

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXX, Number 103, 8 October 1996 — Breslin addresses journalism students [ARTICLE]

Breslin addresses journalism students

By NATALIA MEHLMAN

Contributing Writer

Expounding on his idea of quality journalism, Pulitzer prize-winning journalist, columnist, and author Jimmy Breslin of *Newsday* addressed students and faculty members yesterday afternoon in the World Room in Journalism Hall.

Breslin won the 1986 Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of Queens police brutality and his for writing about AIDS victims. Breslin is also the author of the memoir, *I Want to Thank my Brain for Remembering Me*, which was released this year. Breslin discussed his history as a writer and his perception of journalism in today's world.

Breslin described the Sunday night's presidential debate coverage as "terrible," insisting moderator Jim Lehrer "committed a felony when it comes to the crime of boredom."

"On every station last night," Breslin said, "you saw the same two candidates and the same one boring man mediating between them. . . the questions were unimaginative, and there was no one respectable journalist to mediate between the candidates and the public and call out 'You're lying!'"

Breslin also discussed his "gravedigger theory."

Breslin said when he was covering President Kennedy's funeral, he resisted lining up in front of the White House with "the 3,000 other journalists, the chorus of crickets." Instead, he mustered "enough confidence to leave the music, the crowds the bodyguards" and went to the cemetery to talk to the gravedigger.

"I found this man, Polly the gravedigger, who was getting paid \$3.01 an hour. He said he had

walked over to the ceremony to watch and the bodyguards wouldn't let him. So he just walked away, said it was an honor to be there, and kept on digging graves for \$3.01 an hour," Breslin recounted.

Breslin attributed the different lifestyle of today's journalists as one of the reasons that journalism has lost its emotion.

"We all used to go to bars after getting a big story done," he related, "and that doesn't happen anymore, which is really a big loss. . .we would talk about sentence length and verbs, and there would always be someone older there who could tell you what you never get from retrieving old files on a computer."

Breslin said he looks forward to the day that journalism regains its former glory.

"Soon we must overcome our awe of technology and chain ownership [of newspapers], and we will return to English sentences, and that will be an exciting day," Breslin said.

Students and faculty members attending Breslin's lecture expressed admiration for Breslin's unique approach to journalism.

Adjunct Professor of Journalism Terry Anderson said "Breslin's great gift is to take a small picture in a big story and make it really good."

Miki Anzai, Journalism '97, expressed surprise at Breslin's stress on imbuing each of his articles with "nervous excitement and passion."

"In Tokyo, journalism is very reserved and the lecture stunned me, making me wonder if I shouldn't step so far back, but involve emotion in my writing," Anzai said.