I approached this book with some trepidation. Who wants to read a collection of newspaper pieces from 1982, unrelated, thematically disparate, having in common simply the fact that all earned the "...highest honours conferred on Canadian newspaper people," the National Newspaper Awards? It's not that one does not realize that excellence should be recognized. It's simply that these are old spot news, old features, old columns, old cartoons. Not old in the sense that they are historical, but old in the sense that they are stale and too recent to be appreciated the second time around. That was my feeling as I picked up the book and I was wrong.

For one thing, MacFarlane has wisely interviewed the writers of these stories, columns and features. He has interviewed them primarily to determine the journalistic skills and values that these champions use to explain just what it is that they do when they practice their craft. He has managed to get these writers to open up about themselves and their work. In a way MacFarlane's interviews themselves are fine examples of professional journalism.

But the book is not about Andy MacFarlane. It is about the best in Canadian newspaper jour-
nalism. The prize for enterprise reporting went to the Vancouver Sun for its "Olson File", the story of the investigation leading to the arrest and conviction of mass murderer Clifford Olson. Moira Farrow led the thirteen-person team that put together the story. It seems clear that the reporters were both in awe of the grisly story they were unearthing and at the same time committed to telling it.

I was particularly impressed with enterpriser Rick Ouston's story "Talking to a Killer: He Was Glib and Slick." Ouston not only talked to Olson; he also talked to Olson's wife and to her mother. There was not sense of detachment in his accounting of these interviews. Ouston was both appalled and yet he maintained some professional distance.

John Slinger of the Toronto Star, won the National Award for columns ranging from the whimsical to the irrelevant. He's light, satirical, and he can be cutting. MacFarlane's interview explores in some detail just how Slinger puts together his columns. Unfortunately, this time we catch MacFarlane with the unforgivable, the massive self-indulgent cliche. How would you respond to a question which is not a question but a statement such as this one? "These columns bring out in me a feeling of recognition of various aspects of the human condition." Slinger doesn't respond to this nonsense, but he does discuss the rigors and frustrations of trying to write meaningful humourous columns four times a week.

Michael Farber of the Montreal Gazette won the award for sports writing. His story was based on an exclusive interview with Expos star
Tim Raines about the outfield's cocaine addiction. What Farber has done is demonstrate that sportswriting can be genuine journalism even though he says, "...the best writers on a newspaper and the worst writers on a newspaper are in the sports department."

For one who lives in a community served by a self-satisfied daily whose editorials tend to take all possible sides of every issue into account, it was a pleasure to read a sampling of the editorials of Joan Fraser of the Montreal Gazette who won the National Newspaper Award for editorial writing. When she finds the activities of the Quebec government nonsensical, she says so: "This is dangerous nonsense." She notes that the obligation of the editorial writer is rationally to present her case and openly to convince the reader to share her way of thinking and act upon it. MacFarlane's interview with Fraser is interesting because it gives some insight into the process of editorial writing by an editorial board.

One could go on discussing the merits of the various winners, such as Peter Goddard, who won the criticism award for his writing on the Toronto music scene. Goddard asks: How do you continue to comment on Rock and Roll when you are pushing forty and some of the Heavy Metal-loids want to kill everybody over thirty? One could also delve into the nuts and bolts of being a spot news reporter with Chris Young of Southam News. Young tells us how to get the story filed, why it is appropriate to express in the story your anger when you see the ruthless massacre of Palestinian men, women and children by Christians with the apparent collusion of the Israeli Army.

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But perhaps the most moving piece in the book is the last one involving Glen Allen of the Montreal Gazette. He won the feature writing award for his story on a teenage suicide. Allen and MacFarlane exchange notes on what it means to become part of the story you are writing, and the experience of being so engrossed in your craft that you are bringing wayward teenagers to your own home to rescue them and giving $20.00 handouts to derelicts on the street.

Yes, this book is worth reading after all. It is a tribute to the principle of committed journalism. Journalism is not simply good writing and deadlines. As Glen Allen puts it, "I love stories. I love hearing about people's experiences, and how they feel, and if they feel good, and if they feel bad, why, and how life is treating them. I just constantly go after people for this sort of thing. I don't know why. It's a bit of a quirk."

Indeed. A quirk which one hopes more journalism students and working journalists might acquire. This book is good supplementary reading for all journalism courses in newsgathering, newswriting, interviewing, and feature writing.