

Kondor Ponders:

TV Or Not TV?

By Mike Kondor

The best thing I can say about television news reporting is that it is considered by some to be more glamorous and prestigious than the average nine-to-five job.

But when "television people" sit around and talk, the inevitable question comes up: "Is it really worth it?" The usual answer is: "I still haven't decided."

I had an opportunity to find out if it was "worth it" as I progressed through my internship at WHTM-TV, Channel 27 in Harrisburg.

My typical day at the station began with "rounds calls," which are phone calls to state police barracks and police/fire dispatchers in Dauphin and surrounding counties. I placed the calls to

determine if anything newsworthy had occurred overnight.

I learned to coax information out of obstinate police officials, to scribble information down while holding a phone, and to hear a muffled voice while holding a phone, and to hear a muffled voice while listening to a police scanner, a radio, and several live conversations going on simultaneously in the background.

Once I compiled all the pertinent information, I had an opportunity to write some of the stories for the 8:25 a.m. newscast.

Another duty in preparation for the newscast was the editing of videotapes from the previous day's 11 p.m. newscast. I learned to edit a 100-second tape to 40 or 50 seconds, without losing the

gist of the report. At Channel 27, if you can't operate the videotape editors, you aren't worth a plugged nickel to the station.

In the studio, I set up the camera and monitor and I operated the teleprompter during the newscast. Occasionally, I had to give the time cues to the anchorman as he proceeded through his report.

After the newscast, we prepared for the "News-briefs" (two one-minute reports taped right in the newsroom). I learned to pretend that I was actually doing something while sitting in the background during the anchorman's report.

Once the newsbriefs were taped, the tape had to be taken to the editing room to have the standard ten-second introduction and five-second close added to each "brief." The final product had to be exactly one minute long.

The real fun, however, began when it was time to "go out on a story" with one of the photographers and a reporter. You name it, we covered it. From events as dull as a legislative committee meeting to events as frenzied as George Bush's whirlwind tour of downtown Lancaster, we were there.

I suppose that I learned the most while "out on assignment." I learned that you have only one chance to get the "shot" you want -- if you miss it, it's gone forever. You have to anticipate what your subject is going to say and what he is going to do. You have to imagine how the final story is going to be told. You have to have visual material that will match the words that the reporter is going to use to describe the event. The absence of that visual material will ruin the reporter's story, no matter how well it is told.

On the other hand, I learned that the reporter should have at least some idea of how the story is going to be told "going in," so that the photographer doesn't end up taping the entire event word for word -- a practice that wastes tapes and battery power.

In other words, the reporter and photographer have to work together. Each must be aware of what the other is doing.

I observed that, in comparison with a television reporter, a radio or newspaper

reporter has it easy. While a newspaper reporter has only a pad and pencil to carry around, and a radio reporter has, at most, a small tape recorder, a television reporter has to be accompanied by a photographer and 75 to 100 pounds of electronic equipment valued at over \$45 thousand.

And what's more, if just one tiny little part of all that equipment is missing or malfunctioning, chances are that the reporter will lose the story.

Another important fact one learns about television reporting is that a television camera isn't immediately "ready to go." It requires one to ten minutes of set-up time, depending on the nature and location of the event.

Take a committee meeting or a hearing, for example. While the newspaper reporter has only to open his pad and pull out his pencil, the television crew has to find a location in the room to get a good shot; set up and level a tripod for the camera; place the camera on the tripod; connect the camera to the videotape recording unit; connect the camera to the power supply (either battery or AC); set up lights; "white balance" the camera (the process of focusing on a white piece of paper to adjust the color balance of the camera); record some "color bars" on the tape (an in-camera process necessary for an unknown reason); and finally, find the person of interest, focus on him, and begin taping.

And that's the sequence for just one event. When you consider that you may have three or four events like that in separate locations all over town, you can start to appreciate the hassles of television news.

I wasn't surprised, then, when I observed throughout my travels that many television reporters are chain-smokers, sufferers of chronic stomach disorders, or both.

One wonders a little, though, when he realizes that the average salary for this tedious, high-pressure, nerve-racking job is usually less than \$12 thousand a year.

While I admit that I had fun on my internship, I still haven't decided at this point.

Is it really worth it?



Student Intern Mike Kondor (bottom right -- crouching) on assignment with TV-WHTM, Channel 27

Buying a camera

Campus Digest News Service

The photography boom is upon us. Amateur photographers abound and the medium has gained new acceptance as a serious art form. And as interest in photography has increased, so has the number of cameras and options available for consumer purchases. There are so many different features at different costs that beginning photography enthusiasts could get lost.

The first consideration is one of convenience. If you are the type who just wants an occasional snapshot of some family event, then chances are the instamatic camera with rotating flash cubes is the one for you. Or perhaps the kind of camera that pops a finished picture out in just a few minutes is more to your liking. Although these products are the ultimate in convenience, they may take a lot of the fun out of learning about photographic techniques. In addition, they are unnecessarily expensive and can present problems if you want duplicate photos. A simple box camera is certainly sufficient to provide weekend shutterbugs with all the equipment they need to cover a family outing, but if you want the challenge and excitement that the art of photography has to offer, you will probably have to spring for more expensive, complicated gear.

A 35mm camera is a good choice for the beginning photographer. It is relatively inexpensive to buy this type of film, is easy to enlarge, and can present opportunities for huge savings on film at a later date (by buying in bulk).

The consumer should look for a camera that takes interchangeable lenses, such as the wide angle and telephoto lenses, in addition to the

standard lens. Of course, you don't have to buy all of the lenses at once and can add them to your collection as your expertise increases. Also, look for a camera with a shutter speed of from between 1-250th and one-tenth of a second. There are several cameras on the market now with a much wider range of shutter speeds, but such options are of very little use to you until you are nearly a professional photographer and can fully benefit.

Perhaps the biggest bargain to keep in mind is the value of the used camera. Americans, in particular, tend to favor products that are new, even flashy, over something that is old, but in photography, that can lead to wasted money. As cameras have improved so dramatically over the last decade, the prices for fine used cameras have dropped considerably. Secondhand stores, flea markets and want ads are good places to look for such bargains. If you have a friend more knowledgeable than yourself, ask for advice before buying. Keep in mind that the most valuable part of the camera is usually the lens, and if you have any doubts about its condition, it is very simple to have a reliable photo shop examine it.

Finally, you should try to keep your investment low until you are certain that you are serious about photography. The equipment can be extremely expensive, and in the hands of a rank amateur, it can be completely wasted. Careful shopping can usually result in a good, solid, functional camera with all the necessary features to allow you to sharpen and hone your skills.

