lives do they routinely get to share observations and strategies that would enable them to continue doing demanding assignments in ways that produce better results for all involved. But that's what 15 mid-career and senior news personnel from Australasia's key news organisations did in late March-early April.

They attended a special retreat in Coffs Harbour at the invitation of the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma. Among their number were Australasia's first three Dart Ochberg Fellows.

In the first event of its kind, reporters, photographers, sub-editors, producers, freelance writers and editors from five Australian states, the

ACT and New Zealand came together, all keen to listen to, share with, learn from their peers – as well as their own news organisations – to adopt best practice when covering traumatic news stories.

Presentations allowed participants to learn about the science of trauma. Participants also discovered how others had encountered and dealt with the often complex task of reporting on tragedy and violence.

All had direct experience with covering both major and everyday incidents that brought them into contact with traumatised interviewees. Many had done this sort of work within Australasia and beyond, in major cities and remote locations.

Throughout the three-day retreat, discussions about professional and personal issues were candid, considered and, ultimately, immensely valuable.

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## WHAT KEEPS THEM GOING?

Participants identified a number of supportive factors that helped them to keep them well and working in the area like:

- belief in one's self
- having interests outside of journalism
- collegial and family support
- tapping into their love of writing and reporting the news
  - the love of the craft
  - a sense of humour
- a sense of belonging to a team that cared about their welfare, e.g., informal checks by managers and peers
- ready access to counselling without professional consequences or personal stigma being attached
- physical outlets such as sport and yoga

## INSIDE THIS EDITION

## When loss touches newsrooms • • •

SORROW and concern fell over Australasian newsrooms on March 7 when an early morning Garuda commuter flight crashed in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, killing 21 people, including five Australians, and seriously wounding many others.

Shock washed over newsrooms when it was realised that, along with names of high-profile diplomatic personnel and Australian Federal

▼ SYDNEY Morning Herald journalist Cynthia Banham, left, is still recovering in a Perth burns unit from critical injuries sustained when a Garuda jet crashed in Yogyakarta on March 7, 2007, killing Fairfax colleague Morgan Mellish, right, a reporter for the Australian Financial Review.



Police officers, the list of the dead included affable *Australian Financial Review* reporter Morgan Mellish. His Fairfax colleague Cynthia Banham, who works for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, was listed as critically injured.

After she was stabilised, a medivac team transferred a badly burned Cynthia to a Perth hospital where she has since been under the

watchful eye of a team of international burns experts headed by Dr Fiona Wood. Determined to return to work when fully recovered, Cynthia has had one leg amputated as well as part of the other leg but has recently had her first days sitting up out of bed and says she is buoyed by continuing messages of support being sent to her from colleagues and the public.

Those who worked alongside Morgan and Cynthia in Asia were deeply shaken by what happened. Several have shared what it meant to be close to those who died or were injured.

In the latest edition of *The Age*'s subscriber newsletter, *InsideTheAge*, its Indonesia correspondent, Mark Forbes—the only Australian journalist on the ground in Yogyakarta when the plane went down—tells a poignant story of how he experienced the shock and disbelief of the first 24 hours while filing two written pieces for *The Age*, arranging support for Cynthia and for Morgan's family as well as fielding "countless radio and TV interviews on autopilot".

His unique insights, as a journalist and a participant in a disaster, are valuable contributions to our understanding of individual and community responses to trauma.

## Reaching out to families of killed news workers • • •

WHEN someone in the news business dies because of their work, the shock waves begin in the newsroom but reverberate well beyond it, slamming into families who have not only lost a loved one, but often also their main breadwinner.

Two organisations, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Vintu Foundation for Excellency in Education and Journalism, have jointly launched a program to provide much-needed support to some of those families.

News of the project was released on May 3 to coincide with World Press Freedom Day and IFJ General Secretary Aiden White said the special-assistance fund would provide a year's support "to some of the neediest families".

"The grants issued under this special program will help ease some of the terrible financial strain that families are under," Mr White said.

"We can never compensate for the hurt and injustice, but it is intolerable that the families left behind after targeted assassinations should suffer economically as well. This co-operation we hope will expand into a network of support which will reach out to assist the thousands who suffer when journalists are killed."

He said the fund would provide monthly payments for a year to 10 journalists' families who lost a relative to violence related to that person's work as a journalist.

The selected recipients come from all parts

of the world: Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

Delegated-administrator of the Vintu Foundation, Cristian Unteanu, said the collaboration with IFJ would allow the families in most need to be identified.

"We see this fund as a way to help families get back on their feet after devastating loss," Mr Unteanu said.

- The Brussels-based Vintu Foundation for Excellency in Education and Journalism was founded by Romanian media owner Sorin Ovidiu Vintu.

## Introducing • • •

**Professor Kerry Green**, pictured, is a founding member of the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma – Australasia board.

In mid-2005, he joined the University of South Australia as Professor and Head of its School of Communication, Information and New Media, having previously been Associate Professor and Head of the University of Canberra's School of Professional Communication.

Professor Green has worked in, or taught, journalism since 1967.

He began his career at regional daily newspaper *The Cairns Post*, later working at Brisbane's then afternoon daily *The Telegraph* and the Ipswich-based regional daily *Queensland Times*. His wide-ranging experience spans time as a reporter, a newsroom manager, deputy editor (*The Cairns Post* and *The Telegraph*) and editor (*Queensland Times*).

He moved into academia full-time in (1989) when he began lecturing at the University of Queensland. His tertiary qualifications include an economics degree, a Bachelor of Arts in Literary Studies, and a Masters and PhD in Journalism.

Professor Green has a strong journalism research background and is project leader of a major Australia Research Council-funded research project on Trauma and the Newsroom.

He also is a researcher on the Reporting Diversity and Integration Project, funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, and a member of the UNESCO Communication Network in Australia.

He is a past president of the national Journalism Education Association and is a member of the editorial board of the Australian Journalism Review.

Professor Green's other research interests

include investigative journalism, computer-assisted and multimedia journalism, and news media organisation and management.



# Meet the Dart Australasia's 2006 Ochberg Fellow • • •

FOR freelance journalist and author Melissa Sweet, one advertisement in *The Walkley* magazine could not have come at a more appropriate time.

Since the early 1990s, Melissa had written about health and medical issues for key Australian news outlets, including the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Bulletin* and AAP. In 2003, she moved into freelance writing, with her articles appearing in a range of professional and general publications.

Her first book, *Smart Health Choices* (Allen and Unwin, 1999) – a collaboration with evidence-based medical professional and educator Les Irwig and his wife Judy, a health services consumer – had done well.

But she had just spent a harrowing year completing her second book, *Inside Madness* (Pan Macmillan, 2006), a frank account of the murder of South Australian mental health services director and psychiatrist Dr Margaret Tobin.

More broadly, the book also paints a history of mental health reform in Australia, and examines the difficulties of achieving change in complex, conservative health systems.

The book had just been published when Melissa saw the advertisement for the 2006 Dart Ochberg Fellowship.

“The ad for the fellowship resonated with what I’d just been through,” Melissa explained.

“Researching and writing this book was an extremely traumatic process, both for myself and for some of Margaret Tobin’s friends and family members.

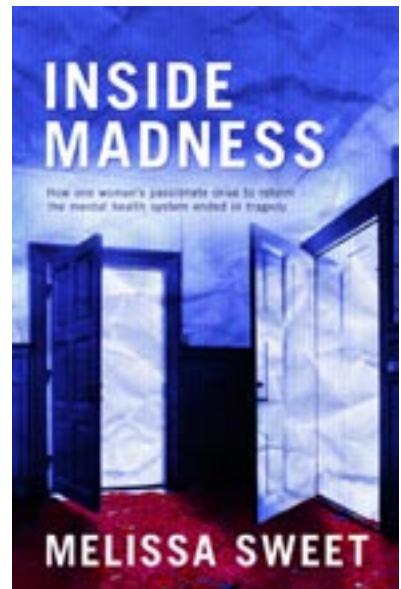
“By telling Margaret’s story, I was also telling the stories of those close to her. When you write a book like this, you have to accept the uncomfortable reality that you may be adding to the grief and trauma of those who have already suffered huge losses.”

It was the third time the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma – Australasia had offered the fellowship and it was clear to the judging panel that Melissa had what it takes to fill the shoes of her predecessors, ABC TV’s Phil Williams and *The Age*’s Gary Tippet.

Dart Centre Australasia director Cait McMahon summed up the judges’ assessment of Melissa’s work by praising her ability to combine significant skills when researching and writing about traumatic incidents.

“This book, along with Melissa’s other presented work – ‘Rising from the Ashes’, which is about survivors of the New Year’s Day bush fires in Junee, south-western New South Wales – indicated her talent in combining some significantly important skills when writing about traumatic incidents,” Ms McMahon said.

“The ability to sensitively bring together issues



▲ FREELANCE journalist and author Melissa Sweet enjoys working from her home in the NSW central highlands and regularly commutes to Sydney where she is an Adjunct Senior Lecturer in the School of Public Health at the University of Sydney.

of human suffering, respect for the humanity of victims, survivors and perpetrators of tragedy combined with fine journalistic investigation and craft is not always well achieved.

“Melissa’s ability to do this while continuing to enthrall her audience throughout, placed her at the forefront of a very competitive group of applicants for the 2006 fellowship.”

As part of her fellowship, Melissa joined other fellows from around the world at a special seminar in Los Angeles in November 2006 where the gathered journalists examined the media’s role in covering violence and trauma.

Some had done really difficult work over a long period of time in difficult circumstances, sometimes at great personal cost.

“One of the main things I got from winning the fellowship was the re-igniting of my appreciation for good journalism,” Melissa explained.

“I got to see there are very good people out there doing good work and it was inspirational.

“As a freelance journalist, the benefit of being connected into a network of fellows is also invaluable. Dart’s collegial contacts have definitely been a great help.

“I got to hear the stories of other fellows who attended the seminar. The diversity of their work was impressive. Some had done really difficult work over a long period of time in difficult circumstances, sometimes at great personal cost.

“So it really was a privilege to be with this group. Just the chance to chat with people

who are very experienced journalists was so stimulating.”

Having worked from within a newsroom and as a freelance journalist, what does the newest Dart Ochberg fellow see as the most important element of change needed to make a difference in the news media.

“While I am delighted there are many people out there striving to be good journalists I don’t perhaps feel so optimistic about the industry itself and its future, especially its commitment to good practice.

“We really need to move away from the recent trend to filling our news with celebrity stories, to go back to telling real stories and stop trying to second-guess what readers and viewers want.

“The social role of journalism is lost when the focus is on celebrity. Market research-driven journalism has a huge opportunity cost. It may well be a reflection of broader social trends but it does nothing for democracy.

“So I think it’s time to go back to good journalism, the basics, and to covering real people with real stories.

“It all comes down to the investment news organisations are prepared to make in good journalism.

“To me, one of the wonderful things to see during the gathering of Dart Ochberg fellows was the effort being put into journalism by small-town newspapers in the United States.

“Globally, though, I think journalism is becoming too seduced by the corporate model.”

Think you – or someone you know – have what it takes to be a candidate for Dart Australasia’s 2007 Ochberg Fellowship? For an application form, call 0419 131 947 or find out more in *The Walkley* magazine out in mid-June. Deadline is July 20, 2007.



# Beginning to make a real difference

## Trauma and our newsrooms

continued from P1

See Page 6 for weblinks to three helpful tip sheets



▲ COVERING the Indian Ocean 2004 tsunami presented challenges for more than 100 Australian news personnel who were sent to many nations, including, *from left*, Seven Network's Jessica Adamson in a devastated Banda Aceh, *centre*, and Rob MacColl and Jamie Walker on assignment in Thailand in the days after the tsunami.

In learning that a sense of meaning is an important factor in maintaining resilience, the participants shared what meaning their work had for them. All valued the impact that journalism can have on democracy with its power to create change and to give people a voice; the feeling that journalism was part of their core identity as a human being; integrity and pride in their work, and the importance of sharing information were just some of the aspects that helped give meaning.

Issues arising from these spirited discussions centred on how to continue the weekend's discourse in industry and what were the pertinent points that needed highlighting?

In the final session, and in feedback to the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma, participants identified a range of important points, including:

- Avoid making assumptions
  - humans are not either resilient or vulnerable – they can be both and this can also change over time

▼ NEWS media personnel often find themselves running towards danger when everyone else is taking shelter or evacuating, as many hundreds have experienced covering natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. With the right support, they can minimise potential risks.



- not everyone will react the same way to the same incident, nor will the timing of any reaction be set or even anticipated or immediately controllable
- The need for more training is high
  - it's important to expand the focus in newsrooms of what trauma means to individuals and communities
  - news personnel need to be trained to
    - ^ deal both effectively and compassionately with traumatised people
    - ^ recognise trauma symptoms in themselves and their peers
    - ^ offer peer support or elevate more serious concerns to ensure professional intervention is offered as early as practicable
  - managers who assign staff to stories (chiefs-of-staff, news editors, pictorial editors) really need to better understand and manage the pressures they place on
- Relatively simple measures can make a big difference in newsrooms
  - plan ahead to enable clear definition of who does what jobs during emergencies (upper managers can become enmeshed in managing a crisis that touches a news organisation in some way, so their attention is easily diverted from managing people still in the field or in the newsroom)
  - public acknowledgment of news personnel who have undertaken difficult assignments – hero-grams if you will – are a simple but valuable way of acknowledging effort and validating skills they have employed
  - while managing risks is important, adopting a purely legalistic approach rather than a human one can be counterproductive to all parties
  - it's important to identify strategic champions within middle and upper management, including CEOs and board members
  - the importance of internal communication was emphasised (e.g., providing staff with a method of direct or mediated contact with an injured colleague so they can express well wishes and support)
  - accountants and other executives also need education. (e.g., phoning home from a dangerous, distant or long assignment should not be considered a perk)
  - it will be important to bypass people who are likely to be barriers to change
- It's important to be extra vigilant when sending people on difficult assignments



▲ CONFRONTING grief and loss is part and parcel of reporting the news, as demonstrated by these images of Bill Hardy Sr embracing his daughter Jess in Bali after the 2002 terrorist bombing that took the life of their son and brother Billy and the evacuation from the Island of Nias in early 2005 of the remains of nine Australian service personnel killed after their Sea King helicopter crashed during a mercy flight in the weeks after the tsunami.

- news personnel need support and checks during and after they return from traumatic assignments
- overseas postings often put family and intimate relationships under pressure
- families of journalists doing difficult jobs/distant postings need to be better engaged and supported
- having next-of-kin info kept up to date (best if individuals nominate who should be contacted and how)
- Take the stigma out of the trauma and journalism conversations
  - it's critical to promote a culture which allows/supports networking among news teams - there needs to be greater openness in newsrooms about the issues around reporting tragedy and trauma because there are concerns, real and/or perceived, that speaking openly about the impact of trauma will lead to individuals being sidelined for difficult jobs because they are seen as vulnerable
  - the fear of speaking out only perpetuates the problem and does not advance newsrooms towards best practice
  - it is important to have opportunities to network/bond/talk with people who've been through similar experiences because reporters, photographers and other media personnel crave safe, supportive



opportunities for discussing ethical and personal dilemmas. They benefit from peer input and support

- tape editors and photo editors often don't have peer support in the same way as journalists on assignment. This needs to be rectified
- court reporters have specific issues that need addressing
- reaching out to people within our own organisations is to be encouraged
- the value of saying no was emphasised. Some, particularly those in junior positions, may need help with this. Airing an issue may make it easier for others to do so
- Individuals need to take responsibility for ensuring their own safety and well-being
  - planning is a key characteristic of resilient people and organisations
  - greater self care and trauma awareness helps individuals recognise and address traumatic responses

Participants heard how news personnel from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation have recently compiled an excellent DVD on trauma and journalism. This will be used to start conversations about reporting trauma in that organisation's newsrooms around the country. It features news personnel from all levels who share some powerful insights. The ABC has plans to back that DVD up with a workplace training program.

After a private screening of the DVD, the participants warmly applauded the valuable pioneering work being done by the ABC. There was universal support for an industry wide DVD on the same topic, involving the broadest cross-section of news outlets and workers from all levels. There was a popularly supported suggestion that such a DVD be accompanied by lists of useful resources and relevant training.

At the end of proceedings, participants agreed that the retreat had been invigorating and thought-provoking. They encouraged Dart Australasia to hold more such events in future.

They also noted that the time had come for them to help change in newsrooms around the country, changes that will enable healthier journalists and, ultimately, better journalism.

To that end they formally nominated themselves as the inaugural Dart Opal Group, partly because of the complex but quintessentially Australian gem stone, and partly in reference to the name of the resort where the weekend was held but, in good humour, because it will inevitably be shortened to DOG, an apt acronym because the group is learning new tricks, wants to be a faithful companion and will be a terrier at the heels until it achieves its purpose.

True to its origins, and as one of its first acts, DOG has already initiated an 'Open Letter to Managers and Editors' (see inside back page).

▼ COVERING death, disease and disorder ... whether it's the scourge of AIDS in PNG, its ravages on the most vulnerable or stepping in to record conflicts between warring parties in unstable areas like East Timor, it is impossible not to come away with images and experiences that will stay with you for life. These experiences may lead to emotional growth or distress. How these assignments are managed can make the difference.



## From the director • • •

Welcome to the Dart Centre's *Australasian Update*. At the time of writing, the inquiry into the death of one of the Balibo Five is under way at the Glebe Coroner's Court in Sydney. This morning, listening to the radio I heard one of the family members of the 'Five' speaking about the ongoing grief of their loved one killed in East Timor over 30 years ago.

The Balibo Five were doing what journalists do — attempting to inform the world of a significantly violent, internationally relevant event. As a consequence they were murdered.

As we read in this edition of *Australasian Update*, colleagues recently had to confront the death of Morgan Mellish and the major injuries sustained by Cynthia Banham, along with the deaths and injuries of 19 other passengers on the Garuda crash in Indonesia, some of them well known to journalists around the country.

We extend our condolences to all who continue to grieve their loss through death and injury. Managing grief is not an easy task. It often continues for extended periods and the concept of 'closure' around grief is a misnomer

Certainly grief will take on a different shape with the passage of time, but to continue to feel loss is a natural phenomenon. What we know about grief is that it is complicated by factors such as violence, manner of death, deception, neglect and unanswered questions around the death.

Grief following violent death is generally associated with negligence or human intent, which leads to the inevitable investigations, such as a Coroners Court to determine the locus of responsibility. This rarely follows natural death and means that the grief process is further exacerbated by the deceased being identified as a "victim".

For those grieving, there may even be a sense of revenge or retribution which does not follow natural death.

Violent death is the most common form of



▲ TEARS for Timor, Rob MacColl's Walkley award-winning photograph which captures a young girl's grief for the violence and loss she experienced in East Timor.

death for the under-40s — Source: the US-based Violent Death Bereavement Society, online at [www.vdbs.org](http://www.vdbs.org) — which means that those grieving will tend to be younger parents, siblings, family members and friends.

This also means that the working population will tend to be exposed to accidental deaths, suicides and other violent deaths more than they will natural deaths.

This newsletter discusses many options of self care in the face of trauma, whether grief caused by violent death, or other forms of trauma response.

The principles are the same — maintaining support of family, friends and social networks; speaking about feelings and not bottling them

up; steering clear of substance abuse and seeking professional help if things become overwhelming.

Working towards some form of acceptance is also necessary. The words are easy, but the experience is painfully difficult.

Health practitioner Dr Ted Rynearson writes in *Retelling Violent Death*: "Uncertainty and ambiguity are inherent in meaningless violence. Accept that violent death is a riddle that will never be answered — final answers or resolutions are impossible. The goal then is to accept the ultimate uncertainty and instead reconnect with the rapture of being alive."

Cait McMahon  
Director, Dart Australasia

## Trauma reporting award •••

The Australasian Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ASTSS) is offering a media award to recognise excellence in journalistic reporting of traumatic events for journalists who work in the State of Victoria.

The ASTSS provides a forum for extending the understanding of, prevention and treatment of major stress and trauma within the Australasian region. It is affiliated with the International Society for Traumatic Stress (ISTSS).

A prize of \$1000 will be presented at the ASTSS 2007 Annual Conference in Ballarat in late September. Applications close July 31, 2007.

For further information, see ASTSS's 'News Board' — online at [www.astss.org.au/site/Media/ASTSS%20Ballarat%20Media%20Award.pdf](http://www.astss.org.au/site/Media/ASTSS%20Ballarat%20Media%20Award.pdf) — and an application form can be downloaded from [www.astss.org.au/site/Media/Media%20Award%20Applic.pdf](http://www.astss.org.au/site/Media/Media%20Award%20Applic.pdf)

## Handy tip sheets • • •

IN conjunction with the Dart Opal Group's open letter to editors and CEOs of Australian news media, *a copy of which runs on the opposite page*, the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma - Australasia has developed three helpful tip sheets which were sent to major newsrooms around the country along with the letter itself.

The first tip sheet is based on research findings and the other two on proven practical interventions that can help newsrooms and news personnel begin to implement best practice.

You may see one or more of those tip sheets posted around your newsroom but you can also access — and download — all of them online at any time from:

### Tipsheet #1:

#### Current research on journalists and trauma

[www.dartcentre.org/australasia/current\\_research.pdf](http://www.dartcentre.org/australasia/current_research.pdf)

### Tipsheet #2:

#### Tips for editors

[www.dartcentre.org/australasia/editor\\_tips.pdf](http://www.dartcentre.org/australasia/editor_tips.pdf)

### Tipsheet #3:

#### Tips for journalists

[www.dartcentre.org/australasia/journo\\_tips.pdf](http://www.dartcentre.org/australasia/journo_tips.pdf)

## Key web links • • •

EACH edition of this newsletter is published online — at [www.dartcentre.org/australasia](http://www.dartcentre.org/australasia) — in both .pdf and html formats.

This edition the html version contains a number of extremely useful hyperlinks to

resources of use to individuals and newsrooms.

These international weblinks focus on: reporting trauma; self care as well as examples of award-winning and first-person stories from the frontline.

They're worth book-marking.

## Open Letter to Editors and Chief Executives of Australian news media

We are a group of journalists, photographers, editors and subeditors who have a combined industry experience of 320 years. We are writing to ask your assistance in fostering the resilience of news workers to handle the trauma and violence we face in our daily work.

A growing body of evidence suggests that exposure to such trauma and violence can have a detrimental effect, not only on news workers' own wellbeing, but also upon their ability to do their jobs to their full capacity.

More and more news organisations around the world are recognising the benefits of taking a systematic approach to supporting staff to cope with the exposure to trauma that their jobs often entail. These benefits include increased productivity, better journalism and fulfilment of employers' legal obligations to provide duty of care.

We work for a broad cross-section of Australian news organisations. Those in our group have covered – and in some cases, witnessed first-hand – wars, mass murders, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, coronial and criminal court cases, countless car crashes, child abuse and other harrowing events.

Most of us survive these ordeals through personal resilience and a profound belief in the meaning and importance of our work.

Even so, the most bullet-proof of professionals can be profoundly affected at times by their stories, and the evidence is clear that this is normal and human. This is no 'weak link' in the newsroom. In fact, it can assist in great reporting.

A small percentage of us do not survive. We personally know of many colleagues who have left journalism because of a breakdown of that resilience, leading to a crippling inability to continue in the work. Others remain in the industry but suffer other effects of long-term exposure to trauma: difficulty coping with work demands, breakdown of personal relationships and chronic health problems, for example. Expert trauma counsellors tell us that these outcomes are almost always avoidable through early intervention and adequate support. Instead, many of our colleagues feel isolated and victimised, unaware that their feelings are common results of their direct experiences and can be relatively easily treated.

We welcome steps many news organisations have made in developing Employee Assistance Programs to help staff at crisis point. But more could be done to help those staff avoid reaching such crisis points.

Through our affiliation with the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma, an internationally-acclaimed organisation, we would like to help your organisation provide:

- All news workers with information and training in basic self-care techniques that would help them maintain resilience.
- News editors and chiefs-of-staff with information to help them identify colleagues at risk of developing symptoms and instigate strategies to protect that worker from long-term harm, thus fulfilling their obligations of duty-of-care.
- Simple information explaining trauma and its effects to assist journalists, photographers and camera operators in their interviews with people affected by traumatic events, leading to more powerful stories. Such information and training is standard practice for other first responders, such as emergency service workers, but has not yet become standard practice in the media.

We are not promoting "soft" journalism. Nor are we suggesting news organisations refrain from covering death and disaster. Instead, we are advocating smarter journalism, informed by self-understanding and compassion towards interview subjects.

To this end, we enclose a small kit of useful material. We ask you to distribute it to all of your staff, including those not directly involved in news gathering, and to make it a policy to distribute it again to news workers heading out on assignments that are known to have traumatic elements. We are happy to provide you with electronic copies if you would like to make it available on via your intranet sites and for installation on the desktops of pooled laptop computers.

This letter was written as a result of a weekend discussion in March 2007 at Coffs Harbour, facilitated by the Dart Centre Australasia. It involved the following journalists and photographers and is endorsed by them all.

In the coming months, representatives of our group will contact you directly in the hope of meeting with you and discussing your newsroom needs and offering any assistance we can provide. In the meantime, please feel free to contact any of us directly (individual telephone numbers were listed on letters).

## Signatories

### South Australia

Jessica Adamson  
Reporter, Channel Seven Adelaide

### Australian Capital Territory

Philip Williams  
Presenter  
Stateline, ABC/Dart Ochberg Fellow ('05)

### Tasmania

Leigh Winburn  
Photographer/Pictorial Editor  
The Mercury

### Queensland

Sharon Marshall  
Reporter, Channel Ten

Rob MacColl  
Photographer, The Courier-Mail

### Trina McLellan

Subeditor (former journalism educator),  
The Courier-Mail

### New South Wales

Andrew Meares  
Photographer, Sydney Morning Herald

### Lisa Millar

Reporter, ABC

### Suzanne Smith

Reporter/Producer, Lateline, ABC

### Melissa Sweet

Freelance journalist and author  
Dart Ochberg Fellow ('06)

### Victoria

Brett McLeod

Reporter, Channel Nine

### Bill Pheasant

Deputy Editor, Opinion and Editorial,  
Australian Financial Review

### Gary Tippet

Senior Writer  
The Sunday Age/Dart Ochberg Fellow ('04)

### Kimina Lyall

Author, former foreign correspondent

### Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma

Cait McMahon  
Executive Director

Dart Centre Australasia

Bruce Shapiro

International Executive Director  
Dart Center US

## Visitor • • •

THE US Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma's research co-ordinator Dr Meg Spratt, *pictured*, will visit Melbourne in mid-June where she will meet with a number of journalism educators.



Dr Spratt is former newspaper reporter and editor who also has more than 10 years' experience teaching journalism and media studies to university students.

Her particular research interests include journalism history, race and gender, and political communication, with an emphasis on photojournalism.

Recently, Dr Spratt's PhD dissertation examined the uses and interpretations of photojournalistic icons from the height of the American Civil Rights Movement.

Dr Spratt will then be attending the World Journalism Educators Congress being held in Singapore later in June with three Dart Australasia board members, director Cait McMahon, Professor Kerry Green and Jim Tully.

## About Update • • •

The Dart Centre for Journalism & Trauma - Australasia is incorporated in Victoria as a non-profit company limited by guarantee. It is affiliated with the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, which is based at the University of Washington - Seattle.

*Australasian Update*, its electronic newsletter, is prepared by the group's secretary, Trina McLellan, on a voluntary basis. All content queries should be directed to the group's director, Cait McMahon.

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John Street, Hawthorn, Victoria

## Worth a read • • •

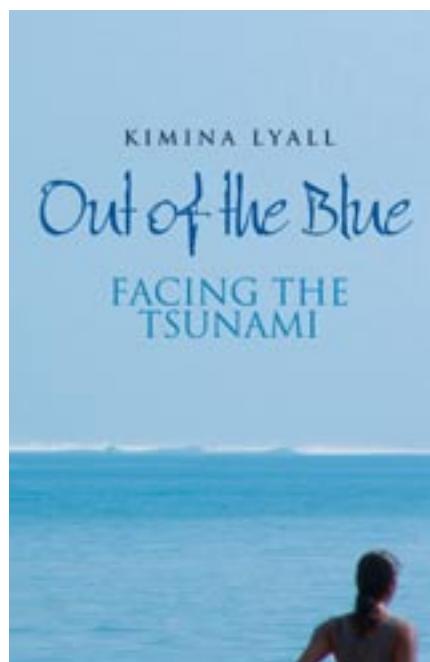
WHEN the 2004 tsunami crashed onto the coastlines of countries fronting the Indian Ocean on Boxing Day, one Australian journalist, an experienced foreign correspondent, was having a well-earned getaway with friends on a Thai beach, oblivious to the drama that would unfold around them.

What happened over the coming hours and days as she kicked into automatic reporter mode — and what that meant for her and those around her — is the riveting story contained in Kimina Lyall's *Out of the Blue* (\$29.95, ABC Books).

How she reacted when friends lost their lives and her partner was washed out to sea, how help eventually reach survivors, working amid death and destruction, how individuals and communities responded, the grief that slowly seeped into her being, and what it was like to be torn between the professional and the personal, Kimina tells it all with candour and the acknowledged clarity of hindsight.

The lessons she acknowledges she learned in the weeks and months after the tsunami — and those there for others to take on board — are borne of first-hand exposure to a natural disaster and its traumatic circumstances.

But they are expressed in the familiar, accessible language of a journalist telling it like it was from her point of view.



The surreal period that followed the initial waves makes fascinating reading for all working in the news media and should underscore how trauma can touch individuals differently.

## For your diary • • •

ABC TV's *Compass* program is scheduled to air nationally 'Bearing Witness', an examination of the interface between journalism and trauma on Sunday, June 17 (check local TV guides for start times).

The program has been recently put together by the corporation's Religion and Ethics Production Unit and is presented by senior ABC reporter and presenter — and 2005 Dart Ochberg Fellow — Philip Williams.

### Program summary supplied by ABC TV:

The burden of bearing witness is born by newsmen and women around the globe who put themselves on the front line of conflict and tragedy in the course of their work.

But what sustains them? How do they deal with trauma?

Almost three years after the Beslan massacre veteran ABC TV reporter Philip Williams is still dealing with the traumatic aftermath of covering this shocking siege.

Now he wants to meet other journalists "who've been through the same thing".

He takes us on a moving personal journey into the 'darkness in the soul' of men and women whose job it is to report on our behalf events that most of us could not bear to experience.

He visits legendary Vietnam War photographer Tim Page who went everywhere, saw too much and



coped by drowning himself in drugs and alcohol. "I don't think these were criminal acts. It was a method of survival," he tells Philip. Some 40 years on Tim Page still carries it.

Philip is shaken: "I would hope for young journalists starting out we develop new means so they can 'download' and relieve the pressure of horrible images or the horrible stories or what ever it is that blocks up their emotions so it doesn't become a dominant force 40 or 50 years later."

Philip also meets Sally Sara who as the ABC's Africa correspondent filmed horrific civil conflicts involving child soldiers; and, Kimina Lyall, a respected foreign correspondent who at her Island weekender in Thailand when the Boxing Day tsunami crashed into her world.

These distressing experiences have changed their lives.

Philip pleads for more understanding for all of his colleagues: "Why would a journalist going to cover a war or traumatic event be any less affected by that event than the soldiers or the emergency workers? Or perhaps even, to a degree, the victims themselves. We're in there. We're seeing it all. We're recording it. We're reliving it. We're editing it. Of course we're going to feel it!"

## Your Dart Centre Australasia contacts • • •

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