

THE  
DANGEROUS  
LIFE

BY MICHAEL COLLINS

**F**EW OF the journalists gathered here tonight probably knew what dire straights our profession would be in when they dove into it years ago. Massive layoffs and buyouts, plunging salaries and now even outsourcing are plaguing outstanding reporting and threaten this most important cornerstone of our democracy.

The bottom line is battering our business. Many of us fear for our futures. But there is one line in the sand that we can't yield on whatever the challenge—journalistic excellence.

Too many of our colleagues worldwide have given their lives in the last year so that people can know the truth. This alone obligates us to redouble our efforts to not just resist the ill winds of change but to thrive and produce the best work of our lives.

That's why we're here tonight—to honor the best work of 2006 and recognize its significance to Southern California and beyond. That recognition can serve as the bar that journalists should strive for.

I have the distinct honor of serving as the chair of the Los Angeles Press Club Judging Subcommittee, my fourth year in this pivotal position. Naturally, we don't judge ourselves but commit to comprehensive and thoughtful analysis of our sister clubs' annual competition submissions. Reciprocal judging assures unbiased critiquing and the devotion that we spend to judging others has been repaid handsomely.

The organizations that judged us this year included the press clubs of New Orleans, Houston, Arizona, Florida, Denver, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Syracuse, Delaware, Alaska, the East Bay and the Colorado Press Women. Among the press clubs we judged were the Press Club of New Orleans as well as the press clubs of Syracuse, Omaha, New Orleans, and Houston.

Our judges this year included members of the Los Angeles Board of Directors including Jahan Hassan, Rory Johnston, Josh Kleinbaum, Eric Longabardi, Terence Lyons, Ezra Palmer, Anthea Raymond, Linda Renaud, Buster Sussman, Adam Wilkenfeld and Chris Woodyard. Other volunteers helped

the Press Club over the last year, people like Sebastian Ramirez, a soldier shot in Afghanistan who lost his son in action in Iraq. Ramirez is now a freelance photographer for the Simi Valley Acorn.

The last year has been one bloody and brutal one for journalists as the shocking assassination of our Pearl Award honoree Anna Politkovskaya bears sad testimony to. When the Russian journalist was gunned down by an assassin in October 2006, she became the third Novaya Gazeta staff member to be killed in six years says the Committee to Protect Journalists in a new report, "Anya's Paper."

CPJ has the grim distinction of reporting that 2006 was the bloodiest year for journalists in the organization's 26 years of collecting and analyzing the increasing murder and mayhem suffered by our colleagues. It isn't surprising that Iraq heads the list for the most dangerous place on the planet for reporters and their support staff. Last year saw 32 journalists killed in country including CBS News cameraman Paul Douglas along with soundman James Brolan. The men, along with CBS News reporter Kimberly Dozier, were embedded with the U.S. Army's 4th Infantry Division and reporting from outside their Humvee when a car packed with explosives detonated, killing the men as well as an Army Captain and wounding six other soldiers. Dozier, who lost so much blood that her pulse was gone, survived through transfusions, over 25 surgeries and literally thousands of stitches.

Since the war began to the beginning of this month, 104 journalists have been killed in Iraq, the majority of them murdered versus death in combat crossfire, along with 39 support personnel. Less than a month ago, two Iraqi journalists working for ABC News were abducted by gunmen and slain after being dragged from their car near one of the men's homes. Cameraman Alaa Uldeen Aziz, 33, and soundman Saif Laith Yusuf, were roundly praised for their bravery and dedication to journalism by the shaken

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Baghdad press corps who cite Iraqi journoas as the unsung heroes of the long war. 32 journalists were slain in the chaos of Iraq in 2006.

Two journalists were killed in Mexico last year including Bradley Will, 36, a reporter and independent documentary filmmaker for Indymedia.com. Will was shot while filming fighting between antigovernment activists and armed assailants and his revolting murder was captured on footage that shocked journalists around the world. Mexico now has the distinction of being the second most deadly country for the media with murder and intimidation the scourge of the land. Seven journalists have been murdered in Mexico since October. In late May, the severed head of a local official was dumped outside the offices of a newspaper in the Gulf state of Tabasco in what is seen as a threat to the paper, Tabasco Hoy. In January, Tabasco Hoy reporter Rodolfo Rincon disappeared and his whereabouts remain unknown.

Our profession is in danger, from corporate greed and from powers intent on silencing us and, in many places around the world, intent on killing us if we threaten the twin vice grips of money and might. We aren't going to let this stand. As journalists, we will not just continue to wage truth; we will redouble our efforts in the face of adversities that will test our faith and fortitude. And we will succeed as the winners among us will show us tonight.