

# DONATE TO FIRST DRAFT SO ATHENAE CAN CONTINUE TO CALL OUT BAD REPORTING

One of the points I always make when I talk about the failures of traditional media journalism is that they are captive to their sources—and to certain kinds of sources, at that.

Athenae has a typically righteous post about just this topic today, with regards to the Fort Hood tragedy yesterday. And as it happens, it is fund-drive week over at First Draft.

So go over and read the post, part of which appears below. And while you're there, leave some scratch if you can.

The only part of this Fort Hood business I feel remotely qualified to begin to talk about is the coverage, of which it is impossible to judge the accuracy right now. But on TV people are calling up anyone they can think of, to say anything that pops into their heads, without vetting, without background checking, without any of the vaunted gatekeeping traditional media like to deride bloggers for lacking.

My first daily paper job out of college was in a small city getting ripped apart by gang violence. I'd never covered cops before, and the police reporter was this terrifying news god who knew everything and had sources that made Deep Throat look like Ari Fleischer. I was scared to death I'd get called out to some scene where nobody would talk to me, and I'd end up screwing something up.

So one night I'm confessing this to the copy editor working my meeting story

into something recognizable as English, and he tells me something I've never forgotten in 12 years. "If you can't get anyone to talk to just look around and write down everything you see.

Everything that's happening, write it down. That's the story too." I've gotten a very few great journalism lessons in my life and that was one of them, that this is the job: Write down what you see.

It's not a lot. It's not anything I'd ever put above anyone who can swing a hammer. I don't have a lot of useful skills but I felt for a long time and still feel that we know each other because we are told about each other and that if all you can do is bear witness then you do that. Write down what you see. And tell as many people, as many many people, as you possibly can. It's a simple job. It's an impossibly simple job.

But you have to shut the fuck up and get out of your own way to do it, and that's where most of us slip up at least once. We make it all about us, or about who we know, or what we really think, and not about the experiences of the people involved.

[snip]

The first day, the first hours: Cut out all the analysis, all the nonsense, and just tell us what you see. What you can prove. What you know is real. That's what we need. That's the best thing that can be done in this scenario. That's the only useful thing. That's what people need the most.