

Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
Magazine Division
Educator of the Year Award

David Abrahamson
Acceptance Speech
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Officers and members of the AEJ Magazine Division, esteemed colleagues, beloved students, ladies and gentleman,

A promise and a confession: First, I promise that my remarks this evening will be mercifully brief. And the confession: I probably ought to admit from the very start that I am not completely sure that I deserve this honor. I accept it, of course, and thank you from the bottom of my heart. But I confess to you that I wonder if I have truly earned it.

Perhaps part of this insecurity comes from the fact that, like many of our colleagues at most journalism schools, before coming to the academy I had a previous professional life as a practitioner, a working journalist.

Entering the academy later in life has its pluses and minuses, to be sure, but there are a number of implications which, it could be argued, border on the universal.

First, while it is probably true that latecomers do generally tend to over-idealize the academy, we may have a special appreciation of one of the terribly important and quite wonderful core truths about the Leafy Grove. Compared to the regular work-a-day commercial world, it is quite remarkable. The university is about ideas, rather than money and power.

Oh, is it not about money and power.

And it is hard to overstate how refreshing and, yes, inspiring, this fact is for those of us who come to the academy from previous lives in the commercial realm.

Second, it is possible that those coming to the teaching profession a little later in life many have a heightened awareness of just what a privilege it is to do this for a living. As a dear

friend once noted, one reason that teaching is unique is simply because it calls for what she terms a certain “generosity of spirit” on the part of the teacher. At heart, it is a giving profession. Wonder of wonders, you are not only permitted, but encouraged, to care about others.

And lastly, to be brief, as someone who has not taught for my entire lifetime, I must mention the truly pivotal, absolutely essential, place of role models in my own education -- my own teachers who I am sure that, without a flicker of conscious thought, I model myself on every single day in the classroom. It is not a particularly long list, but the qualities are perhaps timeless.

I recall Mrs. Humiston's kind humor in eight grade English. The late historian David Herbert Donald and his gentle questions from my junior year in college. The way that the late Neil Postman, in one of my doctoral classes, seemed to genuinely treasure the organic nature of class discussion. And my dissertation director, Paul R. Baker, who by word and deed led me to one of the great underlying truths about teaching. As Yeats so aptly said: "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."

Since we are the Magazine Division and there is an urgent, even existential, question facing us all, perhaps you will kindly permit me a moment more at this bully pulpit. I'd like to say just a word about the magazine form in the brave new digital world in which all of journalism is, at this moment, trying to find its place. We've all heard it said that long-form is dying, but I suspect there is ample evidence to suggest that is simply not true. As the web matures, it continues to demonstrate that wonderfully insightful observation by Victor Navasky, long-time editor of *The Nation*. He once said something that everyone in this room knows only too well: that “Magazines are an art form, not just a delivery system.”

And I would argue that the magazine form is finding its place in the brave new world. One need only to look at

- Longform.org
- ...or Byliner.com
- ...or Narrativemagazine.com, [quote]“dedicated to storytelling in the digital age”
- ...or Atavist.net
- ...or one of my favorites, “The Best Magazine Articles Ever” (which can be found at KK.org).

All demonstrate that truth so eloquently stated by Tim Holmes in *Inside the Magazine*: “Magazines are prime examples of a cultural resource. They are full of stories we tell about ourselves, which we accept as being ourselves.”

And so, to conclude, two final thoughts:

I am quite certain that there is a very bright future for magazines in the years ahead, and I’m happy to ensure that my students know that.

And I thank you for this kind and thoughtful award. In accepting it, I share the honor with my own teachers, my colleagues, and, of course, my students. And with your kind permission, I shall hope that they agree with you that I deserve it.

Thank you.