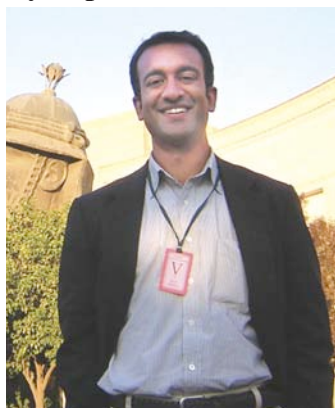


Campo Alumni to Talk About Iraq at Saint Mary's

By Sophie Braccini



Rajiv in Bagdad

Photo courtesy of Rajiv Chandrasekaran

Living in Baghdad's "Green Zone" shortly after the US invasion of Iraq, Rajiv Chandrasekaran, a young journalist for the Washington Post and alumni of Campolindo High School, was keenly aware of the privileged enclave he was working in as the war raged all around. Yet, it was from this stable aberration that most American officials based their decisions on rebuilding Iraq and as Chandrasekaran argues, that's exactly why the decisions were so out of touch with Iraqi reality.

Chandrasekaran moved to Moraga with his family from Palo Alto in 1987 and he completed his high school years at Campolindo. There, his favorite subjects were science and math and he actively considered becoming a doctor or engineer. However, his interest in news research and reporting started with his participation in "La Puma,"

Campo's student newspaper. He remembers how Edward Hewitson, English teacher and journalism adviser had a profound influence on him and his interest in reporting the news.

After graduating, Chandrasekaran re-crossed the bay to attend Stanford where he majored in Political Science. There too, he gravitated toward journalism and edited the Stanford Daily, the student newspaper that's been publishing news since 1892. A month after graduation, Chandrasekaran was offered an internship at the Washington Post that eventually turned into a permanent position.

At the Post, Chandrasekaran began reporting on business issues and his background in Silicon Valley made him a perfect choice for covering technology issues. In 2000, he was offered the opportunity to cover South East Asia for the Post. In Chandrasekaran's words, "this was a great new adventure, I had never traveled to that part of the world, and I was interested in living overseas, in discovering new countries as well as seeing my own from further away."

At 26, he found himself stationed in Djakarta Indonesia for 2 1/2 years. There he covered issues and events such as the 2000 Olympic games in Sydney, Australia and President Clinton's historic visit to Vietnam. After 9/11,

he reported extensively from the hot spots of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Chandrasekaran believes that his physical appearance might have allowed him to be accepted in this part of the world. In 2002, his editor moved him to Cairo so he could better cover the Middle East. Then he was stationed in Baghdad six months prior to the commencement of the Iraqi war and became the Post's bureau chief in Baghdad August 2004.

From his experiences came the book: "Imperial Life in the Emerald City - Inside Iraq's Green Zone." "It was a crazy world inside the Green Zone," says Chandrasekaran, "many of the decisions were made in the protected area by people who had been sent by the White House based on political loyalty rather than cultural, technical or operational competency.

They didn't always see what was really important and relevant to the Iraqi people like jobs or electricity." Chandrasekaran witnessed the aftermath and how it led to protests and dissatisfaction with the American occupation.

The depiction of life in occupied Baghdad has won the author many awards, such as the Samuel Johnson Prize for non-fiction, the Overseas Press Club's Annual Cornelius Award for best non-fiction book on International Affairs and the Ron Ridenhour Book Prize, he appears regularly

on CNN, MSNBC and National Public Radio. For the journalist, coming back to America and writing the book was a way to bring a much-needed closure to an exhilarating but sometimes dangerous time of his life.

Chandrasekaran is now facing an interesting new challenge. Like most newspaper in industrial countries, the Washington Post competes with the Internet and television to be the media of choice for communicating the news. This may be why the paper has chosen him as its national editor, a young man that understands the forces that drive today's news media. Chandrasekaran manages a team of sixty journalists and editors who are in charge of providing content for the paper and the online version of the Post. Since the online version is updated 24/7, journalists have to work in different ways and sometimes even send their articles directly from the scene of breaking news.

This exiting life and great responsibility do not preclude a bit of nostalgia for his native Bay Area. He often visits his family, who still reside in Moraga, and will talk at Saint Mary's College about his book on October 22nd. For reservations call (925) 631 4381.

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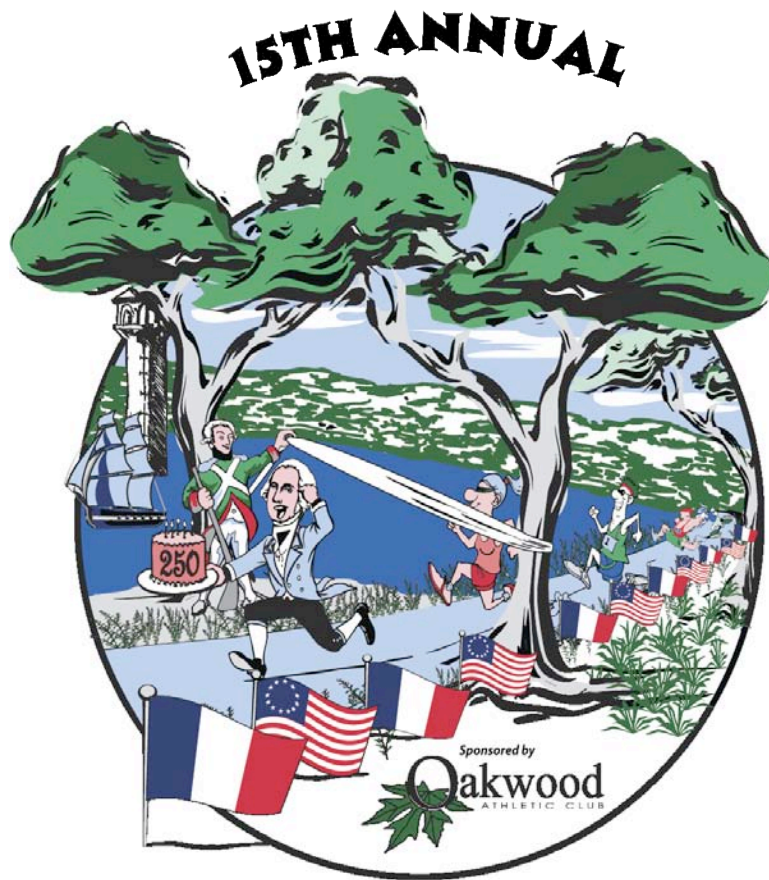


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