Shortly before her death in June, author and filmmaker Nora Ephron sat down with Pete Hamill, veteran journalist and distinguished writer-in-residence at the Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute, to talk craft and reminisce about the New York Post. The event can be viewed at nyuprimarysources.org.

On the old New York Post city room

NORA EPHRON: It was so dirty. It was sooo dirty. And it had no air-conditioning, of course. And when you came into the newsroom, there was a door with glass on it and someone had written in the dust on the door the word “filthy,” and spelled it p-h-i-l-t-h-y... But it was romantic in its own way, that room. You didn't even have your own desk, by the way. You had to troll for a desk.

PETE HAMILL: Or a chair! They were always two chairs short.

EPHRON: Yes, and all the chairs were broken. And everyone smoked and you'd put your cigarette down on the desk and it would burn into it. And that was part of why we all loved it. It was really fun being a reporter at the New York Post.

HAMILL: To give you a sense of where it was, where Battery Park City is, it was right across the street, 75 West Street. There was no Battery Park City then; it was the United Fruit Company piers, and in the summertime the windows were all open because, as Nora says, (publisher /owner) Dorothy Schiff would never pay for air-conditioning for the working stiffs at her newspaper. So from the bowels of these fruit delivery ships would come the most gigantic mosquitoes and flies. And we'd be sitting there at our typewriters going whack [hit table] and whack [hit table]. And we were never happier. At least I wasn't.

EPHRON: I did love it, I did. I thought, "I'm gonna do this forever."

On being a newspaper journalist

EPHRON: I was clever and I could write a sentence, but I was very lucky because they kind of knew I was a new kid and I was $98 a week. My first week I had turned in a story and (editor) Fred McMorrow came over to my desk and sat down and let me watch him cross out the extra words. One of the things he told me was absolutely the opposite of what I learned in my journalism class in high school. He said, "Never start a story with a quote. We always want to know who's saying it." That kind of thing was so great, but it was a long time before I really knew how to write a story.

HAMILL: The learning process, particularly on a tabloid like the Post, was amazingly quick because the staff was so small. There weren't so many specialists. If there was a fire at a school, you didn't wait for the education editor to get in a cab and go out there. You went.

EPHRON: When I was there about four years, they asked me if I wanted to be a columnist, and I didn't know how to write a column. Four years [after that], I was writing a column at Esquire. So I'm just a big believer in assembling it by little by little...trying to put yourself in someplace where you can write and write and write and write...and then, eventually, you can write.
TABLE FOR ONE
Living alone doesn’t mean living lonely, says Eric Klinenberg, but it does reshape the future of the American family.
/ BY ALYSON KRUEGER / GSAS ’12

PLANET OF THE APPS
Mobile apps are here to stay, and their cultural impact is only outdone by the soaring success of the industry.
/ BY JOHN BRINGARDNER / GSAS ’03

STORY OF THE STREETS
Hilary Ballon looks back at the visionary and controversial making of Manhattan’s most distinguishing feature—the Grid.
/ BY KEVIN FALLON / CAS ’09

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The ubiquity of mobile applications, and the way they’ve transformed our cell phones from a means of communication into vehicles for an entire lifestyle. The monopoly is also one of the few clear players in a rather frugal economy. “Table for One” (p. 30) checks in on another phenomenon—the fact that 32 million Americans now live alone. As that number continues to rise, the article considers how we’ll have to accommodate this domestic revolution. Lastly, “Story of the Streets” (p. 42) examines the monoculturalism of the great change to hit New York since Henry Hud- son first mapped the Narrows. The creation of Manhattan’s famed “grid” in 1811 dramat- ically altered the city for ever, and a new book and exhibit help contextual- ize just how brazen a project it was.

While the grid has simpli- fied how city slickers navigate New York, it seems we’re still always trying to find our footing as we stride faster and faster into the future. Hopefully stories like these help us take stock, personally and collecti- vely, for a few moments, to stare at what’s happening and wonder what it’s all about.

—The NYU Alumni Magazine team

CONTRIBUTORS

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JUSTIN WARNER is an NYC- based freelance writer, playwright, and lyricist. He has contributed to a variety of publications, including American Theatre, New Scientist, and McSweeney’s Internet Tendency.

The City It Challenges You to Do Big Things,” said U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor at NYU’s 180th Commencement. The Bronx native grew up a few blocks from Yankee Stadium, where the ceremony took place.
Thanks to all who responded to the Spring 2012 issue. Please keep the letters coming...

The (letter writers) do not realize that the women in the story are daughters, sisters, aunts, and friends to us all. I am the mother of a gay woman, who is married and herself the mother of twin boys with a chord on the way. She in no way threatens the institution of marriage—rather she strengthens it. She and her partner both have PhDs, both are university professors, and both are phenomenally smart. What strikes most of us who know gay people is that they are exactly like everyone else. If we were all as capable of loving as your subjects, our world would be a far better place.

Eileen Sharan Smith (WSC ’56)

New York, New York

I think Nicole Pezold wrote an excellent article regarding homelessness and housing (“Locked Out”). I work in the field of developing and managing permanent supportive housing for those who are homeless and have severe and persistent mental illness. I know firsthand the challenges that my nonprofit clientele face.

David Breinin (WSUC ’74)

Cleveland, Ohio

A HOME FOR ALL

One of the many alumni benefits available to all NYU alumni.

Please send your comments and opinions to: Readers’ Letters, NYU Alumni Magazine, 25 West Fourth Street, Room 619, New York, NY 10012; or e-mail us at alumni.magazine@nyu.edu. Include your mailing address, phone number, school, and year. Alumni become the property of NYU and may be edited for length and clarity.