



## EDUCATOR'S COLUMN

### Former Student, Now National Radio Reporter, Covers Unforgettable Story

*By Maryann Lazarski, Communication Arts Faculty, Cardinal Stritch University*

It's June. That means another academic year has come to an end. It's a time when college grads are keeping their fingers crossed for jobs. So I can't help but think about some of my former students who have been fortunate enough to land those broadcasting jobs and are doing great things in those positions. In fact, I received an e-mail from one of those former students last month, asking to get together when he's back in town. I'm always happy to make room in my schedule to meet with former students. It's a time for me to smile and be proud of their accomplishments. It's a time for them to now share their passion with someone who talked a lot about that "p" word in the classroom.

Jeff Monosso is an award-winning reporter now living in New York City. He's a national correspondent for Fox News Radio, serving 800 affiliates nationwide with an estimated 20-million listeners per week. Prior to his move out east, Jeff worked at WISN and WTMJ/WKTI radio in Milwaukee and KTLK in Minneapolis. I remember when he was producing radio news stories in my class and finishing up his degree in communications at UW Milwaukee, while bartending, DJ-ing, and news anchoring. It took him 10 years to get that degree, but he did it in 2006.

Since then, he's covered some impressive stories...from Super Bowls to the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver to the Inauguration of Barack Obama. He's also reported on the Minneapolis bridge collapse, the earthquake in Haiti, and the recent Gulf oil spill.

I wanted to find out from Jeff what he's learned so far from his work in the radio news business and what advice he'd give to students. Aside from all the good writing tips and how to best use sound, something stood out to me that's worth sharing. It was his answer to the question, "What's been your most memorable story so far?" I'd rather have him tell the story.

"THE HAITI EARTHQUAKE is a story that I will never forget. I remember a colleague, who was already down there shortly after the quake, e-mailed me and told me to bring Vicks VapoRub saying, 'Buy up the store before you leave.' I didn't know what to expect. I saw a doctor and got several shots, malaria pills, etc., and then went shopping for supplies. My adrenalin was flowing before I even left New York.

I flew into the Dominican Republic first because the airport in Haiti had been shut down to commercial traffic. I spent the night in Santo Domingo and then met up with my colleague. We rented a van and loaded it up with food, water and our gear and hired a driver.

We drove eight hours to the Haitian border where we were to meet up with a Haitian congressman and his armed guards who would help us cross into Haiti and keep us safe as we drove to Port-au-Prince. Fox had two bases of operation in Haiti. One was at the airport, and the other was at the Ibo Lele Hotel, on a mountainside overlooking Portau- Prince. That is where I stayed. It was believed to be on solid bedrock and safe.

We had a safe house at the Dominican Republic embassy in Port-au-Prince. We make practice runs by car in getting there, and the general of the Dominican Republic army gave us his word that should something happen, he'd chopper us out of Haiti.

It was policy to never leave base without armed guards, and before every trip out, we'd be briefed on possible security threats and go through scenarios where our security guards might be killed, and we might have to shoot our way out of a situation. I was always aware of where the guns and more rounds of ammunition were before I went out.

I remember driving down into the heart of the city for the first time. A locally hired driver was behind the wheel. Also in the van, a camera man, a TV reporter, a print journalist, at least one-armed guard, and me. During the drive no one said a word. We all just looked, listened, and processed what we were seeing. The death and destruction was overwhelming. I also remember wondering when I'd smell it...death, and then I remember thinking to myself "Wow, there it is". It's true what they say about the smell of rotting human flesh. You'll never forget it.

I told the stories of people who lost everything they had, like two young men, neighbors, who lost their homes and entire families, but yet these men were grateful for being alive.

The story of parents forced to watch doctors amputate their children's arms and legs, using only vodka and rusty hacksaws.

The story of the grocery store that collapsed and how, while rescue crews from Florida searched for the living, hundreds of Haitians lined up behind barricades and security guards waiting for all of us to leave so they could climb in and loot, looking for food, water, and supplies.

We made a difference, my colleagues and I, in covering an orphanage in Port-au-Prince where over 100 children and babies were left with nowhere to live and very little food or water. Their situation was dire. Many of the children were to be adopted by Americans, but their paperwork was destroyed. This story hit me the hardest, watching volunteers who lost everything they had, taking the time to come and sing songs and play with the children, just to keep the children's minds off of being hungry and thirsty. We hammered their story hard and got the Red Cross to bring supplies. We even got the State Department to finally cut through bureaucratic red tape to get the children, who were coming to America anyway, evacuated out of Haiti. On the day I left Haiti, a 6.1 earthquake shook me out of bed. I went from sound sleep to 60 mph out of where I was sleeping in about 1.5 seconds. Turns out the ground the hotel was on wasn't solid after all. That scared me.

A couple of colleagues and I made it to the airport and essentially were on our own once we were dropped off. Our American press credentials helped get us in, and we eventually boarded an evac flight bound for somewhere in the United States. We didn't find out until we landed that we flew to Sanford, Fla."

Thanks, Jeff, for sharing. Thanks for doing what you do...and doing it well. Wisconsin can be proud of the broadcast journalist you've become. I know I am.