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Trailblazing Columnist

Dinah Eng builds bridges through her writing and gets minorities involved in journalism

By Cynthia Moritz

On New Year's Eve 1999, Dinah Eng found herself working in the Gannett News Service newsroom, as she had on any number of holidays during her past 20 years as a newspaper writer and editor. Missing her family, she vowed it would be the last time she would spend a holiday that way. A year later, she left her job at Gannett and set out to become a freelance writer. She also moved from Washington, D.C., to Los Angeles. "I really believe that we have to follow what's in our hearts," Eng says of her move. "If we stagnate personally, we won't grow professionally."

Eng is used to blazing new trails. As an

undergraduate in newspaper journalism and English literature at SU, she followed the typical route of working for the *Daily Orange*, and became head of the copy desk in her junior year. She was passed over to become the paper's managing editor her senior year because she didn't have enough managerial experience. So she turned this disappointment into an opportunity by starting the campus's first news magazine, *Outlook*.

After earning a master's degree in journalism from Columbia University and living the vagabond life of a neophyte journalist, Eng accomplished another first in

1990, when she became the country's first Asian American columnist. At the time, she was in charge of hiring columnists for Gannett, and one of her goals was to diversify its editorial voices by selecting Native American and Hispanic columnists. She also had someone in mind to become the first Asian American columnist. But Eng's editors weren't sold on the writer she had chosen, so they suggested someone they were impressed with—her.

That was the beginning of Eng's column, "Bridges." Its title came from her desire to build linkages between people, and among such topics as science, religion, women's issues, and spirituality. "I try to relate what happens around us to what happens within us," she says. "The column isn't written just for Asian American readers, but I do deal with issues of importance to that audience from time to time."

Eng's bridge-building also shows in her work to get minorities involved in journalism. In addition to consulting on diversity, she is a past president of the Asian American Journalists Association, and of Unity, Journalists of Color, an organization of multicultural journalists. She continues to serve on the diversity committee of the Newspaper Association of America board, and on the national advisory board for the Knight Centers for Specialized Journalism at the University of Maryland and the University of Southern California.

For Eng, connecting with others has always been important. She grew up in Houston, but came east for college because she was born in New Jersey and wanted to reconnect with her East Coast roots. "I had a lot to learn when I came to SU," she says. "I had a closet full of dresses and skirts. The first thing my roommate said to me was, 'Dinah, we have to go shopping and get you some jeans.'"

Eng isn't overly apprehensive about what comes next. She's already had some freelance success, writing pieces for such outlets as *The New York Times* and *Discovery.com*. And she maintains her ties with Gannett News Service, continuing to write "Bridges."

"I've always believed that life is a journey of the spirit," Eng says. "Writing, for me, is a vehicle to explore that journey. And as congested as the freeways in L.A. are, most days I find myself driving around with a smile on my face for no particular reason. I'm just happy to be where I am."



Joe Lawton

Keith Brown '82

Tackling Tough Issues

While working as a television reporter in Hartford, Connecticut, in the mid-'90s, Keith Brown reported on half-a-dozen child abuse and neglect cases—all involving African American children. He knew it was important to report on these incidents, but he was concerned that the stories gave a skewed view of black parents.

Brown's own mother played an important role in preparing him for adulthood, and he feels the bond between African American sons and their mothers is especially important. "Because of the position of black men in this country, it takes someone special to raise a black son to believe he can do anything he wants," he says.

To highlight this relationship, Brown wrote *Sacred Bond: Black Men and Their Mothers* (Little, Brown, and Co.). The book made several top-selling lists, including the Blackboard African American Bestsellers List, and ones compiled by *Esence* magazine and Black Entertainment Television. It also won the American Library Association's Black Caucus 1999 nonfiction Honors Book Award.

Pretty good for a first-time author. But Brown has had plenty of experience communicating with an audience. He is a producer of critically acclaimed television documentaries, including *Blacks and Blue*, an investigation of the sometimes adversarial relationship between African Americans and the police; and *Deadly Justice*, an examination of the death penalty. As a member of the producing team for *CBS Reports: In the Killing Fields of America*, a documentary about violence in the United States, he won a George Foster Peabody Award, an Emmy Award, and a Robert F. Kennedy Award for Excellence in Journalism. Currently, Brown is a senior producer of specials for Geraldo Rivera at NBC, work-

ing on such topics as the influence of Latinos in the United States and the recent Los Angeles police department scandal.

When he was an SU student, Brown's biggest interest was Africa, so he majored in international relations in the College of Arts and Sciences. That interest led to his first overseas experience, as part of Crossroads Africa, an organization that sends students to Africa to work on summer development projects. Between his junior and senior years, Brown traveled to Botswana. "It changed my life," he says.

After work as a Peace Corps volunteer in Cameroon, a stint producing cultural programs at the American Museum of Natural History, and serving as director of overseas programs for Crossroads Africa, Brown found himself wanting to communicate his African experiences to others. As a result, he broke into broadcasting by offering his expertise on Africa to the PBS television program *South Africa Now*. What began as volunteer work turned into a job for Brown, who honed his skills by earning a master's degree from Columbia University's School of Journalism.

Brown became an author the same way he broke into journalism—he plunged right in. "During my book tour, I met many SU alumni," he says. "The support I've gotten from the SU community has been absolutely amazing. I made lifelong friends."

—Cynthia Moritz

Photo Op

Life as a photojournalist can be tedious. Just ask Ruth Fremson, who stood in the rain for hours before snapping her Pulitzer Prize-winning photo of White House Deputy Press Secretary Joe Lockhart peering out of his window shortly after then-President Bill Clinton gave his grand jury testimony in the Monica Lewinsky case. "I'd staked out a position outside the White House early that morning," Fremson says. "As I walked back to the press room at the end of the day, I took a picture of Lockhart peeking out at us from behind closed curtains. I didn't think about it at the time, but later I realized my photo captured the hunkered-down mood of the White House under siege."

Photography was not Fremson's first career choice. She grew up in Queens, New York, and had planned to go to art school in New York City. But her parents wanted

her to have a broader education, so she enrolled as a dual advertising design/photography major in the College of Visual and Performing Arts and the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. After two years of graduate study at Ohio University, Fremson became a photographer for the *Washington Times*, later worked for the Associated Press, and currently works for *The New York Times*.

In the year and a half since Fremson began working for *The New York Times*, she has covered John McCain's presidential primary campaign, Rick Lazio's senate run in New York State, and the 2000 Republican Convention. She then hooked up with the Al Gore campaign after Labor Day and rode that through Election Day. "Covering the inaugural festivities was a nice finish to a long political year," Fremson says. "Now I'm looking forward to staying home and exploring what New York City has to offer."

—Christine Yackel



Joe Lawton

Ruth Fremson '86