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Inside:
2 ➤ Patch cont'd
3 ➤ Interview with Amy Award Winner
4 ➤ Discipling Journal

A Newsletter of The Amy Foundation



Patch's Peril and Promise

by Dr. Les Sillars

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A 2009 graduate of our Patrick Henry College journalism program walked into my office for a visit recently, and if I were a newspaper publisher the sight would have been terrifying. Nathan Curby himself is not particularly scary. He's a polite young man and very bright, but he is on the front lines of a massive effort to shift how local news operates, a change that threatens journalism's current business models while offering readers the chance to help shape their own local news.

Such websites offer a huge opportunity for concerned citizens to make a difference

Nathan is the editor of the *Dale City Patch*, a brand new local news website in a community along I-95 just south of Washington, D.C., and one of a network of such sites AOL is spending \$50 million to launch this year. There are now in the Patch network over 400 sites in 19 states, most in the suburbs of major cities like New York, Chicago, Atlanta, and

Los Angeles (80 in California alone, from Agoura Hills to West Hollywood).

If you haven't seen a Patch website yet, you probably will soon; Patch's goal over the next few years is to blanket the nation with thousands of such sites. The rest of the journalism industry has been cutting reporters and editors, but Patch's website lists 362 immediate openings for regional and local editors in selected states. The sites offer pretty standard local news — mainly sports, community events, crime, real estate, municipal government — while the sites themselves focus on getting readers involved.

"Think of our site as the community water cooler — a place where you can stop by and talk about everything going on in town," wrote the editor of the Milpitas (Calif.) Patch, who then detailed how that can go way beyond commenting on stories. Readers can ask and respond to questions, post wedding/birth announcements and events to a calendar, upload photos and video, review restaurants, and list their business/church/charity in the directory.

There's even a "shout" feature that is essentially a glorified comment box, but the comments appear on the front page in big letters so readers know their words will get attention. And, of course, readers can stay in touch via Facebook and Twitter feeds.

This is by far the most ambitious effort yet to cash in on the

Continued on page 2 ➤

Prayer Requests

We believe "The prayers of the righteous availeth much." We invite you to pray with us about various aspects of the Amy Foundation Ministry.

Amy Prayer List:

- Amy Writing Awards — increased exposure and number of submissions in 2011.
- More Christian writers mobilized and equipped to use their skills in obedience to Christ's call to make disciples.
- Amy Internet Syndicate — new users this year.

Spread the Word!

The Pen & Sword is now published online only. If you or someone you know would like to receive a notice when the next issue is posted, along with a link to the online edition, send your e-mail address to amyfoundtn@aol.com

Pen & Sword

Editor:
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► Patch, cont'd from p.1

theory that the way to make big money in local news is not by delivering information but by building an online community.

Others have tried for years to make similar "hyper-local news" models work. Organizations from one-man blogs to the *New York Times* and MSNBC have tried to find a viable business model. Industry analysts estimate that local businesses spend \$100 billion annually on advertising, so there's clearly money on the table.

But very few hyper-local news operations make money; fewer still have shown the potential to go national. Patch hopes to be the breakthrough. It's keeping expenses for each website low (4.3 percent of the cost of a comparable community newspaper, it claims) by limiting news gathering staff to one full-time editor (at around \$40,000/year, plus a budget for freelancers) while using regional advertising salespeople. Technical support comes from

headquarters in New York. The sites are bright, well-designed, and easy to use.

Is Patch really a potential threat to your local metro daily? What about national publications like the *Washington Post* and *USA Today*?

The news industry has been struggling for years, and Patch could well take a big bite from the existing revenue pie. With a national network Patch could offer advertisers as much or as little exposure as they want.

If the Patch model does, one day, dominate community news, there will be upsides and downsides (as with anything). Community journalists constantly complain that they're too busy covering rubber duck races to have time to hold powerful people and institutions accountable, and that problem will be even worse for lone editors like Nathan. Local news could end up becoming even more trivial than it already is.

On the other hand, such websites offer a huge opportu-

nity for concerned citizens to make a difference in the quality and direction of their local news. The Internet promised to make the news interactive, yet American journalism culture, deep down, detests much audience involvement, outside an occasional news tip and letters to the editor. Now Patch is begging viewers to get involved. Here's a chance to publish a column, post a comment, or pitch a deserving story straight to the editor.

"Newspapers aren't going away any time soon," Nathan said. "But this is a great alternative for both readers and advertisers that want to reach their community. Journalism isn't dead, and at least in this outlet, it's thriving." ◀

This article is reprinted with permission. It originally appeared on the American Roundtable website, an editorial service of Patrick Henry College.

Congratulations to the 2010 Amy Writing Award Winners

You can read the full text of all 15 winning entries for 2010 at www.amyfound.org.

Ruth J. Colvin	An Unforgettable Holiday	<i>The Post-Standard</i> ; Syracuse, NY
Kendall Wingrove	Seeking the Perfect Outcome	www.americandaily.com
Cal Thomas	Something About That Name	<i>The Washington Examiner</i>
C. Byron Buckley	When A Coach Had to Take a Stand	<i>The North Vernon Plain Dealer</i> ; IN
Eileen Button	Wish Lists Don't Always Include Good Gifts	<i>The Flint Journal</i> ; Flint, MI
John A. Murray	The Spiritual Pathway to March Madness	<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>
Steve Cornell	Faith, Brit Hume and Tiger Woods	<i>Sunday News</i> ; Lancaster, PA
Delvyn C. Case	Deeds, Not Words, Define Who We Are	<i>Portland Press Herald</i> ; Portland, ME
Tom Flannery	Prayers For Hitch	<i>The Carbondale News</i> ; Carbondale, PA
Rusty Wright	Is Casual Sex Losing Its Zing?	www.americandaily.com
Stephen Cloud	For Nate	<i>The Lillian</i> ; Lillian, AL
David Marotta	The Poorhouses of 'A Christmas Carol'	<i>Charlottesville Business Journal</i> ; VA
Brenda J. Norris	Sharing Faith With Your Kids	<i>Bangor Daily News</i> ; Bangor, ME
Dr. Claudia Brantley	Listen to God's View of Tolerance	<i>The Spartanburg Herald-Journal</i> ; SC
Robert Michaels	Christ Never Cared to Win Popularity Contests	<i>The Benicia Herald</i> ; Benicia, CA

Pen & Sword Interviews 2010 Amy Writing Award Winner Ruth Colvin

Q: What inspired you to write your Amy Award winning article?

A: When I have an experience that really touches my heart, my reaction is to sit down and write it up. I want to share the feelings and the experience with others. In this case, I was ashamed of my feelings of self-pity because my husband Bob and I were not invited to join any family for Thanksgiving. I finally thought to myself that there were so many others with no family. Who would be most lonely? Maybe just one resident of a nursing home had no visitors. Bob and I would be those visitors.

Q: How did you go about marketing the article and getting it published?

A: After completing the article, I sent it in to our local newspaper, *The Post-Standard*, in Syracuse, N.Y. I was surprised when one of the editors called saying they wanted a picture and wanted to feature it.

Q: How did you hear about the Amy Awards?

A: I heard about the Amy Writing Awards from a friend.

Q: Do you have any encouragement for other Christian writers — those who write as a profession or on the side—as to how to utilize media resources to publish their written works?

A: I'm a firm advocate of, "Be ye doers of the word, not

hearers only" in the Bible. If anyone, especially those of us who don't write as a profession, feels something special and would like to share it, just write it down, right from your heart. Don't worry about organization, grammar and spelling — first get it on paper. Put it aside; later read it again and again, editing and rewriting. When you feel satisfied, send it in to your local paper or magazine. One never knows if your thoughts, put on paper, will be just right to reach other hearts as well.

Q: How do you fit in time to write and structure your writing time?

A: I can't understand a life without reading — that's why I started Literacy Volunteers of America (now ProLiteracy) nearly 50 years ago — to teach people to read. Because people are always looking for material to read, writers are always needed. So I write, whenever the mood hits me, and whenever I find something in my heart that I must share.

Q: How do you get your ideas for articles or books?

A: An unmet need!! I wrote my book, [A Way with Words](#) because I was constantly asked why and how I started Literacy Volunteers. Many stories are told in this book. I wrote [In the Beginning was the Word: Teaching Reading and Writing Through the Bible](#) when I realized that thousands of people wanted to become literate so they could read the Bible. I wrote [Off the Beaten](#)

[Path: Stories of People Around the World](#) (coming out this summer) after having many opportunities to work with dedicated people in developing countries. People need to be inspired by heroes.

Q: What resources do you depend on for writing?

A: Other than short stories or articles that I write from the heart, I first do research. Before the Internet, and before we travelled to a new country, I used the library (and I still do for librarians are wonderful to help with research). I read books first on the history of that country and its people, their culture and traditions, then fiction, getting as much background as possible. My own experiences are then based on something solid.

Q: How often do you read? Do you have any recommendations?

A: I always have three or four books on hand to read, depending on my mood and the need, whether it be for research, history, or inspiration. Three books I've read within the last months that moved me are Nancy Turner's [These is My Words](#), Tatiana de Posnay's [Sarah's Key](#), and Erick Segal's [Doctors](#). While fiction, these books tell stories of individuals whose lives made a difference despite hardships and tragedies. ◀

To read Ruth Colvin's winning article, "An Unforgettable Holiday" go to our website, www.amyfound.org

Ruth Colvin is the founder of Literacy Volunteers of America (now ProLiteracy), a national non-profit organization which trains volunteers to teach basic reading/writing and English as a Second Language. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame. She is a previous Amy Writing Award winner.

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The Amy Foundation will maintain the newsletter's email distribution list and **will not sell or give out** any personal information.

**Tell Us a
Discipling
Story**

Do you have an interesting discipling story to tell? Send a vignette (200-400 words) about a situation or interaction that led to your discipling another person—or group of people—in an unusual or unexpected way. How was God faithful in supporting, reinforcing or extending your obedient actions?

Send stories to:
Pen & Sword
Editor, The
Amy Founda-
tion,
P.O. Box 16091,
Lansing, MI
48901;

or email
amyfoundtn@
aol.com.

Representing Christ in our Calling as Parents

By Mary Jackson

Recently my three children and I visited a grocery store where we had never shopped. Surprisingly we received at least four compliments from workers in the store. My 8-year-old son, the oldest, said as we left, “Mom, those people must know God!” Whether they did or not, surely they recognized the biblical truth that children are a blessing from the Lord.

How often do we step outside our frenzied bubble of responsibility to consider how we come off to others? As Christians, are we embracing even the small opportunities to represent something compellingly different? I am increasingly conscious of this after numerous encounters with people behind me in line at stores or passing me in the aisles. As a mother of young children, I’ve realized the benefits of coming to stores with an organized list and coaching my kids on what is expected. Not only is it easier for me to shop, but it

is a conversation starter. Many older people simply say, “Enjoy them while they are young; it goes so fast.” How true. Others say, “You must have your hands full,” or “What is it like having three?”

After realizing this opportunity, I’ve started inserting biblical truth wherever I can. Yes, raising children has its challenges, but what a blessing. Each child brings something special to the family. We look forward to the teenage years and to one day becoming grandparents.

These words are authenticated to the degree that I am living them out. Let’s be honest, putting on a show gets us nowhere, with people in a grocery store and surely not with our children. Yet I have noticed the more I speak these words, the more I embody them. It would be easy to complain when I am not having my best day or to invite sympathy. Increasingly we invest less of our time and energy into our children, but we expect

accolades in return. I have my sob stories, and then I think of cloth diapers and the days before frozen pizzas, and I am humbly grateful.

Edith Schaffer, in her book *Hidden Art*, writes about how we are an environment for other people with whom we live. “Enthusiasm and excitement infect other people: expectancy that God can intervene and do something in this moment of history, and doing something practical to show that expectancy in prayer, affects the attitudes other people are going to have to their troubles.”

The truth is we live in a society that de-values the biblical role of parenting, a high calling to train up the next generation. It is a gift that can easily be taken away or never bestowed in the first place. How we as Christians view this calling is certainly reflected in our children, not to mention in the aisles of the grocery store. ◀



SUBMIT TODAY!

**15 WRITERS
WILL RECEIVE
\$34,000
IN CASH PRIZES
INCLUDING A
\$10,000
FIRST PRIZE**

The Amy Foundation Writing Awards program recognizes writers who skillfully and creatively present the biblical position on issues affecting the world today in a sensitive and thought-provoking manner. Qualifying non-fiction entries must be published in a secular, non-religious publication (either printed or online) and must be reinforced with at least one passage of scripture.

Winning entries will be re-published in an annual collection of prize-winning articles.

For rules, sample articles and submission forms, visit www.amyfound.org or call 877-727-4262.

2011 Amy Writing Awards

 **The Amy Foundation**
Discipling Our Nation in this Generation