

Our new stars

WATCH YOUR BACK
– TOMORROW'S WALKLEY-WINNERS ARE HOT ON YOUR HEELS




OVERALL WINNER & TV
The prodigy

At just 15 Sophie McNeill headed to East Timor to film a documentary on the country's health issues and living conditions. "It all started with phone calls from friends. I had been working with Timorese refugees in Perth and later they called me up from Timor telling me how awful the situation was. Their friends and relatives were dying of malaria and dengue fever. None of this was being reported by the Australian media. So I decided to report myself, I borrowed a camera and did it." It's this steely determination that makes McNeill a worthy recipient of the inaugural Young Australian Journalist of the Year Award.

In the few years following her first foray into documentary film making, she deferred her politics studies at Curtin University for a job with SBS' *Insight* and found herself working alongside some of her idols. McNeill has won a slew of awards, including finalist nominations in the 2007 Walkley Awards and 2005 New York Film Festival.

Intent upon living at the very heart of the story, McNeill moved to base herself in Beirut, Lebanon in late 2006. This immersion shows in the depth of her work, which she says benefits from the weeks of research and one-man-band approach that allows *Dateline* reporters to spend weeks in the field on each story.

She has remained refreshingly unaffected by her early successes. In fact she says her dream job is to become a newspaper journalist "when I grow up". Accepting the Young Australian Journalist of the Year Award, McNeill gave most of the credit and half of her \$5000 prize money to her Palestinian fixer, Raed al Atamna. McNeill's determination and sheer passion for reporting is inspiring.



PRINT
The idealist

Ben Doherty grew up in a family that loved news. "I distinctly remember being told to be quiet over and over again while the ABC news was on, so gradually I developed an understanding that it - whatever it was these people were talking about - must be of some importance."

He tested out careers in AFL and the music scene before joining *The Age* in early 2006 after stints at the *Bendigo Advertiser* and *The Canberra Times*.

Doherty nominates David Boon "by the length of the straight" as his childhood hero, but today he looks up to Michelle Grattan, Michael Gordon and Jack Waterford. He believes Stephen Gibbs, formerly of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, is the best writer in the country.

Having filed from Afghanistan, Iraq and East Timor, Doherty is making strides toward his dream of

	<p>ABC NEWS congratulates all the winners and finalists for their contribution to journalism.</p>			
				

working as a foreign correspondent. He missed collecting his trophy while reporting from West and East Timor, but made his presence felt on the night with a rousing prerecorded speech on the ideals of journalism. He fervently disagrees that idealism and scepticism are mutually exclusive journalistic traits.

“I reckon they’re completely compatible. I think at heart most journos have an idealistic streak. And while it can be hidden from view by the grind and pressures and compromises of the ceaseless daily news cycle, I think most journalists embark in the profession with a hope to improve society, their communities, by their work. I think the fourth estate role of the media, as the watchdogs on government and other public authorities, is still one of the core roles of journalism, and that is almost always accompanied by an inherent questioning of what those bodies tell you.”

Doherty encourages aspiring journalists to get a foot in the door. “Do work experience wherever you can, just get yourself published/broadcast and spend as much time as you can in newsrooms. Nag, badger, harass for any opportunity going. It’s always the keenest ones, and the ones who are around when a spot opens up, who get the jobs.”



Maxwellton Races: one of the photographs that won Andrew Quilty the photographic category at the Young Australian Journalist of the Year Awards



PHOTOGRAPHY

The accidental artist

Andrew Quilty drifted into photography after quitting a design degree when he was given a camera, before setting off to drive around Australia. Quilty shoots the rich and powerful for *The Australian Financial Review*, and does not use the words “work it”. Ever. “Work it’ is for the red carpet and that’s not photography,” he laughs.

The trick to a good portrait, he says, is finding common ground with the subject. “If you can find common ground beyond what they might be publicly known for you’re halfway there. Then of course if you are able to implement the basic principles of photography: light, composition etc you might have a good portrait.”

As a child Quilty’s heroes were Astro Boy and Inspector Gadget, a far cry from his inspirations today: “Trent Parke, Alex Webb, Josef Koudelka, Eugene

Richards, Dean Sewell, James Brickwood, music, books, solitude, the open road, the weather and my muse!”

Quilty’s photography has been recognised around the world, from the World Press Photo Awards to *Art in Australia*’s top 25 artists under 25. He sees his work primarily as documentary, but isn’t averse to the idea that his work is recognised as art. “There is certainly no reason to disregard the art market and if anyone believes that my documentary work would be appreciated on a gallery wall I couldn’t be happier.”

He dreams of a world where photographers call the shots. “Working for newspapers can be difficult at times as you are expected to illustrate stories that often have few photographic possibilities. My work is usually dictated by writers and editors. I’d like to see photographers dictating terms for a change!”

“My advice for young photographers starting out would be that which I was given by a World Press Photo winner earlier this year: do whatever you have to do to make money in the beginning, then go and do what you love.” ▶

News Limited Community Newspapers is proud to sponsor the 2008 Walkley Awards and congratulates all finalists and winners.

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▶ RADIO

The modern gonzo

Michael Atkin, of Triple J's *Hack*, was apparently something of a modern-day Huck Finn as a child. "As a kid, I was a pretty good swindler... I could convince people to do things they didn't really want to do." The seemingly inevitable career in real estate was eventually overturned for journalism simply because it was more interesting.

"I get to meet people from all walks of life, and sometimes my work helps people. Even if all the details I research don't end up in a story, I'm still left with a much deeper understanding of that issue," Michael says.

Hack has a reputation for making news and features that appeal to Triple J's young audience by approaching stories from fresh angles, often with a bit of gonzo reporting. Michael recalls two especially outlandish yarns. "I went to an under-30s fetish party where there was a lot of interesting bondage stuff going on."

Then there was the soccer game he covered where there was a riot between rival teams' supporters in Sydney's suburbs. "Because I was doing a radio story I had to get right amongst it. It was scary, but fun in a way."

Atkin believes journalism as we know it needs to change to be relevant to younger generations.

"The media is changing in how young people consume it. Young people generally are turned off by newspapers, even by TV news. They want targeted information and they want back story. For example, in a story about a conflict between Palestinians and Israelis – young people want understanding of the situation, not a snapshot. That's what we try to do with *Hack* – tailored stories, reported from the ground. That's also the key to success for outlets like VBS [the online, on-demand television news arm of *Vice Magazine*]."

"I notice a lot of mainstream media outlets rarely speak to young people. Or when they do quote a young voice, they're seeking a really specific opinion, or that voice is not given much weight within the story. It is tokenistic sometimes. Take an issue like binge drinking. People of all ages binge drink in Australia, it's a culture, but there's a disproportionate level of hysteria surrounding young people's binge drinking."



ONLINE

The geek made good

The Sydney Morning Herald's Asher Moses started a gadget and game reviews website when he was 13, as "a great way to get lots of free stuff and play with the latest gadgets as they came out." While his mates flipped burgers, he freelanced for pocket money, and continued to write while studying commerce at UNSW.

"After about a year I realised that being a bean counter at a faceless corporate financial giant would beef up my bank account but would never be as fun or fulfilling as journalism," Moses says. And so his studies became part-time while he worked full-time as an associate editor at CNET.com.au and then the *Herald*.

That single-mindedness seems innate – he nominates Bill Gates as his childhood hero "as cheesy as that may sound". These days he's grateful for inspiration and advice from around the *Herald* newsroom, and particularly his boss Stephen Hutcheon.

Moses used Wikileaks to great effect in his winning stories and believes journalists must become more literate with online tools. "The internet is completely foreign to many traditional reporters and, with so much of our daily lives taking place online, I think that needs to change. Reporting on happenings on the internet is a different beast and while the same journalistic skills apply, online tools like Wikileaks can be used to find stories you'd never get the traditional way.

"Even trawling blogs and online forums centred on topics you're interested in can be useful in finding people to talk to and catching wind of breaking stories before they are picked up by mainstream media and local stakeholders."

Working as a specialist technology reporter has made Moses a passionate advocate for the importance of rounds. "Specialising gives you far more freedom to find stories yourself and really go in-depth on a particular topic. Plus, if you can carve out a niche and prove you're better at it than anyone else, it's easier to sneak in the back door at a larger publication without going through the general and highly competitive trainee program. And everyone knows specialist reporters are generally paid more than general reporters."

The winners spoke to Clare Fletcher and Fleur Mitchell.

Congratulations to Young Journalist of the Year Online finalist Jay Savage

... a member of ninemsn's inaugural
multimedia cadet program.

We are proud to announce that all our cadets are now
ninemsn associate producers. Well done to Matt Bachl,
Sean Cusick, Josephine Asher, Jack Hawke and Jay.

