

Elliott Bell Award Acceptance Speech  
by Diana B. Henriques  
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Thank you, Glenn. This is a wonderful honor and I am immensely grateful to the association and its officers.

I owe a huge debt, too, to all the fine journalists who have taught me and challenged me over the years — especially to you, Glenn, my best editor ever, and to my friend Floyd Norris, who has been my personal MBA program ever since we first met at Barron's.

My greatest debt, of course, is to my husband Larry, who somehow managed to keep on loving me even after seeing me on deadline. Thanks for that, and for so much more.

I know it's traditional on occasions like this to look backward and share some of the war stories that make this job so darned much fun. But if you'll bear with me for a very short moment, I'm going to look forward instead, and share something that worries me about the ink-free future we're hurtling into.

I'm not among those who think some golden age will end when newspapers migrate fully and finally onto the Web. It will be a white-knuckled ride to get there, but I think we're going to make it more or less intact. However, while I'm pretty sure the press will flourish on the Internet, I'm less certain that freedom of the press will do so.

Lots of things are easier on the Internet. Unfortunately, censorship is one of them.

Hackers nearly shut down Estonia just last month, apparently because they didn't like something its government did. They could just as easily decide, someday in the future, that they don't like something one of us reports on our news site. But even more worrisome is the official censorship: The Chinese government routinely blocks access to certain Internet locations. Could some future regime try to do that here — for the sake of national security, perhaps?

You instinctively answered, "Of course not." I did, too. But maybe that's because we're assuming the continued existence of some whistle-blowing newspapers. Newspapers may be fatally old-fashioned, but they are still the only medium that delivers the news to the public without any government regulation at all.

Magazines? Ask 'em about postal rates. TV and radio? Licensed outright. And the gloriously free Internet? It's accessible only through some regulated portal, like your obliging local phone company. But thanks to the First

Amendment and a long line of “old media” court cases, it’s pretty hard to shut down a newspaper, short of putting a ring of tanks around it — which might cause a bit of a stir here in America, even today.

A.J. Liebling used to say, “Freedom of the press belongs to the man who owns one.” But what happens when nobody owns one anymore?

Perhaps some patriotic hackers would band together to protect us from electronic vandalism and censorship. But to preserve our future freedom, maybe we need to start thinking and talking and lobbying about it now, while the presses are still running.

Thanks for listening — and again, thank you so much for this wonderful honor.