

# Silurian News

Published by The Silurians Press Club, an organization of veteran New York City journalists founded in 1924

Join Us for Lunch at the National Arts Club Sept. 16, 2026

KAI BIRD will discuss his new, sure-to-be controversial book, *American Scoundrel: Roy Cohn's Dark Journey from Joe McCarthy to Donald Trump*



ROY COHN'S DARK JOURNEY FROM JOE MCCARTHY TO DONALD TRUMP

JUNE 2026

## CELEBRATING THE BEST IN LOCAL



“Arrests at 26 Federal Plaza Shock Migrants at Immigration Check-Ins” by Ben Fractenberg of *The City Reporter* takes home the Medallion for Breaking News Photography. Fractenberg captures the anguish of a weeping mother clutching to her infant at Lower Manhattan immigration headquarters as ICE officers take her husband into custody.

BY MICHAEL S. SERRILL

“They haven’t given us food, they haven’t given us medicine. We’re cold. There are people who’ve been here for 10, 15 days. We’re just waiting.” That’s a quote from an inmate held last summer in the detention center for captured immigrants at 26 Federal Plaza in Manhattan. He was speaking on one of two videos smuggled out of the center and obtained by *The City Reporter*, the probing online news outlet that provides some of the best reporting on every municipal topic.

The findings from the video were part of “NYC: Nation’s Capital of Immigration Courthouse Arrests,” a series of stories on the poor treatment of immigrants arrested by ICE and the Border Patrol in New York City and detained at 26 Federal Plaza before being shipped to a larger detention center or deported. One revelation in the package: In 2025, the great bulk of immigrant arrests in New York were not made at Home Depots or other such locations, but outside the federal courtrooms where immigrants reported for scheduled appointments to clarify their status.

The series, by Haidee Chu and Gwynne Hogan, is one of two winners of this year’s President’s Award Medallion, Silurian President Aileen Jacobson’s selection of the best of the best in the 2026 Excellence in Journalism competition.

A second President’s Award Medallion goes to *NorthJersey.com/The Record* for two great stories, one about the failure to carry through on prosecution of clergy sex abusers, and a second on New Jersey’s troubled group-home system.

“These investigations are deserving of the Silurians Press Club’s top honors because they represent fearless investigative reporting that exposed hidden abuses of power and

produced significant public consequences,” Jacobson said.

“Together, these entries embody the very best of watchdog reporting: persistent and painstaking work that uncovers the human consequences of institutional policies and practices and makes a strong case for

change.” This year’s Excellence in Journalism Awards attracted entries from around the region in 15 categories. The emphasis in the judging was on local content and impact. The two media organizations that garnered the most Medallions couldn’t be more different: *The New York Times*, with its global audience, which won four Medallions and three Merit Certificates, and the scrappy *The City Reporter*, which won three Medallions. Other winners ranged from *Newsday* with two Medallions and three Merits, to *Streetsblog* with one Medallion and one Merit, to *New York Focus* and *The Forward*, which each pulled in one award. (A complete list of the award winners appears on page 4.)

*The City Reporter*’s series on immigrant detention put faces on the Trump Administration’s war on law-abiding migrants and asylum-seekers who showed up for routine court proceedings. They were arrested on the spot and whisked away to ICE facilities. By relying on old-fashioned gumshoe reporting, leaked videos and keen data analysis (that included assistance from a Brooklyn mathematician who uncovered a method to track courthouse arrests), Chu and Hogan proved—despite on-the-record denials by The Department of Homeland Security—that, by late July 2025, 415 people had been held for days or weeks at 26 Federal Plaza in dirty, crowded detention rooms and without consistent access to lawyers, food or bathrooms. When a federal judge ordered ICE to curtail such detentions and improve conditions, he cited the evidence that was exclusively reported by Chu and Hogan in *The City Reporter*. President Jacobson also singled out for special praise two *NorthJersey.com/The*

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## Graydon Carter: The Going Is Still Pretty Good

BY DAVID A. ANDELMAN

One day in the spring of 2017, after nearly half a century creating or running several impossibly imaginative and stylish magazines—including *Spy*, *The New York Observer* and, of course, *Vanity Fair* which he’d helmed for 25 years—Graydon Carter woke up with no magazine to direct, edit or inspire. He pondered a bit and, before long, in July 2019 to be exact, he returned to his magazine roots and created a new one. *Air Mail*—a digital weekly newsletter covering politics, culture, travel and lifestyle—was the happy result. Graydon captained that online enterprise into September 2025 when he sold it to the digital media company Puck. And on April 15th, he appeared at a Silurians Press Club luncheon to discuss the ups and downs (mostly the ups) of his legendary career, submitting to some amiable interrogation from Ken Auletta.

When he created *Air Mail*, the media world was very different from the days when Graydon had assumed the reins at *Vanity Fair* 27 years earlier.

As he explains in his memoir *When the Going was Good: An Editor’s Adventures During the Last Golden Age of Magazines*, and as he shared with the audience, “It’s a nightmare doing a magazine. When they are losing money, you can’t flush the mon-



Graydon Carter says that, to be great, a magazine article must have four components: access, narrative, conflict and disclosure. “I’m The Guy They Called Deep Throat”—the history-making article that he assigned and published in the July 2005 issue of *Vanity Fair*—made the most of access and disclosure.

ey down the toilet fast enough. And when they’re making money, you can’t go to the bank fast enough.” But thanks to his way with words, pictures and ideas, Graydon has always known how to make money, especially for his employers.



Take Sy Newhouse, for example. The diminutive in size yet towering media mogul who owned Condé Nast (publisher of *Vanity Fair* and other marquee-name magazines, here and abroad) just happened to sign the

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## President's Report In Appreciation and Anticipation

While the world is full of things to fret about, as journalists there is much reason for appreciation of the work that is being done.

I'm proud of the incredible lineup of programs that this press club has presented in the past year.

We started in September with Molly Jong-Fast's insights on growing up in the shadow of a mom who was an internationally best-selling feminist author.

Then, political historian Julian Zelizer explored the presidency and the press, giving Silurians and their lunch guests a much-needed breath of optimism.

David Margolick, aided by Tony Guida, gave a rollicking talk with hilarious Sid Caesar clips.

Sam Tanenhaus engaged in a revealing conversation with John Avlon about his biography of William F. Buckley Jr.

Molly Jong-Fast returned in January to converse with the inimitable E. Jean Carroll about the latter's freewheeling life in journalism and her headline-making court battles—and wins—against Trump.

Neal Shapiro and Betsy Ashton spoke about the challenges facing public media.

Gayle Feldman discussed with Kai Bird the life of publishing legend Bennett Cerf.

And in April, Graydon Carter and Ken Auletta shared memories about the glory days of magazine journalism in New York.

The season's luncheons ended last month with a Lifetime Achievement Award presentation for Chuck Scarborough in conversation with Rich Lamb, and the Peter Kihss Award presentation to *Newsday's* James T. Madore.

The other reason I'm encouraged about the state of journalism is the level of quality reporting, writing and photography that we saw in the entries to the 2026 Excellence in Journalism Awards competition.

The competition was so strong that I had to make some hard decisions in selecting the winners of the President's Awards.

It also has been deeply gratifying to meet the winners of the scholarship awards presented to journalism students by the Silurians. These young people have convinced me that good days of solidly good reporting lie ahead.

This is my last President's Letter for the Silurians Press Club. I want to thank the officers and the board for all of the work they have done over the past two years to make this club so outstanding. I am looking forward to encouraging and helping the new slate of officers carry on the traditions of the Silurians.

*Arlene*



Photo by Arlene Schulman

# THE BEST IN LOCAL JOURNALISM



Jonah Markowitz's compelling and stirring photo essay for *The New York Times* on the emotional fallout that plagues Transit Authority drivers who have struck and killed people on the subway tracks takes home top prize: The Medallion for Feature News Photography.

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*Record* investigative series. Religion reporter Deena Yellin discovered a secret court order that had enabled the Catholic diocese in Camden, N.J., to stymie a state investigation of sexual abuse by church officials for seven years. She revealed that the Camden Diocese had convinced a jury to invalidate a key part of the State of New Jersey's authority to investigate sexual abuse. The judge also granted the diocese's request to seal the records.

Within weeks of Yellin's exposure of the secret ruling, the diocese, under a new bishop, withdrew its objections to the inquiry, and the state Attorney General announced he would appeal the issue to the New Jersey Supreme Court. The Court ultimately ruled the investigation could proceed.

The second winner from *NorthJersey.com/The Record* resulted from a year-long investigation of unsafe conditions in privately run group homes for the disabled. Reporters Ashley Balcerzak and Jean Rimbach illuminated the challenges faced by those who advocate reform. Video producer Michael Karas complimented the package with an excellent documentary.

Statewide, the private group-home industry in New Jersey is a \$1.5 billion business with more than 130 facilities with budgets that can exceed \$500,000 per resident. Even so, individuals with disabilities often suffer from a lack of basic care, including understaffed homes where they are denied proper food, water and medicine. Workers are paid poorly, training is lax and standards are low. The reporting was exhaustive and authoritative, despite the industry closing ranks and refusing to talk.

Beyond the President's Awards, the Silurian award winners covered triumphs and scandals, politics, business, science, photography, sports and the arts. Here are the winners.

### Breaking News Reporting

The Medallion goes to *Bloomberg News*. In "New York's Evening of Terror," the *Bloomberg* team issued a series of swift and authoritative reports after a gunman attacked the offices of the National Football League at 345 Park Avenue. These reports were the first to suggest the gunman's motive was a fixation with Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, a brain disease tied to repeated blows to the head that the gunman himself had suffered as an amateur football player. *Bloomberg* also mapped the scope of the attack that shook many corporate offices in the building, including the investment firm Blackstone, where an executive was killed.

As the first news organization documenting the shooter's motive, *Bloomberg's* fact-based coverage helped shift the public's understanding of the event and dispelled false information, including word of anti-Muslim conspiracies that was spreading online.

The Merit Certificate goes to *Business Insider* for its comprehensive coverage of the trial of music mogul Sean "Diddy" Combs.

### Feature News Reporting

The Medallion goes to *The New York Times'* Joseph Goldstein for "The Fire-

fighter with OCD and the Vaccine He Believed Would Kill Him." In this riveting, first-time-told tale, Goldstein describes the psychological tightrope that Timmy Reen walked for 20 years, serving as a firefighter while privately battling severe Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and a paralyzing fear of contamination. With profound empathy, Goldstein chronicles how after two decades of successfully masking his fears from fellow firefighters, by way of a string of exhausting rituals—exquisitely detailed by Goldstein—Reen was forced into retirement for his refusal to submit to a mandated



The dignity of brotherhood: "The FDNY Remembers" shows firefighters marching in New York's Saint Patrick's Day Parade, carrying 343 American flags, commemorating the 343 FDNY members lost on 9/11. This dynamic shot earned Alexandra Villa Loarca of *Newsday* a Merit Certificate for Feature News Photography.

Covid vaccine, a needle prick that presented an internal terror. The judges called Goldstein's work "a shining example of exceptional storytelling."

The Merit Certificate goes to Dionne Searcey of *The New York Times* for "Lonely at the Top," the story of how the gifted Chef Nduvo Salaam labors in obscurity in a deluxe but mostly empty restaurant on the 100th floor of Central Park Tower, one of Manhattan's new, super-tall residences for the elite.

### Investigative Reporting

The winner of this Medallion is Jesse Coburn of *Streetsblog* for "The Moped King: How an Ex-Delivery Worker Upended the Streets of New York City." Over eight months, Coburn, now with *ProPublica*, chronicled the rise of Ou Zhou from a bicycle food-delivery man to an entrepreneurial fraudster who took public a company that blanketed New York City with unsafe electric delivery bikes. Exploiting loopholes in city, state and federal regulations, Ou Zhou's company, Fly E Bike, fabricated and sold substandard dangerous e-bikes and mopeds to thousands of food-delivery workers who longed for inexpensive transportation. Learning that the federal government had never tested a Fly E Bike for compliance with safety regulations, *Streetsblog* commissioned its own safety study. The reporting linked a number of battery fires to Fly E Bike. After *Streetsblog's* initial investiga-

tion was published, multiple agencies took action. The New York State Department of Motor Vehicles announced it would no longer register mopeds made by Fly. And UL Solutions, which administers the gold standard of testing for motors and batteries, sued Fly for fraud. *The City Reporter's* Department of Transportation canceled a bike-swap program with Fly. Federal authorities, after finally ordering a test, issued a safety recall of Fly mopeds.

The Merit Certificate for Investigative Reporting goes to *Newsday* for "Unprotected," reported by Sandra Peddie, Grant Parpan, Shari Einhorn, Nicole Fuller and illustrator Neville Harvey. *Newsday* used the abduction and abuse of a 14-year-old girl as the lodestone of a massive, months-long, multi-media probe of sex trafficking on Long Island and beyond.

### Business & Financial Reporting

Debbie Nathan and Alyssa Katz of *The City Reporter* take home the Medallion for "The Terrible Truth About Sherita, Brooklyn's Beloved Billboard Dinosaur." The story began as a look into the demise of a Brooklyn billboard showcasing a hand-painted, pink Brontosaurus and the disputed sale of the building beneath it. As Nathan and Katz dug into the story, they uncovered a wide-ranging, years-long scheme to steal the deeds of numerous properties from unwitting owners. Hidden behind pseudonyms and fake corporate entities, two brothers with criminal records for assaulting tenants were behind the scheme. Its victims,

typically immigrants with limited knowledge of English and the law, sometimes only learned they had lost title to their property when *The City Reporter* told them. A legal effort is now underway to challenge the deed transfers.

The Merit Certificate in this category goes to Sophia Lebowitz of *Streetsblog* for "Closing the 'Instacart Loophole.'" Lebowitz's dogged reporting revealed that Instacart inflated the cost of groceries by 75% while underpaying the immigrants who worked as their deliverymen. When an expansion of the minimum wage ultimately passed, then-City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams cited *Streetsblog's* reporting as a reason for overruling Mayor Adams' veto.

### Science & Health Reporting

The Medallion goes to Sam Mellins of *New York Focus* for "Investigation Into Leading Edge Insurers." In this multi-part series, Mellins exposed Leading Edge, an unscrupulous New York State health insurance company with a history of fraud and shocking mistreatment of doctors and patients. Mellins' investigation describes how the state government entrusted to a little-known company the health and well-being of hundreds of thousands of its low-income healthcare workers. Mellins spent many weeks navigating complex regulatory filings, reviewing lawsuits, analyzing billing records and finding and interviewing former

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# THE BEST IN LOCAL JOURNALISM

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employees and beneficiaries of the company to document how Leading Edge profited by underpaying doctors and shortchanging patients. Mellins' reporting produced results. Following publication of the series, the state contractor responsible for hiring Leading Edge terminated its service as an insurance provider.

The Merit Certificate goes to Erika Fry of *Fortune* for "How Big Data and an A-List Board Turned Struggling NYU Langone into a \$14 Billion Hospital Powerhouse." Fry deftly blended sharp analytical detail and vivid color into an engrossing story about a medical center that's doing good while also doing well.

## Environmental Reporting

Mariana Simões of *City Limits* wins the Medallion for "New York Approved a Major Gas Pipeline Expansion. What Does It Mean for Climate Change?" In this well-crafted multimedia investigation, *City Limits* climate reporter Simões offers an in-depth look at New York's controversial approval of a plan by the Iroquois Pipeline Company to substantially increase the flow of fracked natural gas, in contravention of New York State's landmark 2019 climate bill, which mandates moving away from fossil-fuel use. Proponents say the increase, enabled by the construction and operation of heavy-duty gas-compression stations that are required to amp up the flow, is an essential, safe, relatively short-term measure to meet the state's growing power needs. Critics strongly challenge such claims, as Simões reports, and underscore the fact that the state is in clear violation of its legal obligation to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and transition almost entirely to clean, renewable energy sources by 2050. Compelling graphics and interactive maps by Patrick Spauster help sharpen the narrative and stress the urgency of stemming the release of greenhouse gases along with the health-endangering pollutants tied to stepped-up natural-gas transit.

The Merit winner in this category is Shantal Riley, a freelance environmental reporter and contributor to PBS's *Science Friday*, for "Small City Pays a Price for PFAs."

## Arts & Culture Reporting

The Medallion co-winners in Arts & Culture Reporting are Michael Kimmelman and Holland Cotter of *The New York Times* for their reviews of the renovated Frick Museum. The Frick has long been one of the priceless jewels of New York City, though it seldom got the attention poured on its cousin, The Met, a half mile away on Fifth Avenue. So, when the Frick closed for renovation during the COVID pandemic, there was concern that its beauty and intimate scale would be diminished. Kimmelman, reviewing the architecture, and Cotter, evaluating the display of the art, captured in elegant, pointillist prose what a glory the Frick remains and how the renovation actually improved the visitor's experience.

The Merit award in Arts & Culture goes to Simi Horwitz of *The Forward* for a recollection of the groundbreaking movie *Hester Street* and the late Joan Micklin Silver, its writer-director.

## Sports Reporting & Commentary

The Medallion goes to Kevin Armstrong's "Diamond in the Dirt," which transports the readers of *NJ.com*, into the world of financial intrigue swirling around a young potential NBA player. Armstrong's long look at Airious "Ace" Bailey traced the basketball player's path from his childhood in Chattanooga to Rutgers basketball and the National Basketball Association.

This nine-month investigation showed how a sketchy, would-be sports agent, Omar Cooper, insinuated himself and his Lifestyle Sports Agency into the financial affairs of the young hoop star. Digging deeply into Cooper's background, Armstrong uncovered his felony indictments, his federal tax liens, and some seemingly shady deals. After Armstrong's story was published, Bailey fired Cooper. This story vividly illustrates the effects that the huge flow of money has



Noah K. Murray of *Newsday* captured the goofy exhilaration of New York Mets first baseman Pete Alonso after his 9th inning sacrifice fly propelled the Mets to a 4-3 victory over the Pittsburgh Pirates at Citi Field in May 2025. *Newsday* tamely entitled this exuberant Medallion-winning shot "Walk Off Win."

had on what used to be amateur scholastic sports.

## Editorials/Commentary/Public Service

The Medallion for Public Service goes to *Newsday*, which assigned a team of reporters and editors to conduct the most ambitious and sustained examination of traffic safety ever undertaken on Long Island, culminating in this award-winning piece, "Dangerous Roads." In America's oldest suburb, cars are a way of life. *Newsday*'s investigation concluded that automobiles should not be a cause of death at a rate far exceeding the rest of New York State. *Newsday*'s year-long series combined in-depth data journalism with moving and personal story-telling, awarding Long Islanders with a true public service.

The Merit Certificate for Public Service goes to a series of alarming stories by Jan Ransom, Bianca Pallaro and their *New York Times* colleagues for exposing the brutal beatings and murders of inmates by guards in the New York State prison system.

## People Profiles

Ben Sisario of *The New York Times* takes home a Medallion for his searing pre-trial portrait of Sean "Diddy" Combs. As a *New York Times* music reporter, Sisario covered many of the highs and lows of Combs' unruly life. His profile weaves these and new revelations together, portraying Combs in unsparing terms as a person who repeatedly got away with vicious behavior and became a wealthy star because powerful people chose to overlook his alleged crimes and cruel misconduct. As Sisario writes: "Many now say they saw the seeds of his undoing long ago, in the destructive recklessness that had been enabled by years of escaping consequences."

The Merit winner is Alex Vadukul of *The New York Times* for "The Last Lucille Roberts," a wistful portrait of the last survivor of what was once a beloved New York-area chain of more than 50 women-only gyms.

## Minority Affairs Reporting

Hannan Adely, the minority affairs reporter for *NorthJersey.com/The Record*, wins a Medallion for "Civil Rights for Minorities"—three stories describing the plight, and the hope, of immigrants under Trump. One story tells the tale of a North Jersey man who, after being arrested and held in a detention center, decided to self-

port to Costa Rica—leaving behind a wife and three young children, one of whom is hearing impaired and requires special schooling. The second story is more harrowing, describing how Haitian deportees are illegally imprisoned and tortured when sent home, while the families they left behind in the U.S. are victims of extortion. Adely's reporting made its mark; her revelations have been used as evidence in deportation cases that went to court. The third Adely story is also about self-deportation—but of Syrians in New Jersey who returned to their home country after the brutal Assad regime was overturned. Time will tell if their decision was the right one.

The Merit winner is Michael Elsen-Rooney of *Chalkbeat.org* for "Dreams Detained." In a series of stories on the impact of Trump's aggressive immigration crackdown on the students at a Bronx high school, Elsen-Rooney mastered the tenets of good journalism—get access, gain trust, build relationships, tell the truth and, whenever you can, right the wrongs.

## Breaking News Photography

The Medallion goes to *The City Reporter*'s Ben Fractenberg for "Arrests at 26 Federal Plaza Shock Migrants at Immigration Check-Ins." Fractenberg was the photographer for the team that won President's Award honors for "NYC: Nation's Capital of Immigration Courthouse Arrests." His winning photo captures a weeping woman holding her infant at lower Manhattan immigration headquarters as ICE officers are taking her husband into custody. Fractenberg got an award-winning shot, despite being pushed and jostled by the crowd around the crying woman.

The Merit award goes to *Newsday* photographer Howard Schnapp for "A Final Salute," in which he captures hundreds of firefighters giving a final salute to a fallen Long Island colleague.

## Feature News Photography

The Medallion goes to *The New York Times* for Jonah Markowitz's compelling

and very moving photo essay on death in the New York subways. The photos accompanied a story headlined "They Witness Death on the Tracks and Then Struggle to Get Help," about Transit Authority drivers who have struck and killed people on the tracks and cannot get help for their post-traumatic stress. Markowitz was also an author of the beautifully illustrated article, along with Bianca Pallaro and Ana Ley.

Markowitz's photos take us deep into the subway system, to the stations and tracks where the tragedies occur, showing us the city cops, firefighters and Transit Authority



For his riveting investigation "Deadly Force," examining controversial police shootings in New Jersey, *News 12*'s Walt Kane (above) was awarded the Medallion for Television Feature News.

personnel who must deal with them. He also takes us into the lives and the homes of the subway drivers who struggle to get help for the psychological trauma of being involved in these accidents, crimes and suicides.

The Merit award in Feature News Photography goes to *Newsday*'s Alejandra Villa Loarca for "The FDNY Remembers," a dynamic image that bears witness to the dignity of firefighters marching in New York's Saint Patrick's Day Parade, carrying 343 American flags, commemorating the 343 FDNY members they lost on 9/11.

## Sports Photography

The Medallion in Sports Photography goes to Noah K. Murray of *Newsday* for "Walk Off Win." The image captures the exhilaration of New York Mets first baseman Pete Alonso after his 9th inning sacrifice fly propelled the Mets to a 4-3 victory over the Pittsburgh Pirates at Citi Field on May 12, 2025. Being ready with the camera when dramatic events take place is what great

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# Silurians Press Club

## The 81st Annual Excellence in Journalism Awards

### THE 2026 MEDALLION and MERIT AWARD WINNERS

#### PRESIDENT'S AWARD

"NYC: Nation's Capital of Immigration Courthouse Arrests"  
By Haidee Chu and Gwynne Hogan, *The City Reporter*

#### PRESIDENT'S AWARD

"Who Killed New Jersey's Clergy Sex Abuse Investigation" By Deena Yellin  
"Hidden At Home," By Ashley Balcerzak and Jean Rimbach  
"Families Seek Answers from Flawed New Jersey Group Home System" By Michael Karas,  
*NorthJersey.com/The Record*

#### BREAKING NEWS REPORTING

**Medallion:** "New York's Evening of Terror" By Myles Miller, Dawn Lim, Katia Porzecanski, Sridhar Natarajan, Amanda L. Gordon, Hema Parmar and Laura Nahmias, *Bloomberg News*

**Merit Certificate:** "Breaking News Coverage of Music Mogul Sean 'Diddy' Combs Trial" By Laura Italiano, Natalie Musumeci, Jacob Shamsian, Ayomikun Adekaiyero and Haven Orecchio-Egresitz, *Business Insider*

#### FEATURE NEWS REPORTING

**Medallion:** "The Firefighter with O.C.D. and the Vaccine He Believed Would Kill Him" By Joseph Goldstein, *The New York Times*  
**Merit:** "At a Deluxe Dining Room on the 100th Floor, a Chef Toils in Obscurity" By Dionne Searcey, *The New York Times*

#### INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

**Medallion:** "The Moped King: How an Ex-Delivery Worker Upended the Streets of New York City" By Jesse Coburn, *Streetsblog NYC*  
**Merit:** "Unprotected" By Sandra Peddie, Grant Parpan, Shari Einhorn, Nicole Fuller and Neville Harvey, *Newsday*

#### BUSINESS & FINANCIAL REPORTING

**Medallion:** "The Terrible Truth About Sherita, Brooklyn's Beloved Billboard Dinosaur" By Debbie Nathan and Alyssa Katz, *The City Reporter*  
**Merit:** "Closing the 'Instacart Loophole'" By Sophia Lebowitz, *Streetsblog NYC*

#### SCIENCE & HEALTH REPORTING

**Medallion:** "Investigation into Leading Edge Insurers" By Sam Mellins, *New York Focus*  
**Merit:** "How Big Data and an A-list Board Turned Struggling NYU Langone into a \$14 billion Hospital Powerhouse" By Erika Fry, *Fortune*

#### ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING

**Medallion:** "New York Approved a Major Gas Pipeline Expansion. What Does it Mean for its Climate Goals?"  
By Mariana Simões and Patrick Spauster, *City Limits*  
**Merit:** "Small City Pays A Price For PFAS In Drinking Water" By Shantal Riley, *Science Friday*

#### ARTS & CULTURE REPORTING

**Medallion:** "Inside the Splendor of the New Frick" By Michael Kimmelman, Holland Cotter, Lila Barth and Adrianna Glaviano, *The New York Times*  
**Merit:** "50 Years After Its Debut, 'Hester Street' Reminds Us What It Means to Be a Jew in America" By Simi Horwitz, *The Forward*

#### SPORTS REPORTING & COMMENTARY

**Medallion:** "Diamond in the Dirt" By Kevin Armstrong, *NJ.com*

#### EDITORIALS / COMMENTARY / PUBLIC SERVICE

**Medallion:** "Dangerous Roads" By Newsday Staff, *Newsday*  
**Merit:** "Prisons in Crisis" By Jan Ransom and Bianca Pallaro, *The New York Times*

#### PEOPLE PROFILES

**Medallion:** "Sean Combs' Path from Harlem to Stardom, and Now Federal Court" By Ben Sisario, *The New York Times*  
**Merit:** "The Last Lucille Roberts" By Alex Vadukul, *The New York Times*

#### MINORITY AFFAIRS REPORTING

**Medallion:** "Civil Rights for Minorities" By Hannan Adely, *NorthJersey.com/The Record*  
**Merit:** "Dreams Detained" By Michael Elsen-Rooney, *Chalkbeat*

#### BREAKING NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY

**Medallion:** "Arrests at 26 Federal Plaza Shock Migrants at Immigration Check-Ins" By Ben Fractenberg, *The City Reporter*  
**Merit:** "A Final Farewell" By Howard Schnapp, *Newsday*

#### FEATURE NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY

**Medallion:** "They Witness Deaths on the Tracks and Then Struggle to Get Help" By Jonah Markowitz, *The New York Times*  
**Merit:** "The FDNY Remembers" By Alejandra Villa Loarca, *Newsday*

#### SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY

**Medallion:** "Walk Off Win" By Noah K. Murray, *Newsday*  
**Merit:** "Go Play In the Rain" By Thomas A. Ferrara, *Newsday*

#### TELEVISION / VIDEO BREAKING NEWS

**Medallion:** "Helicopter Crash Into Hudson River" By Bryan Lenocker, *Eyewitness News ABC7NY*

#### TELEVISION/VIDEO: FEATURE NEWS

**Medallion:** "Deadly Force" By Walt Kane, *News 12*

**AWARDS CO-CHAIRS:** Allan Dodds Frank and Michael S. Serrill

**AWARDS TECHNICAL CONSULTANT:** Ben Long

**AWARDS JUDGES:** David A. Andelman, Susan Antilla, Betsy Ashton, Joseph Berger, Fran Carpentier, Suzanne Charlé, Jack Deacy, Allan Dodds Frank, Tony Guida, Fred Herzog, Aileen Jacobson, Kevin Noblet, Ben Patrusky, Claire Regan, Michael S. Serrill, Scotti Williston

# E. Jean Carroll: Not His Type? Two Juries Found Otherwise

By DAVID A. ANDELMAN

George Conway likely cost Donald Trump \$5 million, and eventually, perhaps, a whole lot more. Or in the end, you could lay it all at the feet of Molly Jong-Fast. Because it was at one of Jong-Fast's memorable dinner-party soirees that E. Jean Carroll—journalist, author and advice columnist—chanced to meet George. And so it was that E. Jean, a victim of Trump's sexual forwardness in a Bergdorf's fitting room—actually, let's call it what it was: rape—told George Conway her story. And George—a Supreme Court litigator, political insider and self-described “former Republican turned anti-Trump activist”—explained to E. Jean that, even though more than 20 years had passed since that transgression, there were substantially different standards of proof for civil cases rather than criminal cases. The seed had been planted.

“He said ‘you could win a civil case against [Trump]’—so, that's what I did,” E. Jean matter-of-factly recounted on a frigid January 21st to a sold-out room of raptly attentive Silurians and their luncheon guests.

Thanks to George Conway and his on-target advice, E. Jean Carroll sued Donald Trump. And won. Big time. Twice. Two juries found Trump liable for sexual abuse and defamation. In May 2023, a judge awarded Ms. Carroll \$5 million in damages, and in January 2024, at another trial, the judge awarded her an additional \$83.3 million in damages. And after that, there was a short 2024 film (*E. Jean Carroll v. Donald J. Trump*, directed by Robert Greenwald), and then a book by E. Jean herself (*Not My Type: One Woman vs. a President*), which was the topic of the luncheon.

**We didn't even see the gender divide in this country. We thought, ‘We're in New York’... What we found out, though, was that people thought I ‘wanted it.’ Because he was just too cool, and I was too old.**

— E. JEAN CARROLL

Molly Jong-Fast—host of the *Fast Politics* podcast, *New York Times* Opinion contributor and MS Now commentator—was E. Jean's interlocutor in front of the sandwiched-in audience at the National Arts Club—a room that E. Jean described as “powerful,” adding, “People in this room have made a big difference in this country.” But then, for that matter, so has she. Yet, as Molly—a Silurian luncheon speaker last September and the subject of her own book, *How to Lose Your Mother: A Daughter's Memoir*—observed, E. Jean has paid a price for her boldness.

E. Jean swore that, from the get-go, she very much understood that there would be blowback—threats, even—from making her allegations about Trump public. Nevertheless. “I don't care if they shoot me,” she began. Then, referring to the journalist-filled room, she continued, “You all are braver than I have been on my best day. I really don't have that. I just have nerve—that's it. Because I don't care if they kill me. I live in a hovel in upstate New York, the slush of hatred pouring at me. I don't care. I'm living my life. I'm having a ball. Graydon Carter produced a great documentary about my story. [Editor's note: *Ask E. Jean* opened in NYC and L.A. last month.] I have this great book written. And I have a friend like Molly Jong-Fast.” Thunderous applause.

Coming out with her story was more consequential than tilting at windmills, she quickly discovered. “I sued Donald Trump,” E. Jean said proudly. “And then I found myself in the middle of a high comedy. I could not believe it. It was something out of Jonathan Swift. I could not have made up

the characters I was running into.”

The trials were, she said, “a trip,” complete with a great tour guide—the renowned civil litigator Roberta Kaplan. “We ran mock trials before we went to court,” E. Jean explained. “This is what Robbie does. We wanted to present our arguments to see if they worked—what the jury thought of them. And of course, we were way wrong. We didn't even see the gender divide in this country. We thought, ‘We're in New York.’ But we paid 27 people \$120 to sit in a courtroom and listen to all the arguments, ours plus Trump's, and we found out that 27 people could believe that two people could end up in a Bergdorf dressing room, and that two people could have something sexual go on in a Bergdorf dressing room. And that one of those people could be Donald Trump, and one of those people could be E. Jean Carroll. What we found out, though, was that people thought I ‘wanted it.’ Because he was just too cool, and I was too old.”

So, what did E. Jean Carroll and Robbie Kaplan decide to do? “We knew that this took place 20 years ago, so we went back to my old TV show from the exact time when it happened,” E. Jean said. We cut my hair like it was in 1996. I wore the very clothes I actually wore in 1996. For the trial, I wore makeup like I did a 1996. The essence at the heart of abuse and rape cases is always about the body of the woman.”

After the trials resulted in verdicts stunningly in her favor, E. Jean found pure bliss. “I loved gathering all the materials and then writing the book. It was just eight months of sheer heaven. I just loved writing it. I just loved it.”

That E. Jean had found herself in such an unlikely moment was a big surprise. It was a long way from her roots.

“I grew up in the sticks, behind the sticks, in Indiana,” she recalled. “When I first came to New York, straight out of Indiana, I took my dog who was called ‘Tits’ for a walk in Manhattan. For the first time, I left my apartment on 26th Street, walked up 20 blocks, turned to the right. Just remember, I am a hick from the sticks with my dog on a rope. And here she comes, walking down 48th Street. A yard of blond hair is flying this way and that. She's wearing light blue, and her blue eyes are swimming, glittering in the sun. It was Erica Jong. My first New York celebrity. And now I'm sitting next to her daughter, Molly Jong-Fast, and”—at this point,



A fateful friendship: Molly Jong-Fast (l) played a pivotal role in E. Jean Carroll's eventual trouncing of Donald Trump in court. Thanks to a chance encounter at Jong-Fast's home, Carroll learned that it was not too late to take legal action against Trump.

Never one to be silenced or even to mince words: What's E. Jean's response to the blowback and threats she still receives from Trump supporters? “I don't care if they shoot me,” she says.

Photo by Steven Speliotis

E. Jean turned her face away from the audience and spoke to Jong-Fast directly—“that happened even before you were born.”

“We are in a very crazy time now,” E. Jean said. But she has not given up: “We may come out all right. At the end, I feel very optimistic about America. I feel very optimistic particularly sitting in this room.”

And then, parenthetically, she dropped a bombshell. “I never had sex again after that dressing room incident.”

Writing *Not My Type* “was the greatest therapy,” E. Jean said. “I am free and I feel wonderful now,” she beamed and then further evinced her indomitable spirit by revealing, “the pipes froze in my apartment this morning.”

Still, there's a lot to celebrate—\$5 million in escrow is already in the bank, and the prospect of Croesus-like wealth is on the way. If Trump's appeal over the second jury's award to her fails, E. Jean Carroll will receive punitive damages of \$83.3 million, plus accrued interest that will bring the amount she could receive closer to \$100 million.

In that case, E. Jean will have her final revenge, which she pointedly disclosed to her Silurian audience: “I'm going to give that money to everything he hates—to getting back women's rights over their own bodies.”

David A. Andelman is a past president of *The Silurians*, a former correspondent for *The New York Times* and *CBS News*, and creator of *SubStack's* global “*Andelman Unleashed*.”

## THE BEST IN LOCAL JOURNALISM

Continued from Page 3

sports photography is all about.

The winner of the Merit award for Sports Photography is Thomas A. Ferrara of *Newsday* for “Go Play In the Rain,” a shot that captures the resolve of Mets pitcher Clay Holmes as he continues to throw through near torrential rain in their game against the Pittsburgh Pirates at Citi Field on May 14, 2025.

### Television/Video Breaking News

In mid-afternoon on Thursday, April 10, 2025, a helicopter on a sightseeing tour of Manhattan crashed into the Hudson River near Jersey City. Within minutes of the accident, ABC's *Channel 7 Eyewitness News* took to the air itself, with extensive live coverage. Across several harrowing hours,

viewers saw video of the helicopter tumbling from the sky and heard from eyewitnesses in lower Manhattan and Jersey City describing the helicopter breaking apart, its tail and propeller detached, the propeller still twirling in the sky as the fuselage plunged into the river. All aboard the chopper were killed, including the pilot and a family of five from Spain, including three children.

The pilot for Channel 7's news helicopter, himself shaken by the accident, pointed out that such crashes are rare, a catastrophic event in which a pilot is helpless.

### Television/Video: Feature News

Those familiar with our awards won't be surprised at the name of the Medalion-winner in this category: Walt Kane,

of *News 12*, who claims Silurian awards almost every year. His winner this time is a piece called “Deadly Force,” a riveting investigation into a series of controversial police shootings in New Jersey. Kane uncovered disturbing evidence that New Jersey is failing in its efforts to reduce the number of deadly police shootings, especially in cases of people suffering mental health crises.

New Jersey, Kane reports, touts its program requiring mental health professionals to pair with police when they are called to these emergencies. But Kane's investigation reveals that, in the vast majority of cases, the mental health professionals arrive only after the emergency is over or don't arrive at all. Kane's reporting also revealed that the State's system

of investigating deadly police shootings is so shrouded in secrecy that the loved ones of those killed by police often know little more at the conclusion of an investigation than they did on the day of the incident.

On behalf of the President, the Board of Governors and the entire membership of the Silurians Press Club, congratulations to all the winners of the 2026 Excellence in Journalism Awards.

Michael S. Serrill, Co-Chair of this year's awards competition, has labored as a reporter, writer and editor for a variety of publications, including *Time*, *Business Week* and *Bloomberg Markets*.

# Graydon Carter: The Going Is Still Pretty Good

Continued from Page 1

paychecks (and the expense accounts) for both Graydon and Ken.

"[Sy] invested in his magazines so they would make a lot of money, and they did," Graydon said. "But he wasn't [just] a businessman; he was an artist at heart, and I think that came through. He gave his editors complete freedom."

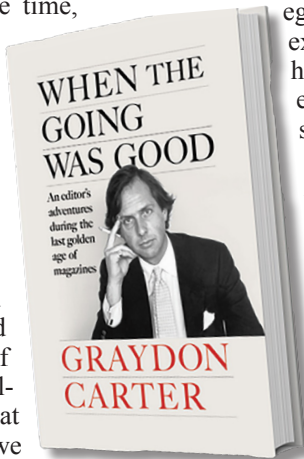
And billionaire Newhouse certainly had deep pockets. One incident that Graydon recalled as proof brought down the Silurians' packed house:

"We'd have lunch at the Royalton, which was between 44th and 45th Streets—between Paul Stewart and Brooks Brothers. I had an account at the Royalton. One day, we'd finished lunch and got to the door to find rain the likes of which I'd never seen before. But all of a sudden, as if in a movie, a Checker cab pulls up. So, we hustle into the car, and I realize I didn't have any cash, and Sy goes, 'Gosh, neither do I.' So, I said to the driver, 'Sir, sorry! We're only going two blocks. I'll give you \$20 for the fare. But I'm going to have to go into the building, and then I'll come out with the money.' The driver looks around at Sy and he says, 'Okay. But the little guy has to stay in the car.' Sy loved that story."

That was not Graydon's only story about little guys. There also was the one about Larry Tisch. Now Tisch is one who has crossed the path of your humble servant, rather insalubriously, so Graydon's yarn truly tickles my fancy.

"Larry Tisch had bought CBS and was firing people from *CBS News*," Graydon began, with no idea that your scribe had been one of the casualties. Graydon continued, "So, we did a column on [Tisch], and we had this thing that we'd make up funny epithets. Donald Trump was a short-fingered vulgarian. That still bothers him to this day. As for Larry Tisch, we called him a churlish dwarf billionaire. So, John Scanlon, a PR guy and crisis-management expert who was working with Tisch at the time, called me up in a rage. 'You really have gone too far this time.'"

"I said, 'What are you talking about, John?' First of all, in those days we had only landlines, and I used to have one of those cradles on my phone and so I'd have one hand free, and he's saying, 'Well, first of all, Larry is not technically a dwarf.' So, I write that down. The next month we



Ken Auletta (left) and Graydon Carter share a laugh during the April 15th luncheon Q&A. During the golden age of magazines—an era that Carter describes as "when the going was good"—he and Auletta also shared bosses and expense-report anxieties.

solved it by saying, 'We have a correction to make. We got a call from a CBS factotum pointing out that Larry is not, in quotes, technically a dwarf.' Another flurry of angry phone calls." (As for yours truly, I've spent decades telling folks that I'd been *Tisched*, turning Larry into a verb.)

There also was Ralph Lauren. "When we did a story on short men," Graydon continued. "We ran photographs of Ralph, and in the magazine we would write, 'not actual size.' But Ralph is a fine person and taller than I always expected. In fact, he is 5'6".

But best case of all (which means that it's really the worst case of all), there was Donald Trump. "You know he has the sort of charm of an aluminum siding salesman," Graydon began. "He'll drop your name into every third sentence. When the movie *Tin Men* came out, the salespeople portrayed in that movie reminded me of Trump. He was craven, he was vulgar, he was selfish, he was egotistical. I would never have expected to see him in the position he currently holds, and I would never have anticipated that he could be so stupid."

Turning to *Silurian* president Aileen Jacobson, Graydon continued, "If Aileen was up at four in the morning, doing tweets like he does, you'd replace her in a heartbeat. Maybe she is doing that; don't know. I don't follow a lot of social media."

"If I was running Kinko's," Graydon added, "and I had an employee like the person he's

become, I'd get rid of that person. He's running the largest, most powerful country in the world, and he has the nuclear codes. And I think that he is not a well person. We all wake up every morning with an existential dread thinking about him."

**B**ecoming a columnist in the olden days was the capstone to a career, and now it's the entry-level job—now that everybody has an opinion on the internet. Today, anybody can have a Substack. So, the key thing is, how do you get noticed? By doing excellent work over a consistently long period of time. And then how do you make a living out of that? Which I think is even tougher.

— GRAYDON CARTER

Ken Auletta then pivoted to Graydon's inherent and peerless prowess for delivering editorial with muscle.

Graydon explained that every great magazine article is the result of four components: access, narrative, conflict and disclosure. Some stories can take years to get into print. Others take less time, albeit still fact-checked down to the last comma.

In the July 2005 issue of *Vanity Fair*, writer John D. O'Connor revealed that Mark Felt, the number two man in the FBI during the Watergate scandal of the early 1970s, was Bob Woodward's and Carl Bernstein's anonymous source "Deep Throat."

On May 31st, just as the Mark Felt story—of which "we were 95 percent sure"—was about to ship, Graydon was at the Nassau Airport, preparing to board a plane on his way back to New York from his honeymoon. A call from a *Vanity Fair* editor came through to his wife's cell phone. "Woodward and Bernstein had just confirmed that Mark Felt was Deep Throat," Graydon recounted. "And so, it was a really happy trip back to New York." That *Vanity Fair* scoop, which ended the 33-year mystery of who was the source that brought down President Richard Nixon, "was on the front page of every newspaper in the world."

Fast forward a few years, and the media universe was changing, Graydon observed. "Becoming a columnist in the olden days was the capstone to a career, and now it's the entry-level job—now that everybody has an opinion on the internet. Today, anybody can have a Substack. So, the key thing is, how do you get noticed? By doing excellent work over a consistently long period of time. And then how do you make a living out of that? Which I think is even tougher."

"Or you start publishing books," Graydon continued. "Those you've always wanted to publish—classics that are charming and funny and with introductions by new contemporary people. Or you do documentaries like the one on Karl Lagerfeld, the most beautiful fashion documentary ever done, financed by Paramount Pictures four years ago, but sitting on a shelf because they fired all the distribution and salespeople at Paramount. And

I'm doing one on Christopher Hitchens for HBO."

The last anecdote that Graydon shared—this one about an "experiment" to test the mettle (and the cheapness) of rich New Yorkers that he and his staff at *Spy* had conducted in the 1980s—had the Silurians in stitches again.

"Some years ago, in the old days," Graydon began, "when you sent out checks, you'd wait for them to be endorsed and come back in a little box. We sent out checks for between 32 cents and \$1 to rich New Yorkers. We waited months, and we got about 25 of them back from people who'd gone to the trouble of writing their signature and 'For deposit only' on the back of the check. So, we then decided we'd send those 25 people 13-cent checks to see who would sign them. Finally, they came back in the box. Two of those 25 people had signed. One was Adnan Khashoggi, who was then the biggest arms trader in the world. And the other was Donald Trump."

*David A. Andelman is a past president of The Silurians, former New York Times and CBS News correspondent (until he was "Tisched" after Larry T. bought CBS and cut the staff). David is also the creator of Substack's "Andelman Unleashed."*

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### Here's News Silurians Can Use

- Our monthly luncheons take place September through May on the third Wednesday of the month. We provide a forum for leading journalists, best-selling authors, politicians—put simply, those who report the news, as well as those who make news. Details about the upcoming speaker—and the registration link—typically post one month prior. Visit [Silurians.org](http://Silurians.org)

- Videos of luncheon speakers and awards lunches and dinners live on our Website, as do past issues of *Silurian News*. Missed an event? Or simply want to relive it? You'll find it

all at [Silurians.org](http://Silurians.org)

- Silurians have special privileges at the National Arts Club. Silurians and their guests may have lunch in the NAC's Dining Room, Monday through Friday. Reservations are required. (When you make the reservation, simply identify yourself as a Silurian.) Credit cards only—but it doesn't have to be the Silurian's card. Anyone at the table can present a credit card, and the bill can be split among cards. For reservations, call 212-477-2389 or email [dining@nacnyc.org](mailto:dining@nacnyc.org)

# Gayle Feldman: A Cautionary Tale Writ Very Large

By David A. Anelman

What happens when an author invests 23 years, interviews 200+ individuals, accumulates two four-drawer filing cabinets and 14 shelves of books—all devoted to a single man of very many parts? The answer, for Gayle Feldman, was simple: You produce one of the landmark profiles of American publishing, or as her interlocutor Kai Bird, himself a world-class biographer, described it, “an intellectual biography of the 20th century.”

In his introduction at our Silurians luncheon at the National Arts Club on March 18th, Kai, who won the Pulitzer in 2006 for *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, observed, “That’s what biography is really all about—using the life to tell the larger story.”

Unsurprisingly, that’s exactly what Gayle Feldman accomplished in writing a magisterial biography of one of the great figures in American publishing and letters: Bennett Cerf—the founder of Random House. Or as she calls her opus: *Nothing Random: Bennett Cerf and the Publishing House He Built*. For her eager audience Gayle unspooled some

**Benny, I discovered very early on, loved to tell stories. And many of them were not true. He admitted this, he was very open about [his belief] that the story was what counted far more than the facts.**

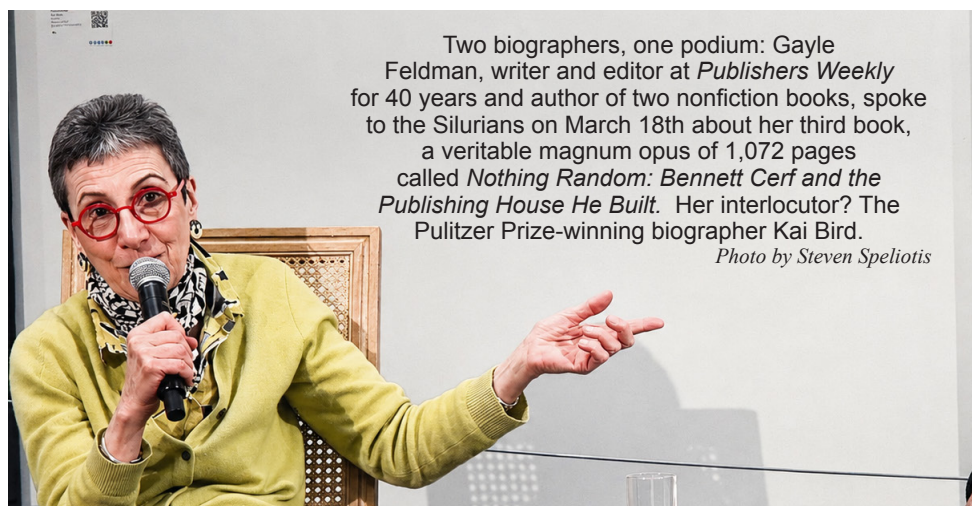
—GAYLE FELDMAN

marvelous tales from nigh on a quarter century of research and writing.

First, though, how did she come upon Cerf? Well, it all began in her youth: “When I was a kid in Philadelphia, my parents sometimes let me stay up late on Sunday night to watch this show that half of America watched—*What’s My Line?* Bennett Cerf was a panelist. When I started writing for *Publishers Weekly*, obviously, I came across the fact that Bennett Cerf had been the co-founder and animating spirit of Random House. He was always the first among equals.”

But it was only later, at Columbia University, stumbling in some archives upon a trove of his letters, Gayle realized, having just profiled for *PW* another leading publishing house—Knopf—“I could do Bennett Cerf, and he had a much bigger life than Alfred Knopf. He knew everybody in books, TV, Broadway and Hollywood. One thing led to another.”

But what led to a book contract 23 years ago was a letter, along with a 25-page pro-



Two biographers, one podium: Gayle Feldman, writer and editor at *Publishers Weekly* for 40 years and author of two nonfiction books, spoke to the Silurians on March 18th about her third book, a veritable magnum opus of 1,072 pages called *Nothing Random: Bennett Cerf and the Publishing House He Built*. Her interlocutor? The Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer Kai Bird.

Photo by Steven Speliotis



posal that Gayle sent to the famed book editor Robert Loomis, who, she explained, “had published all Maya Angelou ever wrote and had edited William Styron and Edmund Morris at Random House. I said to Loomis it would be a conflict of interest for Random House to publish this book, but could he tell me if I was on the right track? Bob phoned me two days later and said, ‘I have sent your proposal to Bennett’s son, Christopher Cerf. And I am going to publish this book for Random House.’ So that’s how I got involved—and I had no idea what I was getting myself into.”

And the tales just began to flow. “Benny, I discovered very early on, loved to tell stories,” Gayle continued. “And many of them were not true. He admitted this, he was very open about [his belief] that the story was what counted far more than the facts.” Still, Gayle added, “Arthur Gelb [metropolitan editor, then managing editor of *The New York Times*] very early on said to me, ‘You must remember that Bennett Cerf was a great exaggerator.’ So, I knew I had to check and check. He really did fabricate stuff.”

Such as? “He said, ‘I am an unusual specimen. Not only I, but both my parents and all four of my grandparents were born on the island of Manhattan.’ Well, he damn well knew that three of his grandparents were immigrants,” Gayle smiled.

Kai especially wanted to know Bennett’s greatest discovery as an editor. “That is really difficult because he published so many,” Gayle replied. “But there is a story I will tell about James Joyce. Because that is the thing that Bennett and [his business partner] Donald Klopfer were most proud of doing as young men: fighting the court case that allowed *Ulysses* to be published legally.”

This was no easy feat. Between 1918 and 1920, two women editors from the literary magazine *The Little Review* serialized portions of *Ulysses*.

The U.S. Post Office considered the content to be “a work of obscenity,” which led to the seizure and burning of multiple issues of the magazine, the arrest of both women and an obscenity conviction. That court decision halted the publication of *Ulysses* in the United States for over a decade.

“But then in the late 1920s, things started opening up,” Gayle said. “*Ulysses* was published in 1922 in Paris. Copies were brought home in steamer trunks by rich Americans. Samuel Roth, who did a lot of pornography, pirated copies of *Ulysses* and sold them under the table. But Joyce was desperate for legitimacy. Joyce’s agents wanted him to go with William Morrow.”

Cerf was only just signing his first books for Random House. Eugene O’Neill was first, then he quickly signed Gertrude Stein. Then, Cerf went to Paris, to Sylvia Beach’s renowned Shakespeare & Co. bookstore—in 1922, Beach had published *Ulysses* in Paris—and the rest was history. In 1932, Ran-

dom House (i.e., Bennett Cerf) dared to publish *Ulysses*, and in 1933, he prevailed in *United States v. One Book Called Ulysses*, a landmark court case that trounced government censorship.

Many of the great names in literature began beating a path to Bennett’s door because, as Gayle recalled, “he worked at knowing the authors he published”—John O’Hara, William Faulkner, Ayn Rand, Dr. Seuss, Philip Roth, William Styron, and many more.

“He also had this TV career,” Gayle continued. [Editor’s note: For 16 years, from 1951 to 1967, Bennett Cerf appeared every week on the CBS panel game show *What’s My Line*.] “Bennett had marvelous instincts for people and writers. But he was regarded by many in the intellectual establishment as a buffoon, largely because of his television career, for which he was known by the vast majority of Americans.”

Sadly, perhaps, little of Cerf’s elan remains in publishing today. “There’s not that same feeling in the big houses,” Gayle sighed. “I mean it’s corporate. Bennett had his feet of clay. He did some shameful things, but he made Random House. And that was worth writing about.”

Yes, Gayle Feldman holds that her opus was a worthy venture, even when her years of research and authorship grew into decades of dedication, and despite the fact that, prior to publication, she was told to cut 500 pages from the manuscript. And yet, even after making these painful “edits,” *Nothing Random: Bennett Cerf and the Publishing House He Built* wound up at 1,072 published pages.

Gayle sent a first set of the galleys of *Nothing Random* to Bennett’s son Jonathan, then held her breath. “‘You got all the big things right,’ he said to me. ‘Go ahead.’” So, she did. And we are all blessed with the results.

*David A. Anelman is a past president of The Silurians, a former correspondent for The New York Times and CBS News, and creator of SubStack’s global “Anelman Unleashed.”*



Kai Bird’s Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of J. Robert Oppenheimer, *American Prometheus*, became the basis for the international blockbuster *Oppenheimer*, which took home seven Academy Awards in 2024, including Best Picture. As for *Nothing Random*, the title of Gayle Feldman’s book, it speaks to Bennett Cerf’s skill and savvy in creating the renowned publishing firm Random House, but also can be said to describe Gayle’s 23 years of research and authorship.

Photos by Arlene Schulman

# Neal Shapiro Will Never Give Up on Public Television (Nor Should We)

By David A. Anelman

Neal Shapiro runs a big slice of public television—what the American people believe is the most trusted institution in America. That’s right. Not Donald Trump and not MagaWorld. But America. And that’s what the soon-to-be President-Emeritus of public television suggested to our Silurians’ luncheon on February 18th has been his mission—preservation, even expansion, in the face of all odds.

“There is something about mission television,” Neal began, “trying to have a different experience, trying to engage [your audience] in their heads or in their hearts in some profoundly different way than who’s going to get kicked off the island or whatever commercial TV does.”

And if anyone should be able to understand that it’s Neal, who spent the previous chapter of his career running *NBC News*, leading top-rated news programs, including *Today*, *NBC Nightly News*, *Meet the Press* and *Dateline NBC*. And prior to NBC, Shapiro spent 13 years at *ABC News*.



Neal Shapiro sees hope for public television: “There’s a whole new generation of people who are watching us, and maybe not even on TV. The biggest single platform where people are watching content is YouTube.”

But no matter the shop, it still always boils down to money, if in a different sense or a newer, more proximate sense of urgency than ever before. “We’re the only Western democracy that doesn’t fund public media,” Neal continued. “There’s a long-standing tradition of why this is important, and what I

think public media really does is address market failure.” In his dialogue at the National Arts Club with Silurians President-Emerita Betsy Ashton, Neal detailed the efforts that WNET and, more broadly, public television are making to survive in the face of Donald Trump’s efforts to destroy them.

“We’re talking about \$1.85 per taxpayer—it’s not like it was a lot of money. And the money doesn’t just go to news, it goes to everything,” Neal continued. “It goes to arts and culture and history. And while there are lots of choices, I think there are some things that are distinctive to public media. Look at Ken Burns. Nobody else is going to give Ken 20 hours to talk about the American Revolution or jazz or buffalo or Teddy Roosevelt or whatever he wants to talk about, because Ken is a brilliant documentarian. But there is not a commercial way in which that can work.”

So why did Trump go after public TV? “The president and his troops have long wanted to stop funding public media because that plays very well with the base,” Neal said. “But if you look at who watches

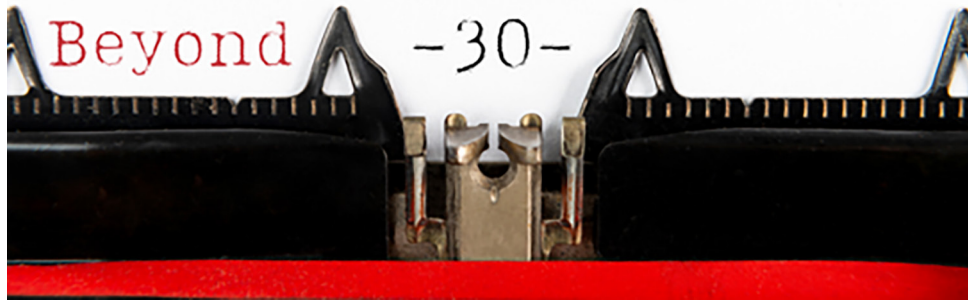
public media across the country, it’s about a third Republicans, a third Democrats and a third Independents. It’s kind of like the electorate. A lot of the shows we do—like *Nature* or kid shows—have no political aspect at all, and everybody watches them.”

“Moreover, there is a lot of love out there for public TV. We did a survey, 31 years in a row,” he smiled. “It says we are the most trusted institution in America.”

Betsy asked, “What happens now, with all the budget cuts, if stations begin going under?”

“We haven’t collapsed,” Neal continued. “That’s the good news. We are like a boxer. I’d say we’re staggering. We’ve been hit hard. We’re not down for the count. But there has been damage. Every station has had to make significant cutbacks. Shows are cancelled, or you’ll see less of them. There may be fewer episodes. New episodes of *Nature*, new episodes of *Great Performances*? We can’t afford to do them. Some shows like *American Masters* and *American Experience* are on hiatus and may never come

Continued on Page 8



This second print installment of “Beyond -30-” (the column that turns the time-honored journalistic end mark on its head) once again proves that reaching the end of your full-time career does not mean you’re “finished.”

In this issue, “Beyond -30-” takes something of a chronological look at what’s been happening in several members’ lives. You might be stunned to learn that, over the course of recent months, more than a few Silurians have taken to the stage, screen and television.

— FRAN CARPENTIER, EDITOR

On March 4, **Joyce Wadler** had a spin in the spotlight as one of six onstage speakers at Joe’s Pub in “The Oldster Variety Hour Presents.” The award-winning reporter/columnist described the event as a “Moth-like, storytelling evening.” The topic? “What I Did For Love.” With her signature wit (replete with sarcasm), Joyce delivered an unsparing



JOYCE WADLER

yet hilarious account of the motherly attributes, or lack thereof, of her one-of-a-kind *mameleh*, Milly Wadler, who would readily profess to anyone who’d listen that she didn’t care much for children. (Spoiler alert: Joyce came

to terms with her mom long ago, loved the woman to bits, and is not emotionally scarred.) So, what made Joyce take the bait to get up onstage and “share”? She explains, “I did the show because Sari Botton [EIC of the online magazine *Oldster*] asked if I’d like to be part of it, and I figured, ‘Why not?’ I’d done some speaking to breast-cancer groups decades ago, and I do the usual author talks any chance I get. But a thing with professional lighting and a guy somewhere in a sound booth? Never.” So, as this editor sees it, “Never” became “Let’s do this!” And you cannot get more Joyce Wadler than that.

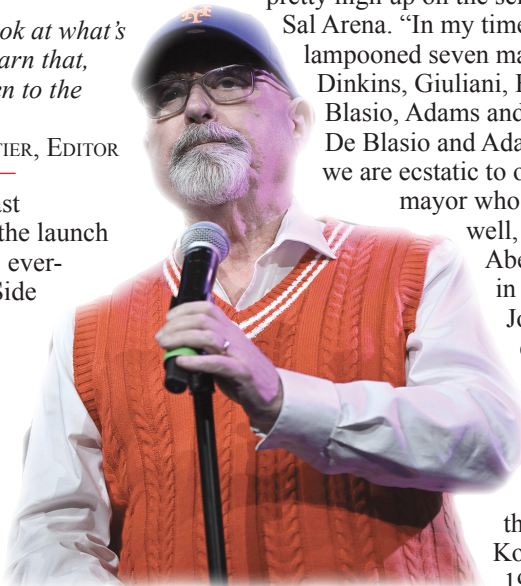
On March 22, **David Margolick**, author of *When Caesar Was King: How Sid Caesar Reinvented American Comedy*, discussed the legendary entertainer on *CBS Sunday Morning* with co-host Mo Rocca. The interview took place at Barney Greengrass, Sid’s favorite deli. As a tribute to Sid, when David’s



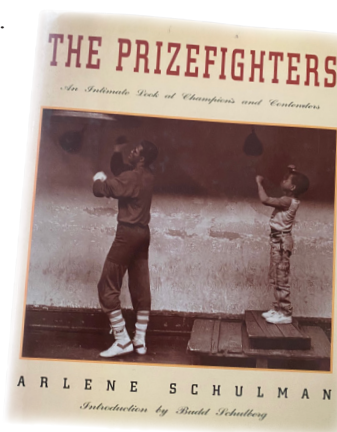
David Margolick and Mo Rocca chatted at Barney Greengrass for CBS Sunday Morning.

book was published last November, he hosted the launch party at the legendary, ever-bustling Upper West Side eatery.

On March 28 (and also March 27, if you count the dress rehearsal), **Sal Arena, Tony Guida** and **Rich Lamb** hit the stage at the Ziegfeld Ballroom, acting and singing—dancing too!—as cast members of *The Inner Circle*. (For the uninformed, *The Inner Circle* is a group of metro-area print and on-air reporters who every spring since 1923 have put on an annual musical parody that raises funds for journalism fellowships, public school newspapers and local charities. The lineup of every show is pretty much the same: the first act lampoons local politics, the second act tackles national shenanigans, and in the final number of the night—the number that everyone’s been waiting for—the mayor of the Big Apple performs a song-and-dance rebuttal.) This year’s *Inner Circle* was titled “Free-For-All”—a nod to Mayor Zohran Mamdani’s socialist leanings. Sal Arena sang and hoofed and even played a cheerleader. Tony Guida portrayed Nassau County Republican Bruce Blakeman. (“I was under duress,” Tony claims). Rich Lamb played two roles: 1st Deputy Mayor Dean Fuleihan and Micah Lasher, former aide to Jerry Nadler. In past shows, Lamb has portrayed Mayors Bloomberg and de Blasio, President Joe Biden, and once had a cameo as Saddam Hussein. “I have



Sal Arena as a cheerleader who sings.



been a member of the Inner Circle since 1985—that’s 41 years, which puts me pretty high up on the seniority list,” says Sal Arena. “In my time, we have lampooned seven mayors—Koch, Dinkins, Giuliani, Bloomberg, de Blasio, Adams and, now, Mamdani. De Blasio and Adams were a bust, so we are ecstatic to once again have a mayor who takes our frivolity, well, seriously. Or as Abe Beame told voters in his quest to succeed John Lindsay, ‘After eight years of charisma and four years of the clubhouse, why not competence?’ And that became the slogan that Ed Koch employed in his 1977 mayoral campaign against Beame. Of course, it was an attack against the previous administrations of both Lindsay and Beame.”

On March 29, **Arlene Schulman** was one of four women who spoke at the South Street Seaport Museum about “Gold Medals & Grit: Secrets and Lies of NYC Sports History.” But Arlene revealed neither secrets nor lies. Instead, she gave the audience the lowdown on what it was like being one of the very few women sports reporters, angling for great quotes and photographs while also navigating sexist athletes and challenging interview environs (read here the men’s locker room). To

accompany her remarks, Arlene screened an assortment of the compelling sports photos from the days when boxing was her beat. Those photos appear in her book *Prizefighters: An Intimate Look at Champions and Contenders*.

March was a banner month for Arlene Schulman. That’s also when Arlene was notified that she’d been named a Fulbright Scholar. In early 2027, she will use her Fulbright Grant to fund a trip to Greece, where she will research her mother’s Jewish-Greek ancestors, the Romanotes, for a documentary.

On May 18, ready to swap the show-biz glamour of *The Inner Circle* for more intellectual pursuits, **Tony Guida** moderated a Q&A with filmmaker Ric Burns that followed a preview screening of the latter’s two-part documentary *New York: The Future of Cities*. The event,



Tony Guida moderated a Q&A with filmmaker Ric Burns.



The poster for the *Ask E. Jean* documentary.

Film Festival in August 2025, finally got its due when it premiered in NYC at the IFC Center, followed by a May 29 opening in L.A. (Note: On January 21, E. Jean became a Silurian by virtue of being that month’s luncheon speaker.) Ivy Meeropol, the film’s director, opined that, for months and months, distributors were hesitant to get behind a movie that centered on high-profile defamation and sexual-assault lawsuits against Donald Trump.

Laura Bickford, the film’s producer (Graydon Carter is another), said in a press release, “I thought I knew E. Jean Carroll’s story from the headlines, but she is an unexpectedly hilarious hero in a rip-roaring life of ups and downs. We are all proud to bring her inspiring story and



Rich Lamb at the mic—but not for CBS News.

indomitable wit to the big screen.” We, her fellow Silurians, are proud too.

To revisit this column’s debut in the January 2025 issue, please visit [Silurians.org](http://Silurians.org). Our website has an extensive archive of past issues of *Silurian News*, as well as videos of our monthly luncheon speakers and awards events. It bears repeating: Visit [Silurians.org](http://Silurians.org)

Inner Circle photos by Anthony Behar

## Neal Shapiro Will Never Give Up on Public Television (Nor Should We)

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back, because these are expensive shows to do. That is something everybody will see and experience, because a lot of our programs take a year or two to produce, so you haven’t really seen what the impact is.”

To help shore up the accounts, Neal has tried every trick in the book, some carrying over from his years at the commercial networks. “We have a joint master control,” he explained. “When I started in public television, almost every station had their own master control—engineers looking at a wall of monitors, all maintaining their own towers and wildly inefficient. Now, we’ve combined these. Half the system is in Syracuse, and one person can monitor eight or nine stations at the same time. So, we’ve driven down

costs.” At the same time, public television needs to find its viewers and reach them.

“There’s a whole new generation of people who are watching us, and maybe not even on TV,” he said. “The biggest single platform where people are watching content is YouTube. Maybe 60 percent of our audience is 55 and older, because that’s who watches Channel 13. If I take that same program and put it on YouTube, it’s incredibly different—a much smaller part, much more like the general population.”

And that could translate into money, as Neal explained. “Maybe [a donation to public television] is not at \$65 a year. Maybe it’s a dollar or two dollars. But if 100 million

people gave us a dollar, that would be real money.” Public television also needs to reach people with content they’ll appreciate. “Like *Downton Abbey*, a show which was made and everybody passed on it. All the networks passed on it. And it didn’t have any American distribution. We got it for a lark, and it became the biggest hit in the history of PBS.”

As for the future? “I think there’ll still be people who appreciate great quality media,” Neal concluded, “and we have to make it easier for them to support it. But they will.”

David A. Andelman is a past president of *The Silurians*, former correspondent for *The New York Times* and *CBS News* and creator of *Substack’s “Andelman Unleashed.”*