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PROFILE: FIJ Mentor and Writing Coach Linda Jue



By Linda Jue

Investigative reporters tend to spend most of their reporting and research time focused on acquiring the facts and data to document a wrongdoing. As a result, the fruit of their labor - the story - too often ends up dry and lifeless. The reader, listener or viewer is left feeling like they should care more than they do about the wrong that's uncovered.

The best investigative reporting doesn't just reveal the facts of a hidden injustice; it tells an evocative story that arouses the curiosity of the intended audience and holds their interest all the way to the end. A compelling story explores themes like unchecked power, corruption, discrimination, greed, and other human failings that drive the wrongdoing being reported on. It also portrays how the people affected respond to the problem, as well as asks whether viable solutions exist. Above all, a successful investigative story makes people care.

That's where I come in. As an investigative features editor, I help FIJ grantees identify the themes that will liven up their stories. In one example, I worked with a grantee on a story about the sexual abuse of

incarcerated women in a California prison. Her reporting was excellent, but her draft needed work. I worked with her to turn it into a more vital story that got to the heart of the power dynamics behind the abuse and the pre-existing emotional and physical damage that made these women extra vulnerable.

The grantee's story, initially intended to appear only in a criminal justice trade publication, was picked up by *The Guardian* of London because of the unusual angle and compelling writing. It's stories like this one that have made my job as an FIJ reporting and writing coach immensely rewarding.

Linda Jue is the editor & executive director of the G.W. Williams Center for Independent Journalism

Our Grantees' Work



A Murder in New Orleans and a Wrong Conviction

In 1988, Erin Hunter was convicted of a murder in New Orleans he claimed to know nothing about after a trial that took place in a single morning. Years later, the detective who investigated the case went to federal prison for extortion, the prosecutor remembered the single eyewitness as being of "dubious character," and investigators suggested Hunter was set up. But Hunter



How a Georgia Jail Doctor Made a Fortune on Prisoners

For local law enforcement, health care for inmates can be a burden. For one doctor, it has been the opportunity of a lifetime.

FIJ grantee Max Blau spent a year investigating how Dr. Carlo Musso, Georgia's former

remained in prison for three decades. **Nicholas Chrastil reports this story for The Lens.**

Photo: Erin Hunter as a young man. (Courtesy of the Hunter family)

deathrow doctor, built a medical empire in Southern jails. His stories were published in **Atlanta Magazine** and the **Georgia Telegraph.**

Illustration by Mike McQuade



Danger in the Ground: Lead Contaminates Neighborhood

Despite alarmingly high levels of lead in the soil of a mostly poor, largely African American community in Atlanta that is now an EPA Superfund “removal action” site, there has been no effort by state or local officials to test children for contamination. An investigation by **Georgia Health News, the Georgia News Lab and The Atlanta Journal-Constitution** brought the story to light with the help of a grant from FIJ.

Lead Slag, a byproduct of smelting found near homes in Atlanta. Photo by Curtis Compton of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution



Spiraling Immigration Costs Under Trump Put a Strain on Migrant Families

Even as the immigration court system becomes more and more backlogged — rising to more than 1 million cases in September — and detention facilities managed by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement have hit record levels, holding more than 50,000 people nationwide, immigration officials are seeking much higher bonds for immigrants or refusing them altogether, **FIJ grantee Paul Ingram reports for the Tucson Sentinel.**

Margo Cowan, an immigration lawyer for more than 40 years, worries about rising prices of bonds for immigrants. Photo by Paul Ingram.

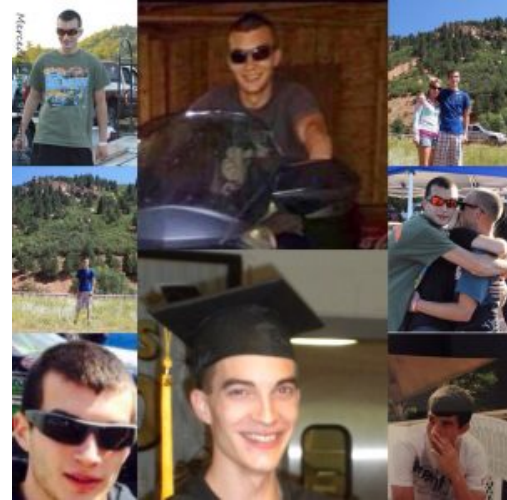


Efforts to Stave off Detroit Foreclosures Leave Many Residents Deeper in Debt

Nearly one in four Detroit homeowners owes more in delinquent property taxes than they did three years ago despite being a part of a county program designed to help them get out of debt and avoid foreclosure, according to a Detroit News analysis. The payment plans, with lower interest rates and an extended five-year repayment deadline, were a solution devised by officials, including Mayor Mike Duggan, to get homeowners out of danger in the midst of Detroit's record-setting tax foreclosure crisis.

But a **Detroit News investigation** by News reporter Christine MacDonald and FIJ grantee Mark Betancourt has found that the plans, enacted in state law in 2015, have kept thousands in a payment plan purgatory that likely will lead to the loss of their homes without more help.

Candis Patterson of Detroit finds it difficult to keep up with the \$179 monthly payment and worries about losing her home. Photo by Max Ortiz, The Detroit News

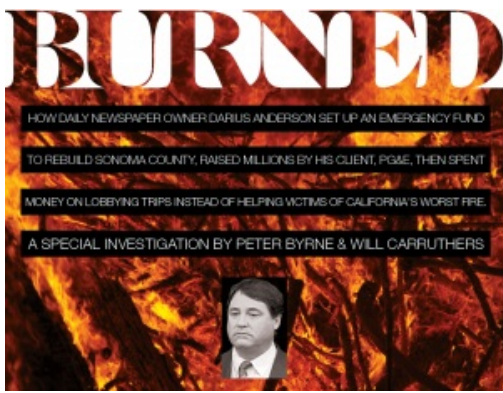


Should Civilians Investigate Police-Related Shootings in New Hampshire?

Most police shootings in New Hampshire over the last three decades have been ruled justified by the state Attorney General's Office perhaps because investigations were completed by the New Hampshire State Police.

Nancy West of inDepthNH.org investigates how the state is now considering a civilian review board to determine whether police have acted appropriately when using lethal force against citizens.

Photo: Cody Lafont who was shot to death by a Claremont police officer who went to his home to tell him to stop calling 911 early on Sept. 25, 2016. Photo courtesy of the Lafont family.



California Foundation Created to Help Fire Victims More Interested in Lobbying for PG&E

The Rebuild North Bay Foundation was created in October 2017, ostensibly to provide relief to thousands of victims of wildfires in Sonoma and Napa counties in California. As **Peter Byrne and Will Carruthers report in the Pacific Sun** the foundation performed little or no relief work, choosing to focus on lobbying on behalf of prominent businesspeople and Pacific Gas & Electric.

Photo Collage by Pacific Sun



White Supremacist Groups Recruitment in Police Departments

For decades, anti-government and white supremacist groups have been attempting to recruit police officers – and the authorities themselves aren't even certain about the scale of the problem, FIJ grantees Varnham O'Regan and Maddy Crowell **report for The Guardian**.

*Hank Willis Thomas' Raise Up statue at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama.
Photograph: Raymond Boyd/Getty Images*

News About FIJ



Jonathan Logan Family Foundation grants \$125,000 to FIJ

FIJ is pleased to announce that the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation has renewed its support of our grant-making program, including \$25,000 for our Diversity Fellowship of 2020.

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