

TUTORIAL

## “Points of Interest” Cheat Sheet

By Steve O'Keefe

For several years, I've been using Points of Interest cheat sheets in press kits to good effect. Written specifically for media contacts, the cheat sheet is an index to story ideas in the book. The purpose is to stimulate a journalist to open the book *immediately*.

Most journalists do not have time to read the whole book. The Points of Interest page helps them quickly find parts of the book most relevant to any story idea. If you get them to open the book and start reading, you've crossed a major barrier to coverage.

Let me give an example. The following items are taken from the Points of Interest page for the book, *My Soul Said To Me*, a prison reform book published by HCI.

**Page 203-04:****How to Sleep in Prison**

Shank strapped to left hand, heavy book under shirt, right hand over throat. This is the position thousands of prisoners assume every night, to protect from nocturnal attacks.

**Page 250:****Project Return-on-Investment**

At the end of a five-year study, the Metropolitan Crime Commission concluded that \$5 million invested in Project Return had saved taxpayers \$209 million in courts costs, prisons and police -- a return on investment of 40 to 1.

If you're a journalist writing about violence in prison, the first snippet should get your pulse going. If you immediately turn to page 203 to check it out, I gotcha! You're in the book. If the writing is any good, you're going to stay in the book, then write about it.

If your interest in prison reform is more fiscal than physical, you might be lured into the book by the second point of interest. *Hustler* magazine took the bait with the prison rape

story. *The Progressive Review*, a Washington, D.C.-based “good government” magazine was more interested in the second.

**Creating a Points of Interest Page**

When I read a book, I keep a Points of Interest sheet at hand and jot down notes for each chapter. Things I look for include:

- **Terrific Excerpts.** I look for 2- to 10-page sections where the quality of writing is particularly strong or the subject matter compelling. I may pitch these as serials or feature articles.

- **Mission Statements.** Every now and then, an author will make a summary statement that captures the whole essence of a book. I keep an ear open for these succinct summations — they make terrific pull quotes to accompany reviews. Think of the way *Whole Earth Magazine* uses quotations from books it reviews.

- **Human Interest Stories.** Almost all media coverage is driven by stories of individuals. So I search for the people in the prose. I pull out their stories and introduce them to journalists through the Points of Interest page. These points usually start with “Meet John Newsworthy” or “Meet Jane Fascinating” — you get the idea.

- **Geographical Hooks.** I keep a separate list of cities mentioned in the book. Media coverage almost always starts with regional coverage, and builds from there. Some authors will mention dozens of place names in a book. For example, Emily Weinstein's *Cat Book* (Beau Soleil Publishing) was promoted heavily in New York and North Carolina — places where the author had lived a long time. But the *cats* profiled in the book came from all over the east coast, and helped us get regional reviews from Florida to Maine.

**Formatting Points of Interest Pages**

The final Points of Interest page you create should look like an index to

story ideas, with page numbers leading to tasty excerpts, good summary statements, and human interest stories. Add a section of geographical hooks at the end, indexing the cities, states, and countries mentioned in the book.

Sometimes you can keep a Points of Interest sheet to a single page, but often you'll need two pages to provide a hook for each major category of reviewer. For example, I recently promoted *Congressional Deskbook 2003-2004*, published by TheCapitol.Net. I needed points that appealed to trade journals for political lobbyists and captured the tactical advantages the book would confer. I also needed points for librarians — a major market for the book — stressing such features as quality indexing and a pronunciation guide.

Points of Interest Pages should be included in the press kit sent with the book. They can be part of an online press kit, as well, but you should never e-mail them to media contacts. The Points of Interest page is designed to get someone to open the book and start reading. It is most effective when it arrives with a review copy of the book, and is ineffective when sent separately — as a file attachment, embedded into e-mail, or faxed. In phone follow-ups with media contacts, they invariably lose Points of Interest that were sent via e-mail, whereas they use the printed version as a bookmark and convenient place to jot notes while reading the book.

I have posted a sample Points of Interest Page at the Patron Saint Productions web site. It's a Microsoft Word document that you are free to download and use as a template for your own projects. You'll find it in the Resources/Templates section of the site at: <http://www.patronsaintpr.com/resources/templates>



## ~ SAMPLE POINTS OF INTEREST ~

From the book, *MY SOUL SAID TO ME: An Unlikely Journey Behind the Walls of Justice* by Robert E. Roberts, D.D.S., Ph.D., M.S.W. ~ Published by Health Communications, Inc. (ISBN 0-7573-0064-2, 297 pages, softcover, \$12.95)

### Page 68: Anthropologist & Guide

Bob Roberts says he feels like an anthropologist in a foreign land. Malcolm is Bob's "native guide" and translator in the predominantly black and violent world of prison. Later, when Malcolm gets pardoned, the roles are reversed: Bob becomes Malcolm's guide and translator in the predominantly white world of politics and money. *My Soul Said To Me* has a sub-plot of the unlikely bond between two men from different worlds.

### Pages 81–85: A Light Turned On

This is a good summary of the impact of the community-building project on the prisoners and guards. See also pages 168–169, showing a reduction in major infractions from 88 a week to just 8 a week!

### Page 152: Sabotage at Dixon

The Warden begins a policy of sabotage to keep inmates from attending community-building workshops. Culminates in a confrontation in the Warden's office between an LSU professor and Roberts — a set up to get rid of Roberts.

### Page 121-123: Meet Randy, the Practice Dummy

Inmate is used as a tackle dummy in football practice for the Warden's teenage son.

### Page 160: Meet Bubba, Crazy Like a Fox

Inmate Bubba shaves his head so the guards will think he's crazy and leave him alone in the final days before his release.

### Page 175: White is Right

A white murderer gets paroled after helping Warden Cain build a swimming pool, while a black bank robber and model prisoner just keeps doing time.

### Page 203–04: How to Sleep in Prison

Shank strapped to left hand, heavy book under shirt, right hand over throat. This is the position thousands of prisoners assume every night, to protect from nocturnal attacks.

### Page 223–25: A Common Bond

Women join the Project Return sessions, and find a common bond with male ex-cons in mutual experiences of rape. Prison rape is the ugly underbelly of this story. The problem is much worse than anyone wants to admit. See the sickening stats on page 231.

### Page 234: Meet John LaFleur, 17 Years in Isolation

In juvenile jail for a minor offense, LaFleur has an altercation with his jailers and is tossed into a ward where he is gang raped by 25 other inmates. Later transferred to Angola where he spends 17 years in isolation rather than be subjected to the inmate population. A graduate of Project Return, LaFleur is the most important interview in this story other than Bob Roberts.

### Page 247: Justice vs. Public Safety

Good explanation of why justice should not be the goal of criminal law — and why public safety should be.

### Geographical Points of Interest:

- Louisiana
  - Shreveport (Bob Robert's hometown)
  - Jackson/Baton Rouge (Dixon Prison)
  - New Orleans (First home of Project Return)
  - Slidell (Bob Robert's residence)
- Oregon (book written there; possible Project Return site)
- Knoxville, TN (Project Return site)
- Minnesota (Men's group)
- West Virginia (Men's group)
- Virginia (Men's group; possible Project Return site)
- Washington, DC (Lots of support from Dept. of Justice)
- Florida (book's publisher)

