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Dear SEJ – Elyssa Rosen Memorial Fund,

Back in September I was delighted to be informed that I'd been awarded a Rosen Fellowship to attend the SEJ conference in New Orleans. I've been a fulltime freelancer for almost two years now, and while the freedom and creative aspects of the work are mightily compelling and reason enough to take the plunge, keeping the lights on has been a challenge as I work to place myself in the rarified air of the major magazines. While I'd registered for the conference, my first, when it was initially announced, the required expenditure for my participation was such that I would have had difficulty in fulfilling my obligation to those "gross necessities of material contingency" (Ed Abbey) that arrive like clockwork in the mailbox on a discouragingly regular basis. My Rosen Fellowship helped alleviate this hardship, for which I am abundantly grateful.

My SEJ mentor is Dan Ferber, who has been of great help to me in offering pitching advice and even tailoring a specific pitch with his knowledgeable edits; unfortunately Dan's recent employment as an editor with *Discover*, necessitating a move to Wisconsin and all the new duties and challenges entailed in editing such a prestigious publication, precluded his joining us in New Orleans. With munificent generosity Dan's colleague at *Discover*, April Reese, stepped in as a substitute mentor in Dan's place, and her insightful and learned advice—both in shepherding me through the humming and sometimes overwhelming frenzy of the conference itself and in providing me with gems of wisdom from her vastly deeper experience—has since helped guide my work. April kindly advised me to prune some excessively verbose pitches and provided me with inside info about appropriate editors, publications and other basics of the journalistic education that I entirely lack.

The SEJ conference itself, aside from its dazzling display of talent, learning opportunities and cutting-edge subject matter, was a revelation in that it put me side by side (and elbow by elbow) with successful people who were doing precisely what I am aiming for myself: providing the public with an imaginative education in the manifold and increasingly manifest harms we are perpetuating on our overcrowded, overexploited planet. It was a welcome relief, coming from an entirely self-taught journalistic background, to learn from others with the same bootstrap mentality who have succeeded on their own terms, cleaving to their own paths and providing readers, listeners and viewers with exceptional reportage on the most fundamental issues of our day. The range of presentations, of assembled expertise, and of excellent field trips (and dining!) was something I'd not enjoyed elsewhere, and I came away from the sweltering streets of my favorite city with a profound gratitude that an organization like SEJ provides both veteran reporters and neophytes like myself with equal access to the best minds our profession affords.

As a person somewhat retiring in the presence of large assemblies I was pleased to experience the deep sense of generosity and welcome that SEJ's membership uniformly provided, and I remain indebted to the kind folks behind the Elyssa Rosen Memorial Fund for their having allowed me to experience this conference without nagging financial worry, free to enjoy and benefit from all that SEJ offers.

Sincerely,

William H. Funk