The Newsroom Brain

A Working Guide to Journalism Decisions

NMC
EXECUTIVE EDUCATION
RESEARCH AND PARTNERSHIPS

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
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About The Newsroom Brain

This publication is one in a series from the Editorial Leadership Initiative, a three-year project of NMC, Northwestern University’s media management center. ELI works to improve the management skills of newspaper editors by helping them recognize trends in their communities and newsrooms while cultivating the skills they will need to prepare for the future.

In setting up the work of ELI, the editors interviewed dozens of newspaper editors and publishers either one-on-one or in focus groups. We also heard from the many participants in NMC’s executive seminars. While the questions from non-editors came from different sources, they seemed to be asking a familiar question: How does the newsroom brain function? That is, if editors know they are going to offend or anger readers, why do they do it anyway? Editors, weary from the blank stares they get when they explain a decision, asked for help in telling their story. This is a first attempt.

The Newsroom Brain is designed to help editors articulate and educate non-newsroom staff about basic journalism ethics and decision-making processes. We hope you will find it to be a great way to get newsroom and non-newsroom staffers talking about ethics and values using real-life scenarios.

Michael P. Smith, Director, ELI
Stacy Lynch, Project Manager, ELI
Acknowledgments

The editors would like to thank the many thoughtful journalists who contributed to this publication by sharing their experience and ideas. Particular thanks to Steve Rhodes for his original research and support in publication. Thanks to Professor Dick Schwarzlose of the Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University for his forward and wise counsel on this book. Thank you to Vivian Vahlberg of the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation for her continued support of ELI and its publications.
Forward

By Richard Schwarzlose, Ph.D.
Professor, Medill School of Journalism

Reporters and editors are looking for answers to the growing number of ethical dilemmas they encounter every day. Increasingly, however, journalists are realizing that while codes of ethics provide broad principles for newsrooms, when journalists face a reporting dilemma, answers that work come from thoughtful discussion among reporters and editors within the newsroom.

The scenarios in this publication provide opportunities for you to explore the dimensions of news dilemmas and to discuss ways of deciding how to handle the issues they raise.

The goal of such discussion is to make you more alert to possible ethical problems as they develop in the newsroom and to give you practice in decision-making based on thoughtful discussions of the problems of your newsroom colleagues. Good luck.
The Inherent Conflicts in Ethics

By Michael P. Smith
Director, Editorial Leadership Initiative
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This is how easily it happens: After working eight straight Friday nights and 27 consecutive days without a break, the managing editor decides to take off early for a weekend getaway. The news editor sneaks off early to catch her daughter's solo with the marching band. There is no major news. Things are extremely well-planned for the weekend and Monday papers. The assistant news editor, who was a star in the sports department with spectacular centerpiece packages, is left in charge. Their parting words were: "We need something to liven up this news report:

depicted as sleazy, plaid-draped con men, are furious that their local newspaper would suggest that customers bypass them to buy cars from unknown sources on the World Wide Web. The usual ad boycott and apologies follow.

1 The events described here are real. The situation has been slightly altered to protect the identity of the newspaper.
In relating this incident months later, the editor observed: "It's never the big things that trip us up; it is the little things..." Such is the case with ethical decision-making in newspapers. The big issues are obvious and there are all kinds of safeguards and legal assistance in place. The little things, the decisions made by beat reporters and frontline editors during the routine of their jobs, create many of the ethical problems faced by editors today. These are the problems that drive non-journalists to frustration. Frequently they ask: What were they thinking? Are they on automatic pilot? Don't they look at this stuff before they put it in the newspaper? The editors often come up with a set of responses. No one ever seems satisfied - tough decisions are rarely satisfying.

Investigate any of these cases and you will find that a framework for ethical decision making is in place. Many newspapers have published codes of ethics; most professional organizations have them too. Many journalism schools teach ethics in separate classes and integrate ethics throughout other classes. By the time you are a reporter at a newspaper, ethics are pounded into you daily. Even if they are not referred to explicitly in conversations between reporters and editors, they are implied in the types of questions being asked - journalistic shorthand for getting at the ethical considerations. At the foundation of most journalistic codes of ethics are three basic principles: 1) Tell the truth, 2) Act to minimize harm and 3) Maintain independence. They are listed in this order because gut and experience—not academic or scientific research—tell us that they are considered and weighted in this order by working professionals. The community, the readers of the newspaper, would also say that No. 2 doesn't seem to matter to journalists as much as the others.

These basic principles guide most journalistic thinking today. They also cause great internal conflict. They point to a decision: Publish the story or don't.

You can see how telling the truth about the ease of buying used cars over the Internet actually caused harm to local used car salesmen. Younger reporters believe that facts are truth; that telling two sides of a story gets to a greater truth. Yet the public often understands that the real truth on an issue may not come by juxtaposing two extremes; it may be somewhere in the gray area of personal experience. Even when truth itself is not
harmful, it is often elusive and temporal. What appears to be true today may not be true next year.

Many editors are experimenting with ways to help reporters get at the greater truth today. In effect, they are creating a new journalistic shorthand in their conversations with reporters. Sit in on this conversation and you may hear these questions: What is the main thing driving this story and how did it come about? How do you provide context or meaning? Do the facts reflect the wholeness of the story? All of these questions are aimed at getting at a more complete truth that may actually act to minimize harm.

It would surprise some newspaper readers that journalists have a code of ethics that includes consideration of the feelings of individuals, whether they are sources or victims. Even though it is not universally embraced in newsrooms, the concept exists. Sometimes, an editor will call a family member of a slain victim and tell them about a photo that the newspaper is considering publishing. Occasionally, the editor will write a memo to readers asking for feedback on certain sticky decisions. The concept of not causing harm conflicts with the need to preserve independence. In the new journalistic shorthand, the conversation between editor and reporter will probably use the word "frame," as in "is there another way to frame this story?"

If that question had been asked of our friends in the opening scenario, it might have produced a story about local dealers who are using the Internet to sell used cars, the advantages and disadvantages of buying over the Internet, or how used car sales reps deal with their persistent negative image.

At the heart of acting to minimize harm is the idea that journalists need to treat sources and subjects with respect. In the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics, this includes showing "compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects. Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief. Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance:"

The code also describes privacy and taste behaviors. Combined, the various aspects of the code describe what may be called good citizenship.
Basic principle No. 3—maintain independence—conflicts with the idea of citizenship. In some newsrooms today, the idea of remaining distant from the community is being challenged by the activities of public or civic journalism. These activities ask the journalist to think of the viability or the civic health of the community when framing and reporting stories. It is controversial because it challenges the principle of independence. Can a newspaper objectively cover a community while at the same time working to solve civic problems? In the past, the independence principle may have been applied to activities that might compromise, or seem to compromise, a reporter's ability to act objectively—whether the sports editor should coach his daughter's little league team; whether the movie critic should take a junket to interview the star of a forthcoming movie; whether the state editor should march in the local gay-rights parade.

In the past, emphasis on independence was used to make sure people were doing things right. Today some argue that independence prevents newsrooms from understanding their communities, not only from doing things right but also from doing the right thing. This may mean lowering some of the walls between the newsroom and the community. The debate rages and it will not be settled here, partly because there is no one "right" answer to the ethical dilemma.

A personal aside proves this point. Even with rules, it is not always clear which of the tenets should prevail. Even if they appear to be absolute, they are no consolation for difficult decisions. One such decision that I still find troublesome evolved over five years. I've slightly changed the situation and simplified it for illustration.

In 1980, a reporter came to me with what was then the story of the first AIDS victim in town—a young man who had been living in San Francisco returned home because he was ill. In his hospital room, he told the reporter his life story. He had agreed to tell the story if the reporter would not disclose his name because his family did not know he was gay. In the room with him as he told the story was his partner. It was a sad and poignant story about the devastation of AIDS. Despite very strong personal convictions against anonymity and not naming the source, I agreed to let the reporter write the story without using the young man's name. Five years later, the same reporter came to me with a story
idea—the AIDS quilt was coming to town. She visited the site of the quilt and discovered a patch with the young man’s name on it. He had succumbed to the disease two years earlier. She returned to the office and wrote a story about the young man, mentioning her earlier story. This time she intended to name the young man. The victim's partner and parents pleaded with us not to name the man—his relatives and neighbors never knew that he was gay and they wanted to keep it that way. We explained that putting his name on the quilt was parallel to publishing it. We published. This was a situation in which telling the truth superceded the minimization of harm. In retrospect, I'm not too sure what purpose telling the truth served other than to cause discomfort to the family. In today's conversations, the questions I would ask would be about framing—is there another way to tell this story?

As this anecdote shows, there are inherent conflicts in ethical decision-making. They are conflicts journalists face dozens of times a day. It is a muddy field they play on. To cope, many editors have followed a simple framework: They have declared "red flag" topics. These are topics that the editor wants to know about or wants further discussion on before they get into print. They put it in writing. Expected behaviors are communicated. And they put it into practice. "The Newsroom Brain" is their story. In this scenario form, it attempts to show the decisions many editors face each day and how they deal with the inherent conflicts.

This publication is meant to be a conversation starter, not the final word. Copy it. Share it. Discuss it. It is designed so that scenarios are set up by a discussion of the ethical landscape; the scenarios are followed by editors discussing an outcome. The scenarios represent real events and real decisions that newspaper editors had to make. They intentionally do not represent landmark cases because the editors wanted to be able to illustrate that even routine stories are filled with tough decisions. Even though some of these cases may remind you of actual events, make no assumptions about them. Try not to base your decisions on decisions made in the past. Base your decision on what is presented only in the scenario.

4 Some news organizations, fearing legal ramifications, do not allow newsrooms to publish codes of ethics. In that case, the editors suggest putting it in spoken words, then putting it into practice.
Resist the urge to page past the scenarios to the section on "How Editors Really Handle It" until you have reached a decision and discussed the scenario. Let us know how they work and how you used this publication.

*Michael P, Smith is managing director of NMC and director of the Editorial Leadership Initiative.*
The Ethical Landscape

Life In The Newsroom

Independence of the Newsroom

Fairness / Credibility

Respecting / Reflecting Community Values

Photojournalism Ethics
The Ethical Landscape

Life in the Newsroom

The following article is reprinted with permission from The Arizona Republic. It is intended to represent a typical day in a newspaper newsroom.

On Dec. 8, 1996, Richard de Uriarte, the reader advocate for The Arizona Republic, offered to open his newsroom's doors and put its decision-making up for inspection. It offers a peek into the ways that newsrooms make decisions and the values at stake.

Executive News Editor Don Nicolson fidgeted in his chair. "I'm concerned about (Page) A1 art;' he told the other staffers at Tuesday's 4 p.m. newsroom meeting. He thought that the planned protest against the term "squaw" might have possibilities. 

"There's a lot of interest in this story;' he told the others. And photographer Michael Chow had taken some shots of the signs protesters planned to put up throughout Squaw Peak Park and along Squaw Peak Parkway this weekend. The story could be the front-page lead story.

Assistant Metro Editor Venita Hawthorne James had a few reservations.

"My ambivalence is that people say they are going to do something (erect 500 signs);" she said. "I'd rather see if they do it:'

But by late Tuesday afternoon, there were only a few other contenders for the top of Page A1.

A subway in Paris had been bombed. Pictures and stories were coming over the wires. That would be a stretch for the front page in Phoenix, though.

Reporter Abe Kwok had uncovered a pattern of racial intimidation against a family in central Phoenix. Three times, Phoenix police were called to the home. Three times, officers...
responded. But in each instance, police failed to file a report.

"Do we have art with this?" News Editor Vinton Supplee asked.

No. The family, fearing additional harassment, refused to be photographed. That's a downer for editors. Ours is a graphic world, and front-page color art is both visually appealing and draws reader attention to the story.

No one, however, criticized the family.

“They’re probably right,” another staffer allowed.

“Well, what's our lead?” Nicolson wondered.

What would you say? If you were at the meeting, what would you have suggested? Even if you weren't asked, would you like to be sitting in the room when those decisions are being made?

We'd like to invite some of you to observe different meetings that the newsroom and editorial departments conduct throughout the day. We want to open up the process of how we gather the news and comment about it.

We're planning occasional invitations to small groups of readers, no more than five or six people at a time, including average citizens, community leaders and newsmakers interested in how we make our decisions. It ought to be an educational process for our readers and us.

The visits would take a couple of hours. We'll give you a little background about the meetings and the staff members attending. You might have a chance to chat with a few editors and share with me your impressions.

If you are interested, send me a note telling a little about yourself and why you would like to attend. Don't forget to include your name, address, daytime phone number and your occupation. Mail them to me at The Arizona Republic, P.O. Box 2245, Phoenix, AZ 85002. Or send e-mail to: rdeuriarte@aol.com or pnireader@aol.com via the Internet.

"Ours is a graphic world, and front-page color art is both visually appealing and draws reader attention to the story."
You have plenty of meetings to choose from in this building.

On the 10th floor, for example, Gazette Editorial Page Deputy Editor Mark Genrich was fuming. He had his hands on a memo from the state Supreme Court, a post-election analysis of Proposition 102. Does Prop. 102 eliminate jurisdiction of the juvenile court over juveniles? No, the memo says.

"That's what we said before the election," Genrich told the editorial-page staff. "It's not that they didn't know it. They just lied in the campaign. It makes me so mad."

You just knew a cut-'em-off-at-the-knees column would soon follow.

In The Gazette's editorial-board meetings, my former colleagues debate the daily issues, trying to win Editor James Hill's nod. Columnist John Kolbe noted President Clinton proposing softer cuts in welfare.

"His sop to the left," Kolbe intoned.

"This is a sop to starving children," Bill Hart countered.

"He signed the bill, didn't he?" Kolbe rejoined.

Things haven't changed much up there.

Across the way, The Arizona Republic editorial board has invited board members and top staff of Good Samaritan Medical Center and St. Joseph's Hospital to discuss their merger. At these meetings, top policymakers across the Valley, state and nation, argue their positions in hopes of editorial support.

Oh, and about Page One? Taking editor James' advice, reporter Pat Kossan changed her lead paragraph on the Squaw Peak story, taking out the reference to the 500 signs. The story, and the picture, appeared on the front page Wednesday, above the fold.

You should have been there.
Newsroom Independence
Without Fear or Favor

In 1896, The New York Times was bankrupt. Circulation had dropped to a paltry 9,000. It was losing $2,500 a day. Adolph S. Ochs published a successful newspaper in Chattanooga, Tenn., but he was virtually bankrupt himself. Ochs, however, convinced the day's leading financiers to back his effort to buy and build The New York Times. His mission: to establish a "decent, dignified and independent" newspaper that would stand in contrast to the sensational scandal sheets of William Randolph Hearst, James Gordon Bennett and Joseph Pulitzer that ruled the day. His guiding philosophy: "To Give the News Impartially without Fear or Favor Regardless Of Any Party, Sect or Interest Involved."

This piece of history is recounted in Harrison Salisbury's 1980 book, "Without Fear or Favor:" The book's central thesis is that, with the publishing of the confidential Pentagon Papers in 1971 that revealed the government's secret history of the Vietnam War (which later led, in part, to the Watergate scandal famously uncovered by The Washington Post), the Times finally fulfilled the promise of the press' responsibility as the Fourth Estate—a power center on footing with the society's greatest institutions. That responsibility is rooted in the notion that the press is both surrogate and intermediary for the citizenry, charged with the critical examination of the day's issues. This ascendancy was only possible because of the credibility won through Ochs' insistence on independence. A newspaper inextricably linked with a political party or commercial interest, or a newspaper that could be intimidated or bought off, could never have built a brand name as powerful as The New York Times.

Independence in the newsroom is indispensable to reporting truth—or at least as close a view of reality as is humanly possible. Reporting the news without fear or favor means reporting the news without bowing to the interests of those who would see truth bent to their advantage. Only by reporting the news without fear of government reprisal or advertiser anger, without favor to those same interests for future reciprocal gain, can the reader be assured that what they read is the most honest attempt at deciphering reality as independent journalists
can make. Only by producing journalism in such a way can newspapers market its chief virtues—integrity, dependability, accuracy. Only by producing journalism in such a way can newspapers unhypocritically cast its spotlight on the on the charlatans and deceivers it so loves to expose. And only by producing journalism in such a way can journalists live up to the inherent responsibilities attached to the freedom ascribed to them in the U.S. constitution.

The independent newsroom is an idealized state. Our world does not exist in such a state, however, and newsrooms are not perfect. Unfortunately, personal biases, advertiser pressure, marketing principles, the public's taste and back-scratching with sources all take their toll on the integrity of the public prints.

But the basic operating model, the standard assumption from which journalists start, is that only a disinterested, thorough examination produces a quality news report. Without fear or favor is the basis by which we try to operate.

“Reporting the news without fear or favor means reporting the news without bowing to the interests of those who would seem truth bent to their advantage.”
Fairness/Credibility

An independent newsroom is not necessarily a fair or credible newsroom. Independent thought can still lack fairness or integrity. Yet, only an independent newsroom can be fair and credible. These qualities are inextricably linked. What do we mean by fair and credible?

Ask a reader what being fair means, and they'll often say, "Showing both sides of an issue:" But being fair is both more and less than that. It is more than that because sometimes there are more than two sides to an issue.

Being fair means thoroughly examining an issue and providing every reasonable opportunity for affected or involved parties to respond to a reporter's inquiries. It means presenting an issue in context. And it means accuracy. Fairness is a behavior that informs reporting strategies. An independent newsroom allows for unfair behavior, but only fairness ensures credibility.

And what is credibility? Credibility is the reputation you have for believability. Does your newspaper that gets it paper publish the truth? And at what rate? How often do they make mistakes? Do they admit those mistakes and correct them?

Credibility is a quality issue. When newspapers are judged on how "good" they are, it is credibility that is judged. Is this a newspaper that gets it right?

"An independent newsroom allows for unfair behavior, but only fairness ensures credibility."
Respecting/Reflecting Community Values

The "left ear" on the front page of The New York Times still carries in it the slogan Adolph S. Ochs first published in 1886: "All The News That's Fit To Print." Editors who worked at a time when the word "budget" wasn't to be uttered in a newsroom, who knew nothing of the paper's financial operations (and, in fact, went out of their way not to know in order to ensure the integrity of the newsroom), may have believed that was what they were delivering to their readers.

In today's world, editors are all too aware that instead of printing all the news that's fit to print (an impossible task to define in any case), they often print, as the joke goes, all the news that fits. There are limits, although the Internet is breaking down boundaries of time and space, imposed by advertising revenue and editorial department constraints, which in part dictate the amount of news published each day.

But just what is "fit" to print? In Ochs' case, it was news deemed significant, important and dignified—the news of government and commerce that shaped public life. It was news, and language, that didn't violate Ochs' standards of taste. The criteria and standards carried out in the paper each day, right or wrong, helped form the newspaper's personality.

Today editors make the same decisions, assessing what is "fit" for the day's paper according to a subjective sense of what readers and advertisers want and need.

On some of the universal conundrums editors face, broad industry standards have been instituted. More particular situations require situational ethics and decision-making.

“…instead of printing all the news that’s fit to print…they often print, as the joke goes, all the news that fits.”
Photojournalism Ethics

It’s a gory photo, an upsetting photo, a photo sure to spark outrage. Are you willing to stand up to the criticism you’re certain to face if you run the photo? Are you sensationalizing? Is it necessary to run the photo, particularly when many people read their newspaper over breakfast? Does it serve a public good? Does it invade the family’s privacy?

The photo department faces an array of ethical conundrums. Debates on today’s digital technology often underscore the extent to which photographers used darkroom techniques to alter photographs before digital technology existed. Is there such a thing as non-manipulative photography? Other ethical questions involve photographing minors, or taking photos from public space (the sidewalk) of people in private space (their bedroom), or of the paparazzi. But the most recurring ethical question for photo departments is the use of photos many readers find offensive—photos of dead people or grieving relatives. These are often photos that win Pulitzer Prizes.

Consider the case of Baylee Almon, the baby girl pictured being carried away in a fireman’s arms from the Oklahoma City federal building after it was destroyed by a bomb. This photo—like that of the Challenger explosion—became the signature photo of the event. What most readers probably don’t know is that Baylee Almon died. Readers probably assumed this girl was being carried to safety. What if they knew from the caption that the girl was already dead? Would that have sparked outrage over the photo?

Readers don’t always like bad news. But as Geneva Overholser, former ombudsman for The Washington Post and former editor of the Des Moines Register, once said, the job of the editor isn’t to provide good news but to provide a good newspaper. In fact, it’s a higher calling to do so. The press has a duty to report bad news, and if that comes in the form of a photograph rather than a written description, so be it.

The photograph tells a story that should provoke outrage. That is often the first step toward problem-solving. Confronting readers with reality is the job of a newspaper. News values tell us this photograph is the most powerful way to tell the story.
Sensationalizing is a phenomenon that occurs when a photo or story is presented for its own sake with the intent to provoke emotion but without any other basis or value. The provocation is an end in itself.

Journalists always ask: Is the photo necessary to accomplish this? Does the story do the job? A photograph is just another element of storytelling. Withholding it is like withholding a fact. Readers are adults who know of death and tragedy in life. They should be considered mature enough to cope with a disturbing image.

As for the family, some newspapers make courtesy calls to warn families, test their feelings and offer condolences. It should never be up to a family, of course, to make an editorial decision. But making such a call, or going through a family friend or religious representative, can be a classy way of handling the issue. The vast majority of the time, journalists find family members supportive—they are outraged and want something done. They want the public to know what has happened to them. And they want a story done right. It will remain in their scrapbooks forever.

“The press has a duty to report bad news, and if that comes in the form of a photograph rather than a written description, so be it.”
Why We Do The Things We Do

The following article is reprinted with permission from the Macon Telegraph.

By Deborah Evans
August 14, 1997

Mornin’ Readers! This won’t be news to you, but what life offers us is often pretty horrible. I’m talking about such events as the Vietnam War, the space shuttle explosion, the Oklahoma City bombing ... It also isn’t news to you that it often falls to newspapers, through words and photos, to chronicle the horrible. Just as we chronicle other “good” news events.

In recent weeks the Telegraph has given Page One coverage in words and photos to a program that pairs disabled children with at-risk teens, public schools preparing for the new school year, and the rescue of a child from a burning building by Warner Robins police.

On July 23, we chronicled a Page One story headlined: “Fatal crash snarls traffic.” According to authorities, a Florida couple wasn’t wearing seat belts when their car hydroplaned and flipped over. The husband died in the wreck. The wife was treated for her injuries at the scene. A Telegraph photographer caught the whole thing on film. We ran a Page One photo. Her bra showed in the photo.

Here’s what some of you had to say about our decision to use the photo:

"I would really hate to be her family;" said one member of the Telegraph’s advisory board.

"The photo brought home to me the violence and seriousness of the wreck;" another member responded.

"How would you like a picture of yourself, half naked, spread over the front page of a daily paper? How would you like a picture like that of

From a letter that landed on my desk this week: "Your newspaper has reached an all time low. To print a picture of a wreck victim, partially clothed and injured, is about as callous as it gets . ... I expect a little human decency from my community newspaper.”
your mother? ... This photo was embarrassing to me ...;” wrote one reader in a letter to the editor.

"You have dishonored and shamed the person of Janice Johnston. Her dignity demanded more;" wrote another reader. "Resist the urge to sensationalize at such cost to the victim of tragedy. Elevate yourselves!"

I thought it would be a good idea to give our photo chief, Woody Marshall, a chance to talk to you about the whys and wherefores of running such a photo.

"Photos like that are disturbing. They are hard photos to look at;" he said. "But we are a newspaper and sometimes news isn't all good. And a lot of times it's not pretty." Woody told me that the photos from the wreck scene also included some of the husband who was killed.

"We chose not to run those;" Woody said. "We looked at a lot of photos and we tried to choose the photo that best described the scene overall without being too insensitive:"

In case you're wondering, Woody has been a photojournalist for 12 years. In that time he has learned something about the impact a photo can have.

"You tend to remember photographs a lot more than other things in the paper;" Woody said. "Photos are easier to remember than words:"

He explained it this way: "If I say 'Vietnam War' to you, you're probably going to remember the photograph that Eddie Adams did of the military person shooting the guy he thought was a spy in the head ... or you're going to remember the little girl running with the napalm, running naked up the path. If I say 'space shuttle; you're going to remember that photograph of the space shuttle explosion."

Sometimes, when the horrible becomes news, something positive can happen.

It had been raining before the Florida couple wrecked. Their Geo Tracker hydroplaned because water had accumulated on I-75, a recurring problem that for some reason state officials have failed to respond to despite local pleas for help.

The coroner asked Woody for a copy of the wreck photo. He feels sure that the photo can be used to make a difference. That maybe this time, with the evidence of the problem in front of their eyes, state officials won't look the other way.
"We all have mamas, sons or daughters who always seem more dear to us after a powerful photo shows the loss messy as it often is of a loved one;" is what one of my bosses had to say about it.

Woody also wants you to know that decisions to run "sensitive" photos aren't made lightly.

Usually, as many people as possible weigh-in on the discussions, including photographers and editors. In fact, you do, too, through your letters and phone calls. Your comments always provide food for thought when the next decision rolls around ...