

A Mentoring Program story

The SEJ Mentoring Program pairs environmental journalists with less experienced SEJ members in one-on-one partnerships. The goal is to help professional journalists who are newcomers to the beat, or who simply want to improve their skills. The program has made more than 50 matches, including this partnership between Sharon Guynup and Barbara Maynard. Sharon is a freelance writer and photojournalist with more than 20 years of experience, and Barbara is a science writer who sought help making the transition from part-time to full-time freelancing. These are their stories.

Sharon Guynup

When Barbara first called me, she was already a good writer with lots of great story ideas, and her background in biology gave her a deep knowledge of the natural world. But she lived in Alaska, far removed from the publishing centers of the lower 48 – and she wasn't sure how to get her ideas out there. Her story proposals were good but needed a little tweaking. I helped her edit pitches, suggested a range of publications to send them to, and directed her toward web venues that could quickly beef up her portfolio. She was ready to fly – and her career has indeed taken off. I felt like a proud mama when she landed her first assignment for a top-shelf magazine!

Mentoring Barbara was a delight and a privilege. This kind of connection is, to me, the heart of what SEJ is about as an organization. Nowhere else have I found a network of colleagues so ready to share information and so generous with contacts as I have with the sej-talk listserv and at the yearly conference. I look forward to mentoring other writers as part of the give-and-take that helps each of us report on crucial environmental issues.



Sharon Guynup trekked 160 miles at altitudes above 12,000 feet in the Indian Himalayas last September. © Photo Credit: Nancy Green

Barbara Maynard

I came to environmental journalism by way of a graduate degree in biology. After a couple of journalism courses and a newspaper internship, I was muddling through the process of finding markets and sending queries, always wondering if I was trying to get in the door without knowing the secret knock. Right about that time the SEJ Mentor Program matched me with Sharon.

From the first phone call, Sharon's support and encouragement were a great help. She filled me in on her background, struggles and successes, and offered ideas on where to get some quick clips. Over the course of our one-year partnership, Sharon gave me valuable feedback on my resume and queries. Her suggestions gave me confidence in the things I was doing right, and



insight on how to change the things that were holding me back, especially the stuffy remains of my academic background. Last October Barbara Maynard celebrated another decade on Earth by backpacking in the Missouri Ozarks. © Photo Credit: Lee O'Brien

Sharon also offered her perspective on where to send pitches and how to repackage a story for a different market – which resulted in a successful pitch to a national magazine, thanks to her input. Perhaps her best advice was to attend the SEJ conference, and that's the first advice I'd give to anyone else starting out. Now if Sharon can just teach me to dance...

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