


# Boston: more than a feeling?

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2008-5-28

 I am in Boston for a [conference](#) on the media and global governance but it's the local news that has caught my eye.

The Boston [Fox](#) and [ABC](#) affiliates that I watched in my Cambridge Hotel room were leading with [weather porn](#) last night as heavy rain storms swept across eastern Massachusetts. I love weather stories. To care about the weather is to be human.

But these programmes were as fast as a hurricane. They didn't stop for breath as they went live from outside resident's homes ("There was a big bang when the lightning hit the chimney"), over to the meteorologist ("more autumn tomorrow") and then straight on to a feast of other human-interest tales.

Fox had the family whose home burnt down after a factory fire 18 months ago – ("It was like a warzone" said the mother) – yesterday their replacement trailer-home fell off the back of the delivery truck and was wrecked. ABC went with a fire in a subway ("I guess the office will understand when I am late").

No-one got hurt in *any* of these stories but it felt like the news response to a terror attack. The presenters didn't actually over-inflate the stories, that was left to the mile-high graphics and rapid cutting. It was done with humour and incredible tautness. But in a highly-competitive TV market like Boston's you have to fight for the viewer's attention and deliver a daily dose of high-octane, people-sized news. It made the BBC and ITV's regional TV output look like the Open University channel.

It's exactly the sort of parochial profit-driven news that I suspect is viewed with disdain or indifference by many of the internationally-minded folk who will gather at the [Robert John F Kennedy School](#) [oops – see comments] tomorrow for this conference. As someone who started on local papers and city TV I have a different perspective.

All news is local and telling stories about your area can be as important to a healthy society as international news channels. TV is very limited in its ability to get complex ideas across but it sure as hell delivers basic contact between public and events.

More from Harvard later.

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