

Jaclyn Schiff, executive producer, Pangea**Michael O'Connell, Producer, It's All Journalism**

Welcome to It's all Journalism. My name is Michael O'Connell. Today we're talking to Jaclyn Schiff from Chicago. She's the executive producer and host of [Pangea](#) — a podcast like ours — where she talks to media professionals, but her focus is on global issues. Jaclyn has contributed to NPR, Kaiser Health News, AllAfrica.com, PBS Media Shift just to name a few. She's the communications director for the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene. She's also one of ten new media journalists chosen by the International Reporting Project to report about global health in Zambia in July. Welcome, Jaclyn.

Jaclyn Schiff, executive producer, Pangea

Thanks for having me. I'm a big fan of the podcast, so it's quite an honor to be on.

Michael O'Connell

Well, this is also an opportunity to get that message out there if there are journalists or people interested that think I they're doing something different and interesting, feel free to contact us. That's how we sort of started this conversation with Jaclyn. She contacted me on Facebook, and we've been communicating over the last few weeks and it just seemed like a good idea to come in and talk to her, especially since, you know, right now we're running down to the end of June, so you're going to be heading to Africa pretty soon. So I thought maybe you'd have some interesting things to say about that. So, tell us a little bit about your background and how you got interested in podcasting?

Jaclyn Schiff

Sure, I've always had an affinity for radio and audio storytelling. In college, I was the news director of my college radio station at GW [George Washington University]. But then I sort of focused more on print and online and kind of left the audio.

I started listening to podcasts at some point I think just commuting and whatever got me into it, and became a big fan of a couple different ones. And just started kicking around the idea of maybe doing my own. I'm always looking for interesting ways to tell stories about global things. It's a bit of an obsession that I have. I think you know, growing up in South Africa you know gave me this more worldly view, and I thought that having conversations with media makers and media consumers who were working in the sort of global arena could be interesting so that's kind of how I got into Pangea.

Michael O'Connell

Can you tell us a little bit about Pangea? How you put it together and what was your goal, your thoughts behind it?

Jaclyn Schiff

Yeah. I'd say very much in the podcasting space, I'm a bit of a hack.

Michael O'Connell

We're all hacks.

Jaclyn Schiff

Exactly. You know, picked up different things along the way. Some of the podcasts that I listen to actually teach people how to podcast. One of my favorites is [The Rise to the Top](#), with a guy who's actually not a journalist and comes at it from a different perspective. So he has a course which I took which explains some of the technical aspects of it. I'm also a big fan of the [Podcast Answer Man](#). He also can get very much into the weeds with some of the technical aspects. In terms of the technology, it was just kind of experimenting over time. And the content of course, I had lots of ideas and so there was perhaps a bit of a lag between the stories and when to tell and my know how. It's a work in progress as I go along.

Michael O'Connell

And that's actually one of the the fun things about doing a podcast is you have this concept, you listen to other people and think, "That can't be too hard." But once you start doing it, you realize there are some skills that you may not have. You have guests that you pursue that don't want to talk on a podcast. There's lots of different things going on but as long as you have that drive and are pushing yourself forward, the rewards are in it in the process of doing it. Now you said you're listening to podcasts. Besides the ones you mentioned, who do you see as inspirations for what you do?

Jaclyn Schiff

Yeah, well definitely, besides you guys as a favorite, I'm also a big fan of a lot of the NPR podcasts — [On the Media](#).

Julia O'Donoghue, producer, It's All Journalism

On the Media is great.

Jaclyn Schiff,

I think anyone who's in this business, I mean how can you not listen to that? I like [This American Life](#). I'm also a fan of [Adam Corolla](#) and listen to that from time to time. And then a few of the [BBC](#) and [PRI](#) podcasts. PRI has a global health and development podcast which I find that very interesting. And that's, you know, my journalistic background is in global health. So I listen to that on a regular basis.

Michael O'Connell

I would agree with most of the ones you said. The only other one I'd add, well I know that Julie and I have talked about podcasts.

Jaclyn Schiff

Yeah, we listen to a lot.

Michael O'Connell

The two that we mostly listen to are probably [WTF](#) and [The Nerdist](#). That's obviously more entertainment oriented. But they are very conversational, very interview oriented. That they are more about going beyond just a simple 5-minute interview, trying to open up and find out more about the subject.

Jaclyn Schiff

Exactly, that's what so fun about these podcasts. Some people who might be interviewed on something like The Nerdist or whatever, you're probably not going to hear from them in a bunch of other places. But you can really geek out and get into you, you know, wanting to hear from these guests. I also then think it's interesting when you get a more mainstream guest, um and someone who is a bigger name in a smaller venue like one of these podcasts and see sometimes what they say and their answers are a little different than what you'd get on CNN or something.

Julia O'Donoghue

Right. I mean some of like WTF, which is a podcast hosted by Marc Maron, that's a very big deal in some very small circles, I think.

Michael O'Connell

He got a TV show out of it.

Julia O'Donoghue

You know, he just had Dick Van Dyke on who is 87-years old. When's that last time you heard from Dick Van Dyke who was lovely, I thought.

Michael O'Connell

He also had, just this last week he had Iggy Pop, which was an amazing interview. I don't think, you'd have to be really pretty bad to screw up an interview with Iggy Pop because he's just an interesting human being.

Jaclyn Schiff

Exactly. Or I saw in my iTunes feed, that [Alec Baldwin](#) who has a podcast which I absolutely adore, in which he has conversations with other people — just did Rosie O'Donnell. I cannot imagine how that interview is going to go.

Julia O'Donoghue

Oh yeah, I just heard a teaser for that when I was in New York this past week. They must be broadcasting it on WNYC or something like that. It sounded very interesting.

Jaclyn Schiff

Yeah I'm sure. I think it's just such an interesting venue to have conversations. And you know, in particular for me, you know, just wanting to convey stories about things like global health and development which tend to be undercovered. I think it's an interesting way to get into it. Particularly, what I'm trying to do is look at it through a media lens. I think a lot of people that tend to listen to podcasts are either avid media makers, and I use that term because I think it's broader than journalism, or consumers of media, savvier consumers of media. So I think it could be an interesting way to hook people into these issues.

Michael O'Connell

I think it's a medium that really for people who are looking for interesting and different content that is deep, it's not just sort of a passing thing, that actually you know you can spend some time with. I think podcasting is a really great space for journalists to find information but also to sort of explore and do new and interesting things. I think that's the probably extent of our geeking out on podcasting. Let's talk a little bit about the global health issues which you find interesting. What drew you to that topic?

Jaclyn Schiff

So it's kind of a weird story. I came to D.C. because I was interested in international and journalism. And I went to George Washington University and actually the year I started was the year they had a program for people who wanted to go into international journalism, but that was actually the year they cut it. So I did the next best thing, and majored in international affairs and then minored in journalism. So I've always had that interest. Some people in the international affairs program focused on health and I wasn't interested in at all. As I mentioned, I grew up in South Africa and I was interested in Africa. I took as many classes about the continent as I could at the undergrad level, which was all of two.

Jaclyn Schiff

What? That sounds terrible. I'm sorry.

Jaclyn Schiff

Yeah, you could take like 25 on the Middle East, but on Africa there was two. So and I was looking for jobs after school and I, there was a job to write for a Kaiser Family Foundation website that was focused on global health. And I thought, well this is an interesting way to write about Africa. And as soon as I got into writing and learning about global health and just how much activity there has been on that scene in the last few years with the Gates Foundation and the Global Fund and everything that the U.S. has been doing with PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) I really got very interested in the issues and kind of haven't looked back.

Julia O'Donoghue

Can we go back a little bit? So you, when, how old were you when you left South Africa? And did you move to the U.S. Or did you move to, I don't know, Australia, the UK?

Jaclyn Schiff

Yeah. I left with my family, well my mom, my dad still live in South Africa. Moved when I was 15 to the Chicago area. I went to high school here. And then said there was that 10 year period in D.C. And at the beginning of the year, I moved back to Chicago.

Michael O'Connell

I listened to a couple of your podcasts and got the subtext that there's a lot of things that about American media. American media just isn't covering healthwise, global healthwise, you know, what are your thoughts on that?

Jaclyn Schiff

It's interesting because I think in some ways, the coverage is more there than it probably has been. So many areas of newspapers as we know are getting cut. But online and the Web allows for many more of these niche news sites. Um, and so if you go looking for it, I think there's a lot of information about these topics. But I think the biggest problems is something that any media organization is facing, and that's the fight for attention and relevancy amongst people who are reading the news.

I would not say newspapers and traditional media is devoting as much attention to these issues as perhaps they should or I think as some people would like to see. But I think there are a lot of newer sources of information or information from nontraditional sources. The question is how do you get these stories to reach news consumers online and how do you make them interesting to them and I think that's kind of where the gap is.

Michael O'Connell

Do you feel that the content that's out there is sufficiently reflective of the people who are reading it, bringing in the information that they would be interested or need to know about this?

Jaclyn Schiff

I think ... well, it is really going to depend on who you ask. I think for people who are interested in these issues and track them, you know some of them would disagree with me. But I would say I think a lot of the content is kind of out there. I think there's always an opportunity to go deeper. And you know for example, a recent episode that I did, I had an [interview](#) with Tom Paulson who is formally of the Seattle Post Intelligencer. And he is really one of the pioneers of this global health beat. He's now doing an independent project after blogging as part of an NPR project for two years. And he took it independent at the beginning of this year. So we had a conversation about that. I think he's really a pioneer in the space and of covering the issue in a lot of different ways that people aren't thinking about. And because he's online only and has a leaner news operation, he's able to, he and his team, I should say, because he has another Tom blogging for him, can cover this issue from so many different angles and appeal to different audiences that are interested in it for different reasons.

Michael O'Connell

I know we kind of said we're walking away from the podcast, but I wanted to ask you something else about your podcast. What was your goal when you set out to do it? What did you want to accomplish?

Jaclyn Schiff

I think the main thing is to tell stories about global issues in a different way. One of the things I always find most interesting as a media consumer is I love the story behind the story. And I think a lot of people tend to be fascinated by this. You know, when you see a movie or you see an article, there's always kind of a story behind how it was put together. A lot of times it's not necessarily the way the creator intended it. I kind of wanted to have conversations not only about the issues, but about how we're getting to see a specific film. An example is,

I talked to these [two guys](#) who did a Kickstarter campaign, a successful Kickstarter campaign. They're planning to do a documentary about the South Sudanese runner who was an independent Olympian in the 2012 games. First of all, I think anyone who is interested in media, is kind of interested in how people are using Kickstarter so I'm fascinated from that perspective, but also in the story they are telling. This guy, Guor Marial, the name of the runner, has this fascinating story. I was interested in how they plan to tell that story and everything that is involved with that.

Julia O'Donoghue

In terms of like mainstream media organizations, and that includes everyone from Slate to NPR, we're not just talking about newspapers and stuff, I feel like a lot of people who know really a lot about health issues typically get, not quite like the science people do, kind of get frustrated with how they feel a lot of mainstream organizations get things wrong when they cover health issues or they don't totally understand or the reporter doesn't totally understand the topic they are writing or reporting on. Do you find that, again not talking about something like Kaiser, but something like I don't know, The New York Times or something like that? Do you think things are covered well when they are covered?

Michael O'Connell

Let me sort of link that up with a question I had about the Tom Paulson interview. One of the things he brought up that he was frustrated with was the mainstream media, they ended up with they'd always tell the same story but in a different way. Oh it's the family that isn't getting immunized to tell a bigger story. That there wasn't enough variety, there wasn't enough scope. Do you sort of see that?

Jaclyn Schiff

It's a big question. Can you elaborate on that?

Michael O'Connell

I just remember that Tom was talking about one of the things that really frustrated him was that, because I think you almost asked him the same question about how he thought mainstream media was covering things. He was frustrated with the fact that quite often, yeah there was a lot of coverage on something but they always seem to tell the same stories. They didn't tell a variety of stories, they didn't tell different sides of the stories. It was kind of like ABC, I think he was talking about ABC got a grant or something to tell some health issue, it was fine, it was better than nothing, but it didn't necessarily have the scope that a newspaper or somebody else might do for a local issue.

Jaclyn Schiff

Sure, sure, now I'm recalling that part of our conversation. I think that is a fair criticism. I think also, global health does hit on a lot of health issues and I probably like to get a lot more nuanced about this just because I was a health reporter. I think it's so different than covering something like domestic health policy. The budgets and everything are very different. You're talking to really different types of experts. I'd place global health much more sort of in the foreign news category than I would in health and science, although, I

don't know, you know, it obviously varies very much depending on your story. But yeah, I think that is a fair criticism that Tom says.

What I find interesting about the landscape now is there are a lot of organizations that have popped up to try to help journalists find different narratives. For example, as you mentioned, I'm going with the [International Reporting Project](#) to Zambia. Um, and I think they are mostly operating from the perspective that these are undercovered issues and just trying to get people from a lot of different outlets and with different types of online audiences to write about them.

But then you have something like, and I might get the name wrong, but I think it's called the [Solutions Journalism Network](#). And it's a pretty new organization started by Tina Rosenberg who writes for the New York Times quite a bit and actually, they have a blog there where they write a lot about these issues. But they're coming at it from the perspective that journalism doesn't always need to identify problems. It can identify and write about solutions in a very in depth and deep way and I think their criticism, if you will, is journalists don't often take that approach. I just kind of read their website and I certainly haven't had many conversations with the people that work there, so I'm not in a good position to I guess be a spokesperson for them. But I find that idea very interesting. And there's a good possibility it could give rise to some different narratives.

Michael O'Connell

I want to go back to something you said before about the podcast and sort of your approach where you're actually talking to media people about the stories that they're covering but also talking to them about journalists, sort of a, rather than just a straight on to the story, you're also talking about the story behind the story. Why did you feel you wanted to do that?

Jaclyn Schiff

I think um, I think as someone who does storytelling in a variety of formats, I tend to find it really interesting. I think, you know, I think a lot of the people frankly that I try to have on the podcast are people who in my network or people who I'd like to have in my network. You know, I've noticed with the podcasts that I listen to, the ones I find the most interesting usually help me learn something. They usually do that I think when the host either has the same problem or is coming from a similar perspective that I am. My hope with people who listen to my podcast is that I'll be inspiring them or getting at answers with issues that they face and telling stories in interesting ways.

Michael O'Connell

And I know that this is one of the things that we stumbled upon with our podcast. We went into it beginning thinking about having interesting conversations about journalism. But something that was obvious but which I never quite realized was that some of the best conversations I've ever had have been in newsrooms. Media professionals are natural storytellers and quite often the best stories that they tell are the ones in the newsroom, the stories behind the stories. Not off the record sort of things. But those are the things that are fascinating and add a lot of nuance to stories. That's one thing that I

found out about our podcast that I enjoy about it but also that I see in other people when they do interviews.

Jaclyn Schiff

Yeah, exactly. I'm curious, which episodes of your podcast have you gotten the best feedback about? Has it been one of those where someone was telling the story behind the story?

Michael O'Connell

Actually our top downloaded episode is the episode with [Neal Augenstein](#) explaining how to do iPhone reporting. And that sort of informed us quite a lot about the direction we want to go. We were like, 'Well, I mean obviously, we're not going to switch over and be a nuts and bolts how to thing,' but we realized that there were probably a lot of people who were interested in how to do things and learning new skills. So that's kind of why we've pursue some guests like [Kat Downs](#) from the Washington Post, [AJ Chavar](#), [Beth-any Swain](#), people who have a particular skillset and interesting jobs where they use them.

And then when we interview them, — man, I'm just pulling back the curtain here — we really try to get them into the weeds. AJ asked us, how far do you want to get into the weeds and we realized we want to go really deep into the weeds sometimes. People seem to really like the idea of you know, 'What type of camera do you use, what type of programs do you use to download?' Kat Downs had this wonderful segment where she just, 'OK, these are the type of programs you need to pick up, these are things that you need to learn how to do,' boom, boom, boom, boom. You know, we got some good response on that episode, partially because she was talking a lot about the work they were doing around the Boston Marathon bomber, but also a lot about just the day-to-day how-do-you-do-your-job type of thing.

I think people like process. And I think podcasting is a great place to play out process, to sort of reveal how things are done and sort of for us, that's where we see things go. So for us, we're always constantly trying to mix that in with the topics. You know, at the beginning we decided we're not going to be, 'What's the top story this week? We're going to talk about the top story this week.' Because we felt, it's hard enough doing this around our own lives to try to stay on top of everything else, but we just felt it would be better that there's all these other discussions that are going on that just aren't being put into a podcast. That's kind of the way we approached it.

Jaclyn Schiff

Exactly. It's an issue I faced as well. It's a work in progress as I develop the podcast. With each episode, I feel like I kind of learn something a little different. Because yeah, I totally relate to that desire. I don't want to be the nuts and bolts, this is exactly how you do something, that's not entirely keeping with my mission, but it's also impossible for people like you and me to compete with NPR. I'm not going to be that authoritative news source. It's not straight up news. It's not even comprehensive coverage of some of the big news issues that I'm following. But yeah, I think there has to be a learning component. That seems to be what draws people in. And I have just observed from my own

habits that that's really what I like listening to. I haven't actually listened to that episode that you mentioned.

Michael O'Connell

What, the [iPhone] one? Yeah we were very surprised. I work in the same building as the gentleman and he's really gung-ho about iPhone journalism. If he explained it to us, and our then producer Jolie Lee brought him downstairs and we just did it in an afternoon and it's by far the most downloaded episode. It's probably twice as much as any of other episodes.

Julia O'Donoghue

I mean that was before I joined the podcast. I listened to the episode, I liked it a lot. I was at Medill when I listened to the episode. They were telling us, I think some of the appeal of that is that Neal works for WTOP. He works in a major market. The fact that he was doing high quality radio reporting with his iPhone sort of gives some legitimacy to like, 'Yeah you really can do this and you're not going to be bush league.'

Michael O'Connell

You're not going to be a freak in the newsroom. He's doing it every day. He's constantly looking for new programs that will enhance what he's doing. I don't know how many iPhones he's got and batteries and chargers he's got. It's sort of inspiring to see him work.

Jaclyn Schiff

Exactly. That's also why I find it important to, I talk to a lot of journalists, to talk to people who totally don't come from that perspective but who are very successful at creating content. Some of the biggest learning moments in my life have come from when I go outside the immediate area that I'm in and talk to people who are on the periphery, who have a different perspective. Finding tools and ideas that they use and bringing it into my work.

Michael O'Connell

I've gotten a lot smarter about journalism just by doing this podcast and I've been in it for decades, more or less. You know, the things have changed so much. With the theme of our podcast, we could spend every week talking about 'What's the business model, what's the business model?' Because that's what everybody talks about. But nobody has cracked the code on that yet. Hopefully when it happens we'll break it here. The fact is, there are a lot of people who want to be journalists and who are doing really interesting, exciting work right now. For us, that's been kind of one of the driving factors, that we bring these very interesting people in.

Like I said, Kat Downs was an incredibly fascinating interview. Her mind was so totally into graphics journalism and how to tell stories but not just from a philosophical sense but also a practical sense with what skills she had to do; how she had to manage her time; 'I can only work on this, I can't work on that.' You know, just the day-to-day stuff in journalism. I think that sort of stuff touches a lot of people. I think they understand the demands. We'd all ideally like to have the perfect online journalism job, but it's the day-

to-day grind of having to put out news and trying to do that on deadline and be creative and interesting. That's a pretty heady thing to have to deal with.

So, enough about us. Tell us about the Zambia thing. What are your hopes for this project?

Julia O'Donoghue

What are you going to be doing there?

Jaclyn Schiff

Well, I don't have the itinerary yet. So the International Reporting Project. They're calling it a new media focused trip. So I think it's people who primarily are kind of more social journalists or more social media inclined.

As you mentioned, it's globally health focused. We actually yesterday had an interesting call from some communications folks from [The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria](#) and I think you know, we're going to see some of the work they do in Zambia.

Zambia is an interesting case because they've been very successful at reducing malaria rates in the country. I don't have the exact figures in front of me. They've gotten a lot of attention for that reason. What I hope to be looking at, as any journalist knows, the story can change once you're on the ground, I've written a little bit about mobile health and how mobile phones are being used in much more creative and efficient ways in Africa than they are here to promote health and I find that really interesting. So I kind of want to take a closer look at how it's been used.

Going back to you know, just having a dominant narrative in some of the reporting. A lot of stories you tend to see about mobile health are like, 'Wow, they're doing this in Africa, can you believe it?' And it's certainly interesting, especially, like I say, you know when it's a little more advanced than what you tend to see here in the states. I want to go a little bit deeper. I'm actually very interested in the perspective of the patients. So the patients that actually use the mobile health, so what's it like for them? And is anything lost or gained by relying on mobile technology? So you know, we'll see, it's the middle of July and I hope to be tweeting and Facebooking as I go and sharing some of those. And I'll probably be doing some stories for [AllAfrica.com](#), so that's where you can kind of track it. But also if you go to the International Reporting Project's [website](#), they will certainly be sharing everyone's content from the trip.

Julia O'Donoghue

So are you guys all going to be together?

Jaclyn Schiff

Yeah. As I understand we're mostly together and then I think there's some opportunity for us to set up our own interviews but I think we're mostly with the group.

Julia O'Donoghue

Just a question about health coverage and journalism in Africa, particularly Southern Africa, do you feel like certain issues are being ignored because other issues overwhelm the news? I honestly don't know the answer to this question. It seems like there's a lot of coverage about AIDS and malaria and I don't really have much of a sense of what else is an issue in that part of the world health-wise.

Jaclyn Schiff

I think it's hard always when something is getting a whole lot of attention, it's at the expense of something else. One of the things that people talk a lot about now is non-communicable diseases and the rise of chronic diseases in the developing world. It's getting a little bit of attention, but AIDS and TB and malaria have really overshadowed it. Although, I wouldn't say that's the case for tuberculosis. It's one of the big three so to speak and it's been out there and I think people kind of know. But we have all the drug resistant tuberculosis now and particularly in South Africa. There have been some really bad outbreaks. I think this whole issue of drug resistance, you know, it does get reported on a little bit. But it's a major issue and you know, I think doesn't necessarily get as much scrutiny as it should. So, I think there's always a bit of a challenge when you are focusing a lot. There's definitely a little bit of AIDS fatigue. People have reported on it so much. When it was an emerging issue, it had star power behind it. I think there's a sense that all the reporting is out there and everything. But at the same time as our fight against it evolves and changes, it also presents different challenges and different stories emerge. It's hard to say we shouldn't pay attention to some of these things just because there's been a lot reported on it. I don't know if that's a great answer, but that's a lot of what comes to mind.

Julia O'Donoghue

No, that's interesting for sure.

Michael O'Connell

You said people will be able to find your content on the International Journalism Project website?

Jaclyn Schiff

Yeah, I'm pretty sure the International Reporting Project website will be sharing our stuff and they've already made a Twitter list with a bunch of the journalists who are going. So that's another way you can get it.

Michael O'Connell

This has been really interesting. I think we're going to wrap it up here. I wish you a good time on your trip. How can people find out more about Pangea? And also get in contact with you if they are interested?

Jaclyn Schiff

I hope some of your listeners will check it out. It's in iTunes and you know, if you search for Pangea it will hopefully lead you there, but otherwise website is www.watchpangea.com, that's a whole other story. Yeah, I have some other subscription options there, so that's the best way to check it out.

Michael O'Connell

Good luck with that and good luck in Africa. And, thanks for talking to us.

Jaclyn Schiff

Yeah, thanks so much you guys and keep up the good work!

Julia O'Donoghue

Thank you.