

“At fifty chides his infamous delay”

(Edward Young, English poet – *Night Thoughts*, 1742-45)

By Michael Collins

Tonight, the Southern California Journalism Awards turns golden – we are fifty years old. We have grown up but what have we learned? How do we face the challenges that beset our beleaguered industry in a world whose course seems even more perilous than it was at the height of the Cold War in 1958?

Then we lived in a “duck and cover” country faced with Stalin’s successor, the bellicose Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev armed to the teeth with hydrogen bombs. 5,000 Marines landed in Beirut to prop up a pro-Western government. The nuclear-powered *USS Nautilus* was the first submarine to cross under the North Pole near the newly-admitted state of Alaska. Eisenhower was President and gas cost a quarter for a gallon. Corky’s and other bars were where we journalists networked. And television threatened to become the primary source of news much to the chagrin of print media.

Fifty years later, we are faced with a resurgent oil-rich Russian still awash in nukes that could fall into the hands of terrorists. We have over 135,000 troops propping up a pro-American regime in Iraq. The North Pole is melting, George W. Bush is President and gas heads north of \$4 a gallon. The web is where we journalists network. And the internet threatens to become the primary source of news much to the chagrin of the print, television and radio media.

At fifty, as hard as we toil, we still are mired in our “infamous delay.” But there’s a difference – the people in this room will not go quietly into the night of civilization as we know it. We won’t because there is no other choice but to sally forth bravely to create journalism that stands like a bright shining beacon on the summit of democracy.

That’s why we’re here tonight – to honor the best work of 2007 and recognize its significance to Southern California and beyond. That recognition of excellence defines the bar that journalists should strive for.

For the fifth year, I have the distinct honor of serving as the chair of the Los Angeles Press Club Judging Subcommittee. Naturally, we don’t adjudicate ourselves but commit to comprehensive, thoughtful analysis and judging of our sister clubs’ annual competitions. In turn, these clubs’ reciprocal judging assures unbiased critiquing of your entries.

The organizations that judged us this year included the press clubs of New Orleans, Houston, Milwaukee, Arizona, East Bay, Cleveland, Colorado, and Syracuse. We judged the press clubs of Kansas City, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Minneapolis, Houston and the East Bay.

Our judges this year included board and club members Jon Beaupre, Jane Engle, Will Lewis, Diana Ljungaeus, Fred Mamoun, Ezra Palmer, Anthea Raymond, Jill Stewart, Buster Sussman and Chris Woodyard. The group's efforts were particularly laudable this year.

We have much to reflect in this golden moment as the challenges that face our country and the world seem increasingly insurmountable. The English poet Young ends his poem *Night I* as the 50-year-old "Resolves; and re-resolves; then dies the same."

We don't have this option. Our planet is dying, the threat of nuclear holocaust remains and has increased, inequality reigns more so than ever, and our profession is threatened by rubes and rogues who value their perverse and pernicious rapacity more than their obligation to serve the public good.

Take this moment in time to reflect on your value to society and how your journalism benefits it. You need no more reason than to emulate and improve upon the excellent work lauded here tonight other than the fact that *you can* no matter what the future of this noble profession holds.