Acclaimed Screenwriter Nora Ephron Offers Insights to School of the Arts Students

BY JAMES DEVITT

Small, Graff Zivin Capture Agricultural Economics Awards

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Arthur Small, of Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) and Earth Institute, received the Quality of Research Discovery Award from the American Agricultural Economics Association (AAEA).

His award was for an article in the Journal of Political Economy, "Valuing Research Leads: Bioprospecting and the Conservation of Genetic Resources," co-authored with University of California, Berkeley professor Gordon Rausser.

Small and Rausser's research showed circumstances in which market-based financial incentives encourage the conservation of biodiversity, and that the process of biodiversity prospecting—the search for valuable compounds from wild organisms—Small and Rausser demonstrated that the financing from access rights to biological resources could support conservation efforts under certain scenarios.

The AAEA also awarded Mailman School of Public Health Professor Joshua Graff Zivin the prize for Outstanding Journal Article: American Journal of Agricultural Economics. His research, "Insect Population Dynamics, Pesticide Use and Farmworker Health," and end in the American Journal of Agricultural Economics. It was co-authored with David Sundling of the University of California, Berkeley.

Graff Zivin and Sunding analyzed the impact of regulations designed to reduce pesticide poisoning of farmers and farm laborers. The researchers included these controls, which impose a time interval between pesticide application and harvest, achieved their aims under only certain conditions.

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Nora Ephron's introduction to screenwriting came in the 1970s when she was dating Carl Bernstein, Bernstein, along with Washington Post colleague Bob Woodward, broke the Watergate story. The two then served as the main characters of the film "All the President's Men." Part of William Goldman's original screenplay caused concern for the real-life journalists, and Bernstein, along with Ephron, "fiddled with it.

Ephron recounted her role at the typewriter, capturing their changes and retyping the many sections that they retained. By the time they finished revising, Ephron had learned the skills behind the art of screenwriting. The film went on to win several Academy Awards, including one for best screenplay.

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Her entry into the film world came as surprise to Ephron. "The last thing I ever wanted to be was a screenwriter. I had no interest in the movie business," New York Times critic, "She told me how much she had learned the skills behind the art of screenwriting.

"I was always wanted to be a journalist," she said. Ephron also shared that Hanks has to have the last word. "But he's not an egomaniac," she quickly clarified, "he is unequivocally collaborative.

In addition to offering tips and insights, Ephron talked about the role of women in the industry. According to Ephron, conditions are improving, but they are still not ideal. What drives the economy of Hollywood is the third world and said, "It is hard for people like me who make intellectual, word-driven films with strong female characters," said Ephron. She feels that things are starting to change now that women like Julia Roberts and Meg Ryan can open movies with big box office draws rivaling big male names.

Ephron explained that students are often asked to make films about women, the area of writing usually reserved for the most. With "Silkwood," for example, the first movie that Ephron produced, the studio was not originally interested in the film. According to Ephron, when Meryl Streep took an interest in the film so did the studio—fearing that if they did not make it, Streep would go to a competitor to make the movie and win an Oscar. With such an impressive list of hit films under her belt, the Academy Award-nominated director is the role for Ephron. Although she was not able to offer many details, she told the audience that she has written a play that is set to be produced, with Jack O'Brien directing. She also has two scripts pending with Columbia Pictures, one about a New York journalist and the other is a bird-watching film, featuring the red-tail hawks that have been sighted nesting on 47th Street and 5th Avenue in Manhattan for the last several years.

The campus community honored 107 victims of the terrorist attacks—41 alumni as well as relatives and friends of current faculty, staff, students and alumni, in a service of prayer and remembrance held on Nov. 15.

Seeking to comfort those grieving the loss of loved ones and to honor the contributions of those who were lost, the service reflected both the American and religious traditions.

Held at noon in the Kone Atrium of Alfred Lerner Hall, the bells of St. Paul's Chapel were tolled as the service began.

Prayers and readings were offered by a variety of representatives from the clergy and student religious groups, along with performances by the Columbia Poetry and Song Ensemble, Columbia Drum Jammers, the University Gospel Choir, Jubilation!, a choir, and others.

Many relatives, friends and professors of the 41 alumni lost in the attacks attended the service, which was organized by the Office of the University Chaplain through the Office of the President.

President George Bush Rupp reminded the audience that if one of Columbia's strengths is the diversity of a community "from every ethnic and religious tradition and from nations around the globe," we must therefore continue to reach out across lines that mark unbridgeable divisions between us. He added, "Only by reaching out to each other can we honor those whom we commemorate today." Following his talk, Rupp read the names of each of the 107 victims as those in attendance were asked to stand in tribute.

Chaplain Jewelnel Davis, in the closing benediction, said: "Our cherished traditions are sacred and will be a present and eternal source of comfort; our enduring foundation of strength. Nothing can separate us from the love and care that ships that have blessed our lives.

Davis continued, "The ties that bind our hearts and our souls will always abide. There is no room for those that we have loved. They will always enliven, always warm and always empower our lives."

—Suzanne Trimel

Service of Prayer and Remembrance Honors CU Grads and Friends Lost in Sept. 11 Attacks