



# **BATBOY**

## **THE MUSICAL**

**story and book by**  
**Keythe Farley and Brian Flemming**  
**music and lyrics by**

**Laurence O'Keefe**

***Directed by Shawn Sturnick***  
***Musical Direction by Michelle Walters***  
***Vocal Direction by Joe Domencic***  
***Choreography by Stefan Zubal***  
***Set Design by Karen Glass***  
***Costume Design by Susan O'Neill***  
***Lighting Design by Deborra Bergmark-Peelor***  
***Sound Design by Todd Leighty***

### ***Official Seton Hill University Study Guide***

***Compiled by Denise Pullen, Associate Professor of Theatre***  
***With contributions from Regina Tvaruzek, Shawn Sturnick, Dr. Michael Arnzen and***  
***Dr. Dennis Jerz***

***Edited by Denise Pullen and Dr. Kellee Van Aken***  
***Prepared for the Seton Hill University Theatre and Dance Program***  
***in conjunction with this production:***  
***FEBRUARY 24 - MARCH 3, 2012***

***This study guide has been prepared for teachers and other patrons who attend the Seton Hill University Theatre and Dance Program production of BAT BOY: THE MUSICAL which plays February 24 through March 3, 2012 at the William Granger Ryan Theatre, 100 Harrison Avenue, Greensburg, PA.***

***Tickets are available from the Seton Hill University Theatre and Dance Box Office at 724-552-2929 or setonhilltheatre.com.***

***For information concerning this production and future Seton Hill University Theatre and Dance Program events and productions, please contact Box Office or Dr. Kellee Van Aken, Interim Director of the Seton Hill University Theatre and Dance Program at 724/552-2934 or vanaken@setonhill.edu.***

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## *A Message on Tolerance from Keythe Farley*

*“Bat Boy” is a work of art with dark themes, but it is no more about murder and incest than Oedipus is. The play is, however, about tolerance and the way that the intolerant must seek a scapegoat that embodies their repressed humanity and destroy that scapegoat. In our story, Bat Boy is the perfect scapegoat for the people of Hope Falls, and, in the end, those people learn a lesson about intolerance only after they have destroyed their town, their children and their livelihoods. Repression, we discover, is the foundation of cruelty and leads ultimately to disintegration and destruction. “Bat Boy” is not a trivial, titillating play about people who engage in deviant behavior. It is a play about tolerance and the destructive nature of repression in the personal and civic arenas. This is the kernel of truth at the heart of the play, and, I believe, at the*

*heart of this controversy.*

*What a great opportunity to teach the values of integration,  
compassion and tolerance -- not to mention grace under pressure.*

**KEYTHE FARLEY**

*Studio City*

**(excerpt from a letter to the students of LaCanada High School Drama Department, dated  
May 18, 2005)**

## **Hit Musical 'Bat Boy,' a Strange Beast, Seemed Unlikely to Fly**

**Theater: The show, playing to raves off-Broadway, began as a low-budget production by the Actors' Gang in Hollywood and two novice playwrights.**

April 21, 2001

[LAURIE PIKE | SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Move over, Hedwig. There's a new freak storming off-Broadway. Bat Boy, the bloodsucking half-bat/half-human, flew from the pages of the Weekly World News tabloid to the 499-seat Union Square Theatre in downtown New York last month in "Bat Boy: The Musical."

Though the title character comes from a cave in West Virginia, "Bat Boy: The Musical" was born and bred in Los Angeles. The comic rock musical originated at the Actors' Gang in Hollywood, and, despite the common perception that L.A. plays don't, well, play in New York, "Bat Boy: The Musical" has racked up raves from the mainstream New York Post ("an instant classic") to the highbrow New Yorker ("smart, playful, and funny"). On April 3, it earned four Lucille Lortel Award nominations, the off-Broadway equivalent of the Tony Awards.

"Bat Boy" is the second Actors' Gang show to mount a commercial production in New York. "I loved it," says Tim Robbins, who founded the Actors' Gang in 1982 and put in his two cents on the New York production by giving notes after previews. "The music was so good and the approach was so fresh. I love the idea of doing a real-life interpretation of a totally ridiculous newspaper story."

The story of the musical's inception and success is almost as improbable as that of its central character. Its playwrights were novices, its first production struggled with a paltry \$12,000 budget, and yet "Bat Boy" went on to win so many grants and awards that it attracted some of the biggest off-Broadway producers. The authors, who claim to dislike musicals, are now being credited with helping to reinvigorate the genre--all while making fun of it.

The idea for the production started over a campfire on a film set in the Southern California desert. Keythe Farley, 36, an Actors' Gang member, was starring in "Hang Your Dog in the Wind," a low-budget independent film directed by Brian Flemming, 34. Farley brought a copy of the Weekly World News to the set, and, after wrapping for the day, the cast and crew sat around the campfire and laughed about the story of a changeling "discovered" in a cave. Over the next year or so, Farley, Flemming and other "Hang Your Dog" personnel would snap up any issue of the Weekly World News that featured the crazed beast ("Bat Boy Escapes!"), and they would make up songs about him at parties.

What they didn't know was that Bat Boy was developing a cult following elsewhere, particularly among other Gen-Xers like themselves. Weekly World News sales increased every time Bat Boy's bald and fanged face appeared on the cover of the tabloid. Farley and Flemming, sensing potential in this ugly little thing that bewitched them, hatched a plan to make it more than a running joke. "We decided this creature must sing," says Farley, who wrote a letter on Actors' Gang stationery to the tabloid, requesting permission to create a musical around him. To his surprise, he got a swift "yes" and a great option price: \$1.

Farley and Flemming, who had previously collaborated on scripts for cable television and the Independent Spirit Awards show, set to writing a tragicomic musical of a freak of nature. But they didn't want the show to be all kitsch. They consulted biblical stories, Greek mythology and New Age philosophies in their creation of a scapegoat who just wants to be loved.

"We used Aristotle's 'Poetics' as a handbook and tried to construct a story that had the power of a universal myth," Flemming says. "That way we could let our comedic instincts run amok, and stage all sorts of interspecies sex orgies and other silliness and be confident it was all grounded in a plot worth paying attention to."

The play opens with Bat Boy biting some pot-smoking spelunkers who invade his cave. The injured kids bring their strange find to the sheriff of Hope Falls, W.Va. He, in turn, palms the rabid animal off on the town veterinarian, Dr. Parker. It is assumed that Parker will destroy the creature in the best interests of the town. Instead, the vet, his wife and daughter undertake the education of Bat Boy, and, surprisingly, the little thing takes quite well to everything from tea service to locution lessons. Still, the town is torn over whether to allow the bloodsucker to live as a human--especially after he falls in love with Shelley, the Parkers' daughter.

All of this happens in production numbers that evoke Disney bombast warped through "South Park" minds, and to the tune of rock, hip-hop and show-tune music with witty lyrics by Laurence O'Keefe, 31, who also wrote the music for "The Mice," one of three short musicals in the upcoming production of "3hree" at the Ahmanson Theatre.

<http://articles.latimes.com/2001/apr/21/>

entertainment/ca-53668

## *The Creators:*

### **Keythe Farley (book)**

Keythe Farley is the recipient of the Richard Rodgers, Lucille Lortel and Outer Critic's Circle Awards for BAT BOY: THE MUSICAL which he co-wrote. Keythe directed the World premiere production of BAT BOY in Los Angeles.

Keythe is an animation voice director with credits that include the hugely popular RUGRATS cartoons, and video game titles such as TRANSFORMERS, GOD OF WAR (1, 2 and PSP), LAIR and SYPHON FILTER: LOGAN'S SHADOW. On stage, Keythe recently directed the World Premiere of EVEL KENIEVEL: THE ROCK OPERA at Bootleg Theatre in Los Angeles ([www.ekrockopera.com](http://www.ekrockopera.com)).

As an actor, Keythe recently appeared in the title role of GULLIVER'S TRAVELS at the Actors' Gang theatre in Los Angeles. Keythe regularly appears as O'Brian in the touring production of Gene Michael Sullivan's adaptation of George Orwell's 1984, directed by Tim Robbins. 1984 has toured the US, Greece, Australia and China. Keythe also appeared as Old Kuno in THE BLACK RIDER at the Ahmanson Theatre, and has worked with the Circle X and Evidence Room theatre companies as well. Keythe has appeared in the HBO movie "...And the Band Played On" and on television series including: "Star Trek Voyager," "Full House," and "Beverly Hills 90210."

<http://www.linkedin.com/pub/keythe-farley/4/593/31b>

## Brian Flemming (book)

Flemming was born and raised in the San Fernando Valley and studied English at the University of California, Irvine. He worked as a script reader for New Line Cinema while making his first feature film, "Hang Your Dog in the Wind."

Flemming's next major project was the stage musical, *Bat Boy: The Musical*, based on a story about a half-bat half-boy in the outrageous tabloid Weekly World News. Flemming co-wrote *Bat Boy* with Keythe Farley and Laurence O'Keefe. The musical had humble origins in a small Los Angeles theater called the Actors' Gang in 1997, but it raised eyebrows when it garnered *L.A. Weekly's* "Musical of the Year," four Ovation Award nominations and six Drama-Logue Awards.

*Bat Boy: The Musical* made its way to Off-Broadway in March 2001.

Flemming's profile as an indie film director took a huge leap with his second feature film, a faux documentary about the assassination of Bill Gates called *Nothing So Strange* (2002). Flemming debuted the film at the 2002 Slamdance Film Festival, where it caused a sensation. Industry bible *Variety* immediately called it "a crackling good movie" that "may be the ideal prototype film for the digital age." *Nothing So Strange* (2002) made history on October 23, 2003, when the film had its simultaneous debut in theaters and as an internet download, becoming the first film ever to be commercially available in all countries at the same moment.

Flemming is an activist on copyright issues. He has released *Nothing So Strange* (2002) as an "open source" project, which means all of the raw footage that makes up the film is released without copyright restrictions, so that others can make their own projects from it without Flemming's permission.

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0281830/bio>

## Laurence O'Keefe (music and lyrics)

Since winning a 2001 Larson Award, LAURENCE O'KEEFE has had more than sixty productions of *Bat Boy*:

*The Musical* produced nationwide. Larry wrote music and lyrics for *Bat Boy*, which has travelled to England and the West End. He also won the 2001 ASCAP Richard Rodgers New Horizon Award for his music and lyrics. With *Fool Moon* clown David Shiner, Larry is writing music and lyrics and collaborating on book for *Drop Everything*, a new clown show/musical which will be workshopped at ACT in Seattle. David and Larry have performed parts of *Drop Everything* at the Tollwood Arts Festival in Munich and at the Lisbon Comedy Festival. Larry has written songs for *The Cat in the Hat*, *The Daily Show*, and other movies and television. But his favorite gig is his ongoing collaboration with the brilliant lyricist/bookwriter Nell Benjamin, with whom he has written *Sarah, Plain And Tall*, *The Mice*, *Cam Jansen And The Curse Of The Emerald Elephant*, and many miscellaneous pieces, including the notorious *Sensitive Song*, which was nominated for a MAC Award but was deemed "too filthy." Larry has been performing his songs in New York, Boston and elsewhere, headlining at the Duplex and at the King Kong Room at The Supper Club with the inappropriately titled Larry's Luau Lounge. In February 2004 he conducted the Harvard University Pops Orchestra in an evening of his songs, including the world premiere of his short opera *The Magic Futon*.

[http://americantheatre.org/biography/detail/laurence\\_okeefe](http://americantheatre.org/biography/detail/laurence_okeefe)

## **Shawn Sturnick (Guest Director for this production)**

*Shawn is delighted to be back on the Hill directing Bat Boy.*

*He is a Seton Hill alumnus himself, and boasts being one of SHU's first male graduates. He's also an expatriate, living and working in Ireland. Credits include performing in the hit show Blue Man Group, writing for the Irish soap opera Fair City, and directing his own original musical Here Comes Love. He is grateful to be working with such professional and talented students and faculty.*

### *Excerpts from an interview with Shawn Sturnick*

*Regina Tvaruzek*

**Regina:** *Can you tell us a bit about your process as a director? Where do you begin and how do you get to the outcome you envision?*

**Shawn:** I had known of *Bat Boy*, but I had never seen it. So the first thing I did was get the recording and listen to it over and over and over again. On the treadmill, or wherever. And I began directing it in my head from what I was hearing. I was writing the story that I imagined connected all the songs. Only then did I go to the script and see how it had already been done. In this way, my ideas, my vision come first and ensure a more confident handling of the material.

**Regina:** *How would you describe this show? What is it about on the surface, and what is it "really" about?*

**Shawn:** It's about *Bat Boy's* desire to be accepted. It's about his yearning to be human and his

discovery of his humanness, love, and ultimately his destruction *because* of that discovery. And what is it really about? It's a musical. It's really about having a good time! Going to the theater and having a good time.

**Regina:** *What themes are most prominent in the script?*

**Shawn:** Bat Boy is an outsider who wants to be accepted and, sadly enough, he's willing to change who he is to achieve that. But it doesn't work. Changing who he is destroys him. So there's a message about being true to yourself. And there's a contrast between being an animal and being human. The townsfolk reject Bat Boy for being an animal, but we see that he is much more human and much kinder than the townsfolk themselves. They're more animalistic, more primal, more violent, more intent on blood-lust and revenge than he is. At least, at first.

**Regina:** *How have you helped your cast understand how to handle the substance of the show?*

On the first day of rehearsal, I said, "This is a musical. And ideally, this is going to be a lot of fun and people are going to enjoy themselves. But what I want you, the actors, to do, is to treat it deadly seriously. There's a lot of funny stuff in it, but ultimately, it's a tragedy. Bat Boy's choices destroy him." So I asked them to approach it that way, and let me take care of the entertainment. That's what will get the themes across and the story told the way I think it needs to be told. And if it's a little more serious than you might expect a musical to be, then I'm perfectly OK with that.

**Regina:** *What character do you relate to the most? Who do you think the audience relates to most?*

**Shawn:** When I first listened to the show, it was Meredith. There's a song called "Home for You" and when I was listening to it, it occurred to me that it was during this song that she realizes who Bat Boy is and that she's been given a chance to redeem a bad choice from her past. That's a powerful moment for me.

**Shawn:** Who will other people relate to? Bat Boy's struggle to belong will resonate with some. Meredith's desire for redemption will resonate with others. As will Parker's desperate unrequited love for his wife. And Shelly's search for love and journey to independence. People will find what they want to find because of who they are. It's Bat Boy's story, but every character has an identifiable journey.

**Regina:** *What message do you want your audience to walk out of the theatre with?*

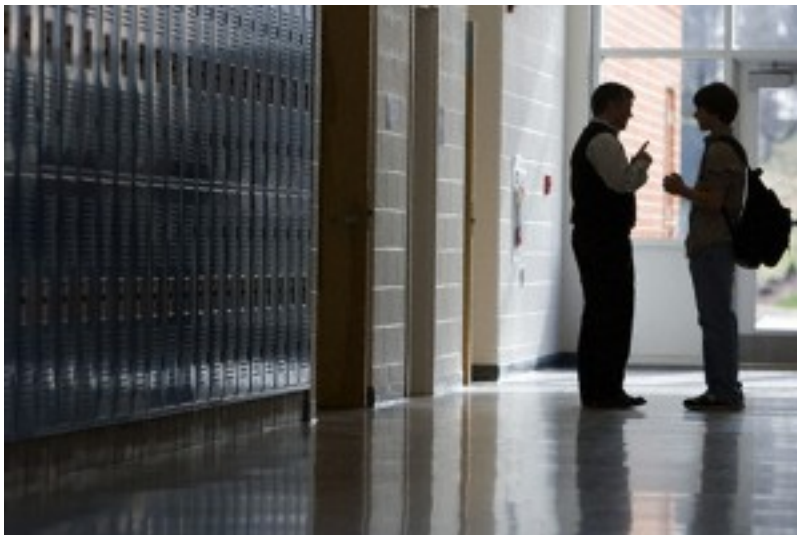
**Shawn:** If people walk out of the theatre thinking "It's not nice to be mean to someone because they're different," that's good. If they walk out thinking "Oh, you know, maybe I should have told the truth early on, before all this bad stuff happened," that's nice, too. But if people walk out thinking "That was awesome! What a great story! I really enjoyed that!" That's absolutely fine. Musicals are first and foremost entertainment. That's why we love them.

**Regina:** *Do you believe there really is a Bat Boy out there somewhere?*

**Shawn:** There's a Bat Boy in each and every one of us. If you feel like you want to belong, then you've got a little bit of Bat Boy in you.

## **Pennsylvania Schools Stand Up to Bullying**

December 12, 2011 *By Kevin Hart*



If educators could wave a magic wand and solve one problem affecting American schools, bullying would be high on the list. Teachers, support professionals and administrators are acutely aware that bullying can take a devastating emotional and academic toll on students – in fact, an estimated 160,000 students miss school each day because they fear being bullied.

While Pennsylvania’s educators may not have magic wands, a new study shows that through hard work and improved communication, they are helping to put a dent in bullying in the Keystone State.

According to “[Bullying Prevention: A Statewide Collaborative That Works](#),” a report issued by the not-for-profit Highmark Foundation, bullying prevention programs that have been implemented across the state since 2006 are yielding positive results for students.

The foundation offered grants for hundreds of Pennsylvania schools and more than 17,000 educators to participate in the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. Olweus is an evidence-based bullying prevention model that has been implemented in several countries and focuses on a

combination of in-school interventions and parental and community engagement. “We all realize that bullying is an issue that extends well beyond the wall of schools,” said Lynn Cromley, director of the Center for Safe Schools, Pennsylvania.

Schools that elected to participate in the bullying prevention program received intensive training for teachers, administrators and support professionals. They learned not only how to handle incidences of bullying, but how to create a more positive school culture where bullying would be less likely to flourish.

And, according to the report, the results have been encouraging. The Highmark research found that only three or more months after implementing the Olweus program, bullying decreased by 14 percent among elementary students and 25 percent among high school students. After six or more months of implementation, 14 percent of middle school students said that they would try to help another student who was bullied.

Of the Pennsylvania teachers who participated in the program, 90 percent said that after the training, they were very clear or fairly clear on how to respond to bullying. Further, students’ perceptions of how their teachers responded to bullying improved.

Professional development focused on bullying prevention has become critical in schools, because bullies have more tools at their disposal than ever before. The rise of texting and social media allows bullies to torment their victims with push-button ease – and often out of the sight of educators.

But by engaging all stakeholders, including educators, support professionals, kids, parents and community members, schools can go a long way toward building bully-free cultures. “We do not have to accept a school climate where bullying abounds,” said Yvonne Cook, president of the Highmark Foundation.

## **Other agencies and groups that promote and teach tolerance:**

**Bullying Prevention \_A Statewide Collaborative That Works.pdf**

**<http://olweus.org/public/bullying.page> (OLWEUS PREVENTION PROGRAM)**

**<http://www.persadcenter.org/>**

**<http://www.safeschools.info/bullying-prevention>**

**<http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>**

**[http://www.ndsu.edu/safezone/safe\\_zone\\_training\\_manual/](http://www.ndsu.edu/safezone/safe_zone_training_manual/)**

## **ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES: TALKING TOLERANCE/ TAKING ACTION**

### ***Discuss with your group:***

**When we see bullying or witness injustice, is it our responsibility to step in?**

**How can we do this safely?**

**Why don't we?**

**What is a group of individuals we do not normally include in "victims," and how can we be more aware and inclusive?**

**How can we make the oppressed part of the solution? Take a situation you are likely to encounter in school, or in a social situation, and formulate ideas on defending or helping a person we in a situation of intolerance, harassment, or bullying.**

**Do I participate in bullying on any level?**

**Is cyber-bullying a real threat? Is it preventable? How much regulation should be placed on personal abuses in social networking and other online bullying?**

**Investigate and invite groups to speak on these topics.**

**Open a dialogue with an under-represented group to discover not how they are different, but what they have in common. How can you better include them in events and activities in your community?**

**Create and present plays, poetry, dance or music exposing these issues.**



## **Evolution Makes A Bat Via Just One Gene Mutation**

**Biology Thursday, November 11, 2004 . This is a SciScoop post by Ricky James**

We knew of his discovery from a shocking 2001 front-page story in that giant of American investigative journalism, Weekly World News....we knew of his musical rise to the stardom he enjoys today...but we had no idea how the American-pop-legend Bat Boy actually came to be...UNTIL NOW!!!

A CHANGE to a single gene allowed bats to grow wings and take to the air, a development that may explain why bats appeared so suddenly in the fossil record some 50 million years ago. Bats have been an evolutionary enigma. That's because the oldest fossil bats look remarkably like modern ones, each having wings formed from membranes stretched between long fingers, and ear structures designed for echolocation. No fossils of an animal intermediate between bats and their non-flying mammal ancestors have been found.

Now Karen Sears, at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Denver, has discovered why intermediate forms may be missing in the fossil record. In a bid to understand where bats' specialised finger digits evolved from, Sears compared their embryological development with that of the finger digits of mice. In both animals, digits form from cartilage cells which divide and mature into bone in regions called growth plates.

But in bats, a key region of the growth plate called the hypertrophic zone is much larger than in mice, which allows their digits to grow much longer. That difference is controlled by a single gene known as BMP2, one of a family of genes important for limb development in mammals. Sears found that a protein produced by BMP2 is present in the hypertrophic region of bats, but not in mice. When she applied the protein to the digits of mouse embryos growing in the lab they elongated just like bat digits. Sears believes that bats began to evolve when this one gene became activated. Although it is a small developmental change, if it allowed the ancestors of bats to grow extended digits it could explain how bats evolved flight so rapidly, Sears told the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology meeting in Denver.

Relatively few transitional forms would have existed just briefly before being displaced by more advanced forms. "We've never had an adequate explanation" for the sudden appearance of bats, Nancy Simmons of the American Museum of Natural History in New York told New Scientist. "This sounds like a remarkable discovery." The lack of transitional forms has also led to speculation about the origin of bats, with some believing that primates are their closest relatives. Genetic studies now show they are closest to ferungulates, which include horses and pigs, or to the shrews and moles. Text for this article (except for the first paragraph) comes from a press release by New Scientist.

<http://www.sciscoop.com/2004-11-11-82718-510.html>

## **Sensationalism, Inflammatory Words and the History of Tabloid Journalism**

*War of the Worlds by Robert Czarny*

*Ladies and gentlemen, this is Carl Phillips again, at the Wilmuth farm, Grovers Mill, New Jersey. Professor Pierson and I made the eleven miles from Princeton in ten minutes. Well, I . . . I hardly know where to begin, to paint for you a word picture of the strange scene before my eyes, like something out of a modern "Arabian Nights." Well, I just got here. I haven't had a chance to look around yet. I guess that's it. Yes, I guess that's the . . . thing, directly in front of me, half buried in a vast pit. Must have struck with terrific force. The ground is covered with splinters of a tree it must have struck on its way down. What I can see of the . . . object itself doesn't look very much like a meteor, at least not the meteors I've seen. It looks more like a huge cylinder. It has a diameter of . . . what would you say, Professor Pierson?*

*Ladies and gentlemen, I have just been handed a message that came in from Grover's Mill by telephone. Just a moment. At least forty people, including six state troopers lie dead in a field east of the village of Grover's Mill, their bodies burned and distorted beyond all possible recognition. The next voice you hear will be that of Brigadier General Montgomery Smith, commander of the state militia at Trenton, New Jersey.*

Orson Welles read this script of *War of the Worlds* adapted from H.G. Wells' novel of the same name during a *CBS Mercury Theater on the Air* episode in a famous incident that caused panic among the station's six million listeners. The broadcast included a statement of its fictional origin at the beginning of the program but was timed to begin its earnest similarity to a news bulletin 12 minutes into the program to capture listeners from the more popular *Chase and Sandborn Hour* just as they cut away to dance music. Their show format was well known and featured the most popular radio personalities of the time. The timing and Orson Welles' *Mercury Theater* program was designed to lure listeners away from their competitor at *Chase and Sandborn* as they channel-surfed during the dance music interlude on the program. It was a calculated and deliberate attempt to increase the listening audience and gain Welles' infamy. It did both. Almost two million people believed an alien invasion was actually in progress and another one and half million were genuinely frightened by the news bulletin interruptions to regular programming that narrated the invasion of Martians on Planet Earth.

It was so convincing that some people grabbed firearms, herded their families into autos, and set out for the mountains. Gasoline was demanded at gunpoint and water towers were fired upon when they were mistaken for Martian space vehicles. In fact, the timing couldn't have been more suited to paranoia and panic. This was just prior to World War II and Hitler himself derided the program citing it as evidence of the corruption inherent in Democracy. This incident is seen as watering down subsequent real incidents of horror such as the Japanese Attack on Pearl Harbor, Chernobyl and others.

This is not the first nor last episode of using sensationalism and crowd psychology and public hysteria for social manipulation and personal and corporate gain. The CBS network faced sanctions because of the irresponsible use of public airwaves after the program, but not censorship. In the end, this episode was about circulation, consumers and market share.

Sensationalism, crowd psychology and hysteria have given us the witch trials, McCarthyism, tabloid journalism, war propaganda, Hitler's 'solution to the Jewish problem,' impeachment of a president, ruination from scandals, racism, genocide, misguided crusades, war and so many other ills foisted by humanity onto humanity. Fictional accounts sensationalized, presented as truth and "breaking news" in modern times have destroyed careers, lives and people.

Those who question in words or print the Machiavellian nature and ethics of such means to predetermined ends and hidden agendas are themselves often equally vilified. Philosophers and writers who questioned the methods of the witch trials and convictions, for example, were imprisoned themselves when they spoke out against the religiously motivated violence of the Puritans who dominated the local culture at that time.

Hitler used hype, propaganda and a philosophy of inferiority from his bully pulpit to murder more than six million Jewish citizens. Sensational accusations both verbal and in print defined McCarthyism in the paranoid culture of the Cold War era as members of society were labeled "communist" or "traitors" to their homeland and persecuted with public verbal floggings and blacklisting.

Racism defined the decade of late fifties to sixties as leaders like Martin Luther King rallied for equality and an end to racial discrimination. Words inflamed then. And before that colonists found reason to label as "savages" the indigenous peoples of the Americas. This indigenous, racial, cultural, ethnic "inferiority" is inflamed by words and by words committed to permanency in print or other means.

Religious persecution, envy, jealousy, hysteria and the need for attention feed the obsession for finding *evidence of the devil* operating in people metaphorically and materially. It seems that human shadow

finds reason to envy light in others and seeks to actively recruit and convert it to shadow. A modern *darksides* highlighting the darkness-light struggle of human nature can be found in media and in particular, in tabloid journalism. The salacious, sensational, darkest and most titillating news makes headlines and makes money for those who peddle the darkest and most unsavory side of human nature. What in the human does this speak to? And as humans and consumers, are we aware of it, its affects and impact on people? And if so or even if not, are we complicit in our own darkness?

The etymology of “Tabloid” in 1884 is from a trademark of the Burroughs Wellcome and Company, a nineteenth century pharmaceutical company in England that produced medicine originally in powder form. The tabloid was a pill made by compressing the powder into small bullet-like pills called tabloids, tablets and later tabs. The oid suffix is from oides meaning like. By 1898, tabloid was being used figuratively to mean a compressed form or small dose of anything. The small newspaper with condensed articles was nicknamed the tabloid. In the context of journalism, “tabloid” referred to the size of the newspaper and its abbreviated content. It has since evolved to mean a sensationalized newspaper with sometimes barely truthful content and even to include television which highlights celebrity news and scandals.

The tabloid industry began in earnest in England and tends to emphasize topics such as **sensational** crime stories, astrology, **gossip** about the personal lives of celebrities and sports stars, and **junk news**. Often, tabloid newspaper allegations about the sexual practices, drug use, or private conduct of celebrities is borderline defamatory; in many cases, celebrities have successfully sued for **libel**, demonstrating that tabloid stories have defamed them. It is this sense of the word that led to some entertainment news programs to be called **tabloid television**. Tabloid newspapers are sometimes pejoratively called the gutter press.

Celebrities don’t always sue because of the time, energy and money investment in countering all the salacious tabloid libel because they realize that they would be in court almost every day. The tabloids count on that fact to escape culpability and are unscathed by the occasional judgment against them which is miniscule compared to profits and is “expensed” on balance sheets. The profit margin trumps the occasional lawsuit.

### **American Tabloids**

Tabloid journalism was exported to America where the papers are now featured in supermarkets at checkout aisles. American tabs are particularly notorious for their deliberate and over-the-top sensationalizing of stories.

The original American tabloid, *The New York Sun*, a gaudy example of the *penny press* made its debut on September 3, 1833 as the handiwork of Benjamin H. Day, a Springfield Massachusetts printer. Since most newspapers required subscriptions paid in advance and cost about ten dollars a year, the penny press became popular because for a penny a day, one could buy *The New York Sun* instead of a newspaper that might cost a week’s salary in advance for working families. In 1835, the *New York Sun* published a lengthy report about life on the moon discovered by a scientist with a powerful telescope, something it knew was fictional. Called the “moon hoax” that incident is famous in American journalism. Truth was not highly valued in the columns of *The Sun* where copy resembled simple and cheap romantic fiction.

The *Sun*’s success spawned knock-off competitors and imitators. *The Herald* was the brainchild of James Gordon Bennett who actually had been a newsman and he built his empire into the most successful and

influential newspapers in history. He broke from the partisan press and favored sensationalism and sordid crime stories with flaming headlines. His son, known for his public outrageous escapades took over after Bennett's death and featured both respectable news and salacious underground drivel and ran thinly disguised advertisements for prostitutes until William Randolph Hearst complained.

The younger Bennett commissioned reporter Stanley with a bent for drama to find missionary David Livingston in Africa. This story was a ploy by *The Herald* to create an international sensation by not just reporting the news but *making the news*.

Hearst joined that same tradition with his *San Francisco Examiner* that borrowed from the doctrine of sensationalism when it gifted the famous French actress Sarah Bernhardt with a wine and dine excursion that included a visit to an Opium Den, afterward writing up the lurid details for an expose` in his tabloid. Hearst hired Ambrose Bierce who wrote bitter contemporary columns that necessitated his carrying a pistol to protect himself from infuriated readers. He later hired women who would write expose`s about society's ills gaining public sympathy (origin of sob story) that Hearst claimed as his mission: champion of the common man and protector of the weak.

Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* was Hearst's competitor who hired "Nellie Bly" (pseudonym) who became one of the first famous female reporters. Pulitzer for whom the "Pulitzer Prize" is named was one of the top sensationalist journalists of his time selling crime, scandal and outrageous stunts. One of the most protracted circulation wars in journalism was waged between *The New York World* and *The New York Morning Journal* owned by Hearst. Both papers favored yellow journalism depicting life in New York: they had no hesitation in *making news instead of reporting it*. The movie *Citizen Kane* is a barely disguised biography of William Randolph Hearst directed by and starring Orson Welles.

Today's tabloids such as *The Globe*, *The National Enquirer* and *The Sun* use extremely aggressive and mean-spirited tactics to sell issues. They are distributed through magazine distribution channels like weeklies and paperback books. The validity of the stories in these gutter press samples can be called into question.

The tabloids readily admit to practicing what is called "checkbook journalism" and tout its legitimacy and justify their use of it because 'everybody practices checkbook journalism.' This practice refers to paying for stories. There is willingness by tabloids to pay handsomely for information upon which to build their stories. They have publicly admitted that it doesn't matter if it is truth; it only matters that somebody is willing to say it for a fee they are willing to pay. For a startling example of the tabloids own claim to checkbook journalism, see Frontline Episode "Tabloid Truth: The Michael Jackson Scandal."

In 1993 when the *Enquirer*, for example, was looking for someone to corroborate the story that Michael Jackson had molested boys, they contacted Ronald Newt Sr. because they learned that Newt's twin boys spent time at Neverland Ranch as aspiring performers learning from Jackson, their mentor.

The *Enquirer* offered the Newt boys' father Ronald, \$200,000 to say that something untoward happened to his boys at Neverland with Michael Jackson. David Perell, Editor of the tabloid drew up a contract and the elder Newt refused to sign, saving it for evidence. In actuality, no children ever showed up to trade accusations about Jackson for cash after the scandal broke in 1993.

Celebrities learn to be on guard most of the time and on red alert in certain circumstances. It takes a sixth sense to be able to outthink a paparazzi or reporter dressed as a service or delivery personnel. It is well known too, that celebrities who badmouth tabloids or name names are punished for their indiscretions. Johnny Carson once belittled the *Enquirer* and found himself the target of a *revenge assignment* by one of its reporters. The paper tailed Carson for weeks until they got a photo of Sally Fields and him drinking champagne on his balcony. They then spun the story in the most malicious way to do the most damage.

Lady Diana Spencer was the most visible target of the paparazzi and the tabloid press. The tabloids even went so far as to rent a submarine at a cost of \$16,000 in order to get a shot of Diana lounging on the beach with a new love interest after her divorce from Charles and her divorce from the royal family. She was considered the most photographed woman in the world during the 15 years she was prominent on the world stage.

Lady Diana's life was scrutinized at every turn and marked by salacious stories in the British tabloids. Diana was painted as unstable, dull, ditsy, depressed, and crazy. They exposed her anger at Charles who had resumed his affair with Camilla Bowles during their marriage. Diana commented that her marriage was crowded with too many people and that included Charles' mistress, the royal family and the media.

Diana knew that her royal children would be subject to the same treatment by the gutter press so she tried to be clever with a kind of cat and mouse game with them to garner favor. Diana saw this as a tactic; the queen reportedly saw it as scandalous betrayal of the royal family's dignity. Diana learned to trade stories for coverage of her favorite charitable and humanitarian work.

The tone of the media changed and the gutter press became more aggressive when Rupert Murdoch began his influential tenure in media. A magnate of the Australian press, he set his sights on the acquisition of media all over the world and acquired significant numbers of media outlets on multiple continents.

Murdoch saw celebrity as a commodity to be tapped and exploited and his minions did exactly that with his acquisitions. His tactics, heavily criticized by the ethical press, politicians and celebrities, included becoming cozy with the leaders of countries and supporting their politics until he was in a position to influence those politics with his newspapers and television holdings which include British, Australian, American and other tabloid markets and the Fox Cable News Network.

In 2009 Murdoch was accused of using private investigators and criminal means to record and expose private messages among the celebrity and royal figures featured in his gutter press. His staffers illegally hacked phones, illegally accessed the target's bank statements, confidential personal data including tax records, social security files and utility bills. Murdoch's News Group Newspapers paid about \$1.6 million in out-of-court settlements to buy silence from public figures whose privacy had been invaded. Those targeted were cabinet ministers, MPs, Actors and sports stars.

The payments were secretly made and evidence was suppressed of hundreds more illegal actions by victims of News Group, the Murdoch company that publishes *News of the World* and *The Sun*. Police have initiated inquiries into at least 31 reporters and senior executives who illegally accessed records of 2,000 to 3,000 people including senior politicians.

Murdoch's reporters resort to extreme deception and illegal means to garner stories. They have disguised themselves as a sheik to sting celebrities and notables, and even posed as a sports team investor in order to gain an interview where the coach badmouthed his players and was fired. Murdoch's *News of the World* boasts on its website that it "offers the biggest payment for stories."



### **The Conversion to Medialoid**

Medialoid is defined as mainstream media infected with tabloid journalism. The conversion occurred because the major news outlets began to relax some standards that had been in place since newspapers and television began. Some attribute partial blame to the O.J. Simpson and other celebrity trials, some to the arrival on the scene of a 24 hour news cycle that began when Ted Turner's CNN did its first broadcast in 1980; some see it as an erosion over time. Somewhere along the evolution of journalism, the standards and the ethics of the profession and the media relaxed. In some cases they took a vacation; and in others that vacation is permanent.

The line of demarcation between the media and the tabloids began to blur in the nineteen seventies but in 1998 it disappeared completely. That year conservative blogger Matt Drudge released a story about a relationship with then President Clinton and White House Aid Monica Lewinsky after Newsweek Magazine declined to publish it. For the next year the American press all sounded like tabloids as Americans were subjected to detailed information about the president's private sexual proclivities. The cast of characters and the investigation into the scandal grew wider as time went on until it ended with the impeachment of a president.

The O.J. Simpson and Michael Jackson trials did little to dissuade the media from their trajectory toward tabloid journalism. The trials of celebrities attract a lot of attention. The Simpson trial was televised and the judge was seen as pandering to the cameras in his courtroom; the Michael Jackson trial was not televised but a previously serious venue, Court TV turned tabloid when it reenacted the daily court proceedings for its evening viewers.

Joining the ranks of tabloid and sensationalist television are programs like Hard Copy, Inside Edition, A Current Affair and their domestic and international clones. Reality TV tends to use the same tactics of

sensationalism, crowd psychology and public emotional hysteria to gain and keep viewers.

Tabloid tactics of cut and paste journalism has leaked into the Internet Blogosphere as well. In a recent case, Andrew Breitbart, conservative Republican commentator and blogger who originally wrote for the Drudge Report, spliced a film of Shirley Sherrod addressing the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) in an attempt to paint this State Department Black woman as a racist and to embarrass the Obama Administration. The cable news channels picked up the story, did not fact check it but ran with it which triggered the NAACP and government officials to denounce her and call for her resignation. When the video of her speech was viewed in its entirety, it revealed the questionable journalistic tactics of the blogger and his agenda. It would seem it also might call into question the cable news cycle of repeating unverified information that seeks conflict but not all the facts. Sherrod reportedly plans to sue for damages to her livelihood and reputation. She is but one example of the casualties of tabloid reporting and media gone wild.

### **Effects of Body Bag Journalism**

“If it bleeds, it leads” is often the standard that local and cable news stations use when deciding what and how to broadcast the news of the day on nightly or 24 hour cycle programs. The way news is now reported has increased the negative effects on children according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Those changes include:

- television channels and Internet services and sites which report the news 24 hours a day
- television channels broadcasting live events as they are unfolding, in "real time"
- increased reporting of the details of the private lives of public figures and role models
- pressure to get news to the public as part of the competitive nature of the entertainment industry
- detailed and repetitive visual coverage of natural disasters and violent acts

While there are issues surrounding parental warnings about sex and violence, increasing concern surrounds news programming. Research shows that children tend to imitate what they see and hear in the news—a contagion called the copy cat effect. The work championed by organizations such as Children Now, medical societies and others who call upon the FCC to revisit rules for journalism and programming clearly suggest that body-bag and sensationalized journalism bludgeons them into cynicism, resignation and fear. Fifty percent of children interviewed said they felt angry, sad or depressed after watching the news.

### **Oversight Bodies**

The first amendment right to free speech strikes grave trepidation in those who seek to make the media more humane and responsible. Censure is a hot topic as is the right to protect one’s sources. There are no official regulatory bodies that govern journalism and in the view of Columbia University, a solution is to implement a seal of approval that insures that media meets certain standard obligations. John Hamer of Columbia proposes something called the TAO of Journalism: Transparency, Accountability and Openness. Hamer says that anything other than some kind of standard for journalism and media is a double standard: “Journalists instinctively react negatively to anything that smacks of licensing, certification regulation, oversight—there is great resistance,” he said.

The Society of Professional Journalists has a code of ethics for its members. While the ethical standards

are admirable, few of their ranks follow their own ethics guidelines:

Journalists should:

- Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.
- Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing.
- Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability.
- Always question sources' motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises.
- Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.
- Never distort the content of news photos or video. Image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible. Label montages and photo illustrations.
- Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.
- Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story
- Never plagiarize
- Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so.
- Examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others.
- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.
- Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.
- Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.
- Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.
- Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection.

### **Minimize Harm**

Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.

Journalists should:

- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
- Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.
- Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.
- Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.
- Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.
- Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes.

- Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.
- Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed.

### **Act Independently**

Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.

Journalists should:

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.
- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
- Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity.
- Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.
- Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.
- Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.

### **Be Accountable**

Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other.

Journalists should:

- Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
- Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.
- Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
- Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.
- Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.

### **Conclusion**

There appears to be no real conclusion to the dilemma presented by modern media, or is there? It seems clear that the media, journalism, and television may be entirely out of control in covering the goings on of leaders and celebrities in our culture. We have seen evidence that this frenzy of voyeurism and the need to know all the gore or juicy details of someone else's private life causes societal ills and does not benefit our children or our own humanity.

Where are the lines drawn of civility, good taste, kindness, compassion, empathy, dignity, respect, professionalism and humane restraint? When consumers consume products without examining their own habits and the effects of those habits, or they thoughtlessly consume products that harm others regularly for profit, they are complicit in the demeaning and destruction of others and of their own humanity. Increasing tolerance and psychological anesthesia toward the slaying of others' images, reputations, livelihoods, life's work and privacy becomes a cultural meme that indicts each of the members and it's whole.

The real question becomes: when we portray ourselves in this light of intolerance, demonstrate glee at the downfall of others, what do we do to our own psyches? What do we do to our own humanity? Maybe it's a contemporary question worth looking into because it defines who we are as humans, it defines our humanity and it determines our future.

**Text, Discussion Questions and Bibliography were written by: Reverend Barbara Kaufmann**

### **Discussion Questions**

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution is part of the Bill of Rights. The amendment prohibits the making of any law "respecting an establishment of religion." impeding the free exercise of religion, infringing on the freedom of speech, infringing on the freedom of the press, interfering with the right to peaceably assemble or prohibiting the petitioning for a governmental redress of grievances.

1. What does "freedom of speech" mean? What does it mean for/to you?
2. What does "freedom of the press" mean? What does it mean for/to you?
3. Do you regularly read any newspapers, magazines or periodicals? What do you read and why?
4. Do you regularly watch certain TV programs? What do you watch and why?
5. Do you listen to talk radio? What do you listen to and why?
6. When you read publications, watch TV or listen to talk radio, what are you expecting from those media?
7. How might media, journalism and television have a bias? Be slanted? Why would that happen? How?
8. Do you expect the media to report the truth? Why or why not? How do you feel about media that invents or distorts the truth? How do you feel about being asked to be a consumer of non-truths?
9. How do you feel about "checkbook journalism?" Is it fair? Legitimate? Morally right? Discuss.
10. As a consumer of media, how are you impacted by that media? What are your expectations? Do you apply standards to the media? What are they?
11. Do you believe the media are fair? Accurate? Humane? What examples can you give?
12. As a consumer, do you feel you have a right to expect certain standards from media? What standards?
13. As a consumer of media, do you feel you have some say or some power over what is printed or shared publicly? Or do you feel powerless?
14. Do you have an opinion about corporate media? How do you feel about one owner owning most of the newsprint or airwaves? Explain. Do you feel it can be beneficial or detrimental to the consumer? How?

15. Do you believe the media should follow its own guidelines with respect to what is published or reported? Why or why not?
16. Do you feel that the public has a right to know what goes on in government? In the private lives of citizens? In the private lives of celebrities? Why or why not?
17. Have you ever felt concern, pride, skepticism, disgust with what is being reported or how it is reported? Do you make your feelings known? How? Why do you or why do you not make them known?
18. Many people have expressed their exasperation with media and how journalism and broadcasting has devolved from the high standards of the past that included fact checking and confirming sources and information from multiple sources before publishing something as fact. If people are fed up with the media how could they go about making their feelings known? How do you think that might change things?
19. The media position is that they only provide what the public clamors for. You are the public. Do you feel powerless or powerful to change things? Would you consider changing your habits and your consumption of materials to support your position?
20. In your opinion, is the media out of control? Why or why not? Should it change? How or why?
21. Who do you believe media has the power to harm? Do you think it has harmed? How?
22. Do you believe the media has constructed, hastened or created someone's demise? If so, in what way? How do you feel about that?
23. Do you believe the media has killed people? Why or why not? If so, how? How do you feel about that?
24. Should the media target certain individuals? Why or why not? How do you feel about damage to an individual? Should the media be more humane? How?
25. What does "fifteen minutes of fame" mean? Discuss. How would you feel and what would you do if it were your turn for the famous "fifteen minutes of fame" and the coverage was positive? What about a negative "fifteen minutes of fame?" Could that destroy your relationships? Your career? Your reputation? Your life? Discuss.
26. Do you "vote with your dollars?" In other words, if something is sub-par to standards or needs restructuring how does the consumer go about letting the vendor know?
27. If it were prudent to change media and how it is presented or consumed, how would you go about doing that while protecting the first amendment? Can it be done? How? Convene in groups and brainstorm ways this could be accomplished.

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- Arthur Edwards is royal photographer for The Sun and teamed up with The Sun's royal reporter, Harry Arnold, in covering Princess Diana and the Royal Family.
- Roy Greenslade was editor of The Daily Mirror, 1990-1991, and assistant editor at The Sun for six years.
- Glenn Harvey is a freelance photographer who covered Princess Diana.
- Max Hastings was editor of The Daily Telegraph, 1986-1995.
- Anthony Holden is the author of two books on Prince Charles.
- Simon Jenkins was editor of The Times, 1990-1992.
- Ken Lennox was royal photographer for The Daily Mirror, 1986-1994.
- Andrew Morton is a royal reporter who has written several books on the Royal Family, including Diana: Her True Story, on which Princess Diana secretly collaborated.
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