

[Press Club of Long Island](#)

A Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists

- [Getting to Know: Karl Grossman](#), Chief Investigative Reporter, WVVH-TV

Karl Grossman has been an investigative reporter for over 40 years. Throughout his long and decorated career, he has written six books, written numerous magazine, newspaper and Internet articles, narrated and hosted award-winning TV documentaries on environmental and energy issues, and is currently the host of the nationally aired television program *Enviro Close-Up*. He was also the very first President of the Press Club of Long Island.

**After reading an article about a reporter jailed for not giving up on a source for an article, you had the idea to form a press club on Long Island. What were your steps to making the press club? And how has your decision to start one up been justified today?**



Karl Grossman

*I was at my desk the Suffolk County office of the (daily) Long Island Press reading an article about a reporter jailed for not giving up a source. I was talking about it with the Suffolk editor of The Press, Tom Condon, who was at the desk across from mine, and saying to Tom how important it could be if we had a press club on Long Island to fight for our colleagues in this sort of situation, indeed to do our part in fighting for press freedom. On Long Island, I was thinking, were hundreds of journalists devoted to the profession of journalism. As we were talking, Dave Woods, then university relations person at the Stony Brook University, happened to call the office. I got on the telephone and asked Dave whether I could utilize the Stony Brook University press list to send out an invitation to Long Island journalists to an initial meeting on forming a press club. The meeting was held at the Three Village Inn in Stony Brook. More than 50 journalists showed up. And I was elected president.*

*I worked subsequently at writing a constitution for the press club. I sent letters to press clubs all around the U.S. requesting copies of their constitutions and formulated a constitution based on these.*

*And we elected additional officers including Maurice Swift, a Newsday editor, who became vice president, and others from all areas of media: print, TV, radio—not Internet yet; it was 1974). We were off and running. And I have been thrilled as the Press Club of Long Island has grown—and expanded to become a chapter, in fact one of the largest chapters, of the Society of Professional Journalists. And always keeping our eye on the prize—those vital and in the world rare things: freedom of the press and a press that not only reports on but challenges power.*

*(A tidbit: originally the notion was to name the club the Long Island Press Club. This would be consistent with*

*many press clubs: the New York Press Club, Los Angeles Press Club, etc. But the two major and competing press organizations at the time on Long Island were Newsday and the Long Island Press and there was some concern from Newsday about the name considering I was with the Long Island Press. Unity was vitally important, I felt, and I suggested the Press Club of Long Island instead. And that's how the organization got its name.)*

**Not only were you the founder of the PCLI, you were also the first chapter President. What was that experience like? From what you can see, how has both the Press Club and world of journalism changed since your time as President?**

*There has been a revolution in media in the nation and world and, of course, on Long Island, and the Press Club of Long Island has fully kept up with it—integrating those doing journalism via the Internet and otherwise involved in “new media” into the club and embracing their work in terms of honors and recognition.*

*Also, there has been more education in journalism: majors in journalism, communications and media offered at colleges on Long Island, and succeeding PCLI leaders deserve great credit for bringing in younger people to the club—college as well as high school students—in a variety of ways.*

**You have been an investigative reporter for more than 45 years. What made you want to be a journalist and how did you first get started in the career?**

*This is a corny story but it's about how I got into investigative reporting. I went to Antioch College out in Ohio. Antioch has long been based on a work-study or “cooperative education” program—students alternate between classes and “co-ops” or internships.*

*In my second year at Antioch, I got a six-month “co-op” at the Cleveland Press. Above the entrance to the newspaper, etched in stone, were a lighthouse and the words: “Give Light and the People Will Find Their Own Way.” And I saw these words in action continually at the Cleveland Press. The newspaper was constantly publishing exposes.*

*It was 1960 and the term “investigative reporting” wasn't yet used. That came a few years later. But there was a group of reporters at the Cleveland Press who did this work.*

*I was a copyboy and when working at night, nearly alone in the city room, if there was a phone call advising the paper about some event in Shaker Heights, for instance, you passed on a note to the suburban desk. A call about something happening in Cleveland itself—the note went to the city desk. But if someone called with a horror story, a tale of injustice, inequity, danger—you gave it to this group of investigative reporters.*

*And the amazing thing to me, at 18, was seeing how when the information was documented by one of these investigative reporters and published, about half the time the situation was resolved. This was just the neatest thing, I thought. A half-century later, I still marvel at this dynamic—how the documentation by media of a horror story, a tale of injustice, inequity, danger is enough to, roughly half the time, resolve the situation. And that's been my experience: about half the journalistic crusades I've embarked on through the many years have resolved or helped resolve such situations.*

*This includes the first major story I worked on as a reporter—documenting how a four-lane highway that New York public works czar Robert Moses wanted to construct on Fire Island would have wreaked havoc with the communities and the nature on that extraordinary roadless barrier beach. My articles in the Babylon Town Leader pointed instead to creation of a Fire Island National Seashore, which, in fact, was established and has preserved Fire Island.*

*From the Babylon Town Leader, I went to the Long Island Press and after several years on the cops-and-courts beat was promoted to doing investigative reporting, my goal. Again I saw what I observed at the Cleveland Press—investigative reporting works!*

*For example, a major expose I did at the Long Island Press—for which I received the George Polk Award—involved a series on how the Levon Corporation was excavating a square-mile of the bluff-fronted north shore at Jamesport on the North Fork under the guise of building a deep water port. In fact, it was a huge sand mine, a*

*massive rape of Long Island. The sand was being barged off to Connecticut to make concrete for Interstate highways being built there. The scheme was stopped. The land is now a state park.*

*After The Press ceased publication in 1977, my articles and column syndicated in Long Island weekly newspapers, my TV and radio work on Long Island, and a book I wrote, Power Crazy, helped in stopping the Shoreham nuclear power plant—the first of seven to 11 nuclear plants the Long Island Lighting Company planned for the island—from going into commercial operation. Shoreham, although it was finished and ready to start operating, was stopped. The additional nuclear plants were never built, and Long Island is now nuclear-free.*

*Investigative reporting works as long as there is a semblance of democracy and people can be informed, made aware. You give light and, yes, the people will find their own way.*

*Later, in teaching Investigative Reporting as a journalism professor at the State University of New York/College at Old Westbury, I got to understand what I had walked into at that Antioch intership. The Cleveland Press was the first newspaper started by E.W. Scripps, quite the crusading publisher, highly active during the Muckraking Era. The culture Scripps created was still very much alive when I at the Cleveland Press for my Antioch “co-op” and the newspaper every few days ran a hard-hitting expose.*

**For the past 20+ years, you have hosted the nationally-aired TV program Enviro Close-Up, which brings awareness to the critical environmental issues at hand. What is your favorite thing about hosting and reporting for this program?**

*I've worked in every form of media: print (newspaper and magazine), TV and radio, books, and in recent years been writing on the Internet (for websites including The Huffington Post). People, I have found, react to different media in different ways.*

*For example, in 1986 I broke the story in The Nation magazine about how the next mission of the ill-fated Challenger space shuttle involved it lofting a plutonium-fueled space probe. If the Challenger disaster had occurred not in January of that year but on its May mission, when it was to be carrying the space probe with 25 pounds of plutonium fuel, there could have been a catastrophe not just killing seven brave astronauts but many more people. If that plutonium—long described as the most toxic radioactive substance—was vaporized in the explosion and dispersed widely, the disaster would have been so much greater. This led to my investigating the use of nuclear power in space and writing a book, The Wrong Stuff: The Space Program's Nuclear Threat to Our Planet, and also writing and hosting a TV documentary, Nukes In Space: The Nuclearization and Weaponization of the Heavens. Congressman Jerry Nadler of Manhattan got a look at the TV documentary, but it was the book, The Wrong Stuff, that had a far greater impact on him—and caused him to get into the issue.*

*To best connect with people I have sought to use all media. And, importantly, TV continues to be the medium most people rely on.*

**How does it make you feel that Enviro Close-Up not only affects the people of Long Island, but also those nationwide?**

*I've been hosting Enviro Close-Up since 1991. And it not only is viewed nationwide but is up on the Internet so it it has a global audience—a product of that media revolution.*

*Some background on how the program got started. I have long been active on TV on Long Island. While at the Long Island Press, I also hosted a program, Long Island World, on WLIW-TV. After The Press folded, I was nightly news anchor at WSNL-TV for five years. In recent years, I've been chief investigative reporter at WVVH-TV.*

*Back in 1991, I was asked to speak on the use of nuclear power in space at a conference in Washington, D.C. At this point, the first Bush administration was seeking to “revive” nuclear power. I thought the conference would be an excellent opportunity to do a TV documentary on this drive. But when I asked people I knew in TV to go down to Washington with me for a shoot, I was given high-dollar figures in terms of cost. So on a Saturday evening, after I had spoken, I was sitting in the auditorium listening to Ralph Nader address the conference—and he was brilliant—and kicking myself that I didn't have a TV crew with me to record what he and others were saying.*

*Then a friend pointed out a cameraperson, with whom she also was a friend who was shooting the Nader talk. And after Nader's presentation was over, she introduced me to Steve Jambeck. Steve was a long-time top cameraperson for NBC (for Saturday Night Live and NBC Nightly News, among other programs) and said when we met that he was familiar with my TV work. He was in the process of taking a bny-out from the NBC. He suggested we might we work together and I said, great! He asked when I wanted to start. I said: now. It was about 10:30 and we set up in a room next to the auditorium and I interviewed various people involved in the conference into to the early morning hours and that formed the basis of our first TV documentary, The Push to Revive Nuclear Power. Steve, his wife, Joan Flynn, who has been our producer, and I formed a non-profit entity, EnviroVideo, and ever since we have been producing Enviro Close-Up and documentaries I've written and hosted. Many of the have received film and video festival awards.*

*Enviro Close-Up has for many years been aired through Free Speech TV and broadcast on 200 cable TV systems in the U.S. as well as on the DISH and DIRECTV satellite networks, and on the Internet. We have developed a substantial audience and it is a journalistic pleasure to get out information on critical environmental and energy issues that people aren't otherwise getting on TV.*



Photo courtesy of lipolitics.com

**Your investigative pieces have appeared in many magazines and newspapers including, but not limited to The New York Times, USA Today, The Ecologist, and E, The Environmental Magazine. What is your favorite piece that you have written during your career?**

*My journalism on the dangers of nuclear power is probably my most important work through the years—both nuclear power on earth and in space.*

*As to terrestrial applications, when I was doing TV on WLIW in the 1970s, one of the Long Island World programs was about nuclear power. I went to Brookhaven National Laboratory, founded by the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission in 1947 largely to develop civilian uses of nuclear technology, and interviewed nuclear scientists. They looked into the camera and said a serious accident at a nuclear power plant was highly unlikely—perhaps there might be one every couple of centuries. But these machines, they said, were so well-engineered and had much redundancy that they were all but fail-safe.*

*When the Three Mile Island accident occurred in 1979, it was clear to me that the scientists at BNL had tried to bamboozle me.*

*And that day I committed myself to writing a book, my first book, about atomic energy—gathering all the information I could about the realities of nuclear power. It took a year to research and write and I was helped by, among others, atomic physicist Dr. Richard Webb and journalistic colleagues on Long Island who reviewed the documents I had obtained. These included documents from Brookhaven National Laboratory among them a report titled "WASH-740 update," done at BNL in the 1960s, in which BNL—despite what those nuclear scientists said on camera—acknowledged the various ways a nuclear power plant accident could happen and the gravity of such a disaster. Over and over again in "WASH-740 update" is the line that "the possible size of the area of*

*such a disaster might be equal to that of the State of Pennsylvania.” (And this was years before the Three Mile Island disaster almost resulted in that). The book was titled *Cover Up: What You Are Not Supposed To Know About Nuclear Power*. I also have written hundreds of articles and columns, done radio reports and hosted TV programs about the dangers of nuclear power—and how safe, clean, renewable power technologies, led by solar and wind, energy we can live with, are available rendering nuclear power unnecessary.*

*As for nuclear power in space, this I stumbled into reading a Department of Energy newsletter, *Energy Insider*, in 1985, which told about two shuttle launches planned for 1986 lofting plutonium-fueled space probes. They would be sent out from the shuttles, one being the Challenger, once they attained orbit. The article noted that DOE and NASA had studied the possibility of accidents on these launches. So I sent out Freedom of Information Act requests to DOE, NASA and the five national laboratories the *Energy Insider* said were involved in these missions requesting the study cited. I asked about the consequences of an accident on launch, in the lower atmosphere, upper atmosphere and a fallback from orbit—and about alternatives to the use of plutonium.*

*I was met with silence; I was being stone-walled. I challenged the apparent cover-up. And, finally, nearly a year later, just before the Challenger accident, I got information from the government. This included the claim that there was only the tiniest chance of a major accident—a 1-in-100,000 chance because of the “high reliability inherent” in the shuttle. After the Challenger blew up, those odds of a shuttle disaster were, incidentally, soon changed to 1-in-76.*

*In further investigating the use of nuclear in space, I found accidents had happened in the U.S. and also the Soviet/Russian space programs, accidents in which radioactive poisons were released. Further, I found that in space—as on earth—there are safe alternatives to the use of nuclear power. Right now, for example, NASA’s Juno space probe is on its way to Jupiter getting its electric power from solar energy. And this, despite DOE and NASA insisting for years that beyond the orbit of Mars there was no substitute for generating electricity other than nuclear power.*

*I also discovered a major weapons connection as I kept looking into why DOE and NASA were pushing nuclear power in space: the “Star Wars” program. It turns out that the “Star Wars” plan of President Reagan was predicated on orbiting battle platforms with nuclear systems onboard to provide power for lasers, hypervelocity guns and particle beams. DOE and NASA sought to coordinate their space nuclear activities with the Pentagon. This resulted in another book, *Weapons in Space*, and TV programs, radio reports and numerous articles.*

**You are also the author of six books. Are you working on a seventh? Is there any other topic you can see yourself writing a book about in the future?**

*I have a sabbatical coming up in 2015 as part of being a professor at SUNY/College at Old Westbury and I plan to write a seventh book during it.*

**You share your knowledge of journalism and more specifically investigative reporting throughout your time as a full time professor at the State University of New York College at Old Westbury. What do you hope to teach the up and coming journalists of the world in your classes?**

*I am delighted to have been teaching now for more than three decades a class in Investigative Reporting at SUNY/College at Old Westbury. It’s reputed to be the oldest class in investigative reporting in a college or university in the nation; it started before I got to the college. Other classes I’ve taught include *Politics of Media*; *Environmental Journalism*; *TV Documentary*; *Theories and Techniques*; *TV & Radio Journalism*; and I supervise an internship program placing students at media institutions on Long Island and New York City. I endeavor to imbue my students with the spirit of journalism—especially the spirit of investigative reporting—as I was imbued as an intern at the Cleveland Press.*

**In keeping up with the times, you have a blog that you have been writing for since 2007. What are some other ways that you think a journalist can get themselves out there if they have yet to be published in a magazine or newspaper?**

*I have a master’s degree in Media Studies from the New School and my perspective is that it isn’t that one medium will totally replace another—as folks in the newspaper field feared when radio appeared, or people in radio feared with the arrival of TV. There will just be more and more media. But the Internet and other “new*

media” of our time are, I suggest to my students, central in the new media scene. And I urge them to jump in. These days, with a blog, you can reach the world. With relatively inexpensive equipment, you make and edit high-quality video. There are many options. You can work for someone else—and here on Long Island we are just a few miles from the media capital of the world: New York City. What opportunities there are on Long Island and so close by in New York City! And you can make your own media—as we have done with EnviroVideo. Writing a blog is an excellent way for aspiring journalists to get out there, get their work noticed. When you write a blog, it’s just astonishing how what you write is quickly picked up. After writing a piece on my blog—[www.karlgrossman.blogspot.com](http://www.karlgrossman.blogspot.com)—sometimes- I’ll search Google a minute after it goes online. And what I wrote is already listed and described on Google. The media revolution is truly amazing—and empowering—for journalists.

**Is there anything that you are working on right now that you are particularly excited about? Why?**

A major focus is the ongoing Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power catastrophe. There is what I consider to be a giant lie concerning this disaster, a suppression of information, an effort at dishonesty of historical dimensions. It involves international entities, especially the International Atomic Energy Agency, national governmental bodies – led in Japan by its current prime minister, the powerful nuclear industry and a “nuclear establishment” of scientists and others with a vested interest in atomic energy.

Deception was integral to the push for nuclear power from its start. I opened that first book on atomic energy, *Cover Up: What You Are Not Supposed to Know About Nuclear Power*, with: “You have not been informed about nuclear power. You have not been told. And that has been done on purpose. Keeping the public in the dark was deemed necessary by the promoters of nuclear power if it was to succeed. Those in government, science and private industry who have been pushing nuclear power realized that if people were given the facts, if they knew the consequences of nuclear power, they would not stand for it.”

Since the book was published in 1980, I’ve given many presentations on nuclear power at which I’ve often heard the comment that only when catastrophic nuclear accidents happened would people fully realize the deadliness of atomic energy. Well, massive nuclear accidents have occurred: the 1986 Chernobyl disaster and the Fukushima catastrophe that began on March 11, 2011 and is ongoing with large discharges of radioactive poisons continuing to spew out into the environment. Meanwhile, the posture of the nuclear promoters is denial insisting the impacts of the Fukushima catastrophe are essentially non-existent. A massive nuclear accident has occurred and they would make believe it hasn’t. I have been and will continue to work hard in giving light on the Fukushima catastrophe.

**Just recently you were inducted into the Press Club of Long Island’s Hall of Fame for your success in the journalism world. What was that like?**

*It was great.*

-As told by Alexa Froccaro

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