

EUSJA News

Newsletter of the European Union of Science Journalists' Associations

Autumn 2000

EUSJA on-line

Editorial

Broadband: Feel the bandwidth

So, you've got your email working and you may even have a web-site of your own, when along comes a flurry of technical articles proclaiming the next generation of the internet has arrived. More change. Under the generic heading of 'broadband' come new acronyms to master. Most of us are familiar with ISDN (once memorably interpreted as standing for It Still Does Nothing). Now we have ADSL. Officially this is Asynchronous Digital Subscriber Line, but I prefer All Does Sound Lovely.

ADSL is the technology that allows telephone companies to pump data down a phone line a hundred times faster than before. So emails that took about five seconds to arrive, will now *turn to page 6*

Inside...

Who looks after the freelancers?	p2
Planetary science	p2
Get your hands dirty	p4
A sad story from Denmark	p4
La vie en sport	p5
Eusja support to travel expenses	p5
How to benefit from Eusja	p7
EUSJA contacts	p8

Globally speaking

The Swiss Association of Science Journalism has got into a good habit: every three or four years we make a trip to a foreign country in order to study the scientific achievements and peculiarities of scientists abroad. At the same time, we take the opportunity to meet colleagues who live a work there. We have been to East Africa, to the United States, to South America, the Soviet Union, China and Australia. And now we've recently returned from a trip to India. This trip opened our eyes to a country that is not often associated with extraordinary scientific achievements (apart from the fact that they invented the zero and are experiencing an incredible information technology boom at the moment). Our visit showed us how wrong this impression is. Fascinating work is being done in India in such disparate fields as energy, space and genetics.

We also had the chance to meet some Indian science journalists (most of whom, incidentally, did not know that their own association has been an associate member of EUSJA for many years, but I think I have now been able to renew our contacts.) Our Indian colleagues have audiences that we Europeans – and the Swiss in particular – can only dream of.

Meanwhile, EUSJA board member Istvan Palugyai has been in Beijing to discuss the creation of a world association for science journalism. This seems to be a distant goal, but in a world where research is global, I think our profession should also take a global view and promote the exchange of knowledge in the popular as well as in the specialised media.

You may object to all this world travel. You might say, let us improve the situation in Europe first. I agree! But we have a saying in Switzerland that goes "Do the one thing without abandoning the other". Last year was a rather disappointing one for EUSJA. The Danish Science Journalists Association had to cancel a promising exchange project; other national associations promised activities, but nothing materialised. There has also not been enough contact between our associations and the individual members, the promotion of which, after all, should be the primary aim of EUSJA.

The EUSJA board has therefore decided to meet for one weekend in December to discuss how to promote these contacts effectively. We will try to organize at least one event by ourselves and encourage member associations to become more active in promoting international contacts. It has long been an EUSJA goal that each member association should host an EUSJA visit every five years. Now we have the means to support such projects with advice and money!

As well as offering support for organising study visits, EUSJA can also offer money to help science journalists from Eastern countries to pay for travel to western European countries. Your national EUSJA representative can fill you in on all the details. The opportunities are there - all you have to do is seize them! After all, there is no doubt that travel broadens the mind. It sweeps away your prejudices, opens your horizons and reminds you that good ideas originate in other countries too.

*Werner Hadorn
EUSJA president*



First steps

Freelancing offers good opportunities – but who looks after the freelancers?

Science and the Internet: it's a good combination for the generation of journalists who are trying to look for their first job. Freelance journalism is becoming more popular as a profession all over the world. According to a research carried out by the International Journalists' Federation (IJF), <http://www.ijnet.org> 23% of all those who work in the media are freelancers. And, as the Freelance International Press organisation (FLIP) <http://www.flipnews.org> says, "editors have begun to see the advantages of using freelancers, who don't take up office space, don't require health and pension payments, and are generally more efficient all round".

With science and technology topics becoming more and more popular with the general public, there are great opportunities to promote science stories in the media. And, as European Union officials note, science and technology journalists are playing an increasingly important role in modern society.

For the young 'digital generation', freelancing offers many advantages. All you need is a PC, a telephone and a modem to make it possible to do interviews, write articles and collaborate with colleagues all over the world writing articles and making interviews at home, and the possibility of collaborating with any media all over the world. Many can and do make careers working this way.

But all is not entirely rosy on the freelance front. As FLIP president, the Italian journalist Virgilio Violo, comments "what worries us most, especially when you consider the endless fascination which the profession has for the young, is the widespread failure to recognise the professional rights of freelancers". The IJF is also demanding a new professional status for freelancers to help combat a growing trend towards unfair conditions.

Author's rights are a case in point. Traditionally, print publications paid freelancers for the rights to publish an article once only. But the situation is changing now that publishers tend to be associated with multimedia groups. Who owns the rights now – especially the electronic rights? what happens when the work is used more than once? Often the freelancer is never paid for this additional use of his work.

True, some courts in France and United States are beginning to tackle the issues of rights brought up by Journalists' Associations. But as journalists, what should we be doing?

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To subscribe to the EUSJA-L e-mail discussion list send the message: subscribe eusja-l firstname lastname (don't forget to substitute your own name!) to the address: <listserv@listserv.rl.ac.uk>

Out of this world

Planetary science with a Portuguese accent

The Planetary Society (TPS) is a non-profit worldwide organization dedicated to the exploration of the planets and the search for life in the universe. It was founded in 1980 by three distinguished scientists: Bruce Murray, Louis Friedman and the late great Carl Sagan. With branches in many countries, TPS supports many educational and scientific activities.

At the Portuguese branch of the TPS we recognise that our goals will have to be slightly different from those of the American TPS. The situations in the two countries are very different. In Portugal we lack a strong scientific culture and tradition and the scientific community is small. So one of the main preoccupations our group is help to raise awareness of science. We want to help to build a society that enjoys science, and our primary preoccupation so far has been to bring science and discuss science (and astronomy particularly) with the general public. One way we do this is by organising informal conferences. And recently we've decided to take advantage of the communication opportunities offered by the internet.

As well as creating an electronic mailing list, we've also set up a web site designed to appeal to a wide range of interests. Log on to <http://tps.portugal.geoman.net> and you'll find the latest news about planetary exploration, the SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) project, a book reviews section (science fiction, technical books and science promotion books); a section dedicated to reviews of science fiction movies; and chat room. The website also helps to promote science forums. These are organised by some of the biggest names in Portuguese science. You'll also find a special section devoted to space art – a place where you can let your imagination run free and view art by some of the world's best space artists. It's an ideal place to visit when you come exhausted from your work and need to relax!

But we want to be able to offer even more. I'm coordinating a new virtual place called "Angles" – a place where anyone interested in science can post articles related to science, science culture and science education. I'm always looking for new contributions and hope as science journalists you'll be interested in sharing your thoughts about the meaning and role of science. I've already had contributions from scientists, students, journalists, philosophers, sociologists and I'd like to include your opinions, based on your experience, too.

Science journalists already play an important role in society – and if the future described by the science fiction writers comes true – your work to encourage the public understanding of science will be even more important. At TPS-Portugal we hope to establish closer contacts with science journalists. We're all on the same side, after all.

If you'd like to contribute, contact me at TPS Portugal, Rua Miguel Bombarda, 260, 4050-377 Porto, Portugal or by e-mail at 96a008@astro.ma.fc.up.pt.

Francisco Miguel de Sousa Goncalves, National Coordinator, TPS (Portugal)
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We speak your language

Whether you are looking for interesting science stories covering a wide range of disciplines and applications, or simply hoping to keep your finger on the pulse of some of the most exciting EU-sponsored science and technology research around, you could do far worse than approach the Press Officers at the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Commission's own research centre.

The JRC is a Directorate-General of the European Commission and the responsibility of Philippe Busquin, European Commissioner for Research. In all it employs about 2,500 staff across its five sites, including a large number of Europe's most skilled scientists.

Science galore

The JRC acts as a scientific and technical reference centre to support the EU policy-making process. Dedicated to serving the common interest of the Member States, the JRC remains independent from private or national special interests. As well as providing customer-driven scientific and technical support for the conception, development, implementation and monitoring of EU policies, the JRC also functions as a reference centre of science and technology for the EU.

In addition, the JRC carries out extensive research of direct concern to European citizens and industry. Over the years, it has developed special skills and unique tools to provide autonomous and Europe-wide expertise to improve understanding of the links between technology, the economy and society.

Activities unlimited

With activities ranging from the assessment of safety standards for children's toys and improved biomaterials for hip implants; new technologies for measuring air quality and vehicle emissions; to investigating chemical releases from materials in contact with food and consumer goods; and the use of satellite systems to monitor land use; urban dynamics and deforestation, the JRC offers science stories to suit all tastes.

The JRC Press Office at the Ispra site, home to the Institute for Systems, Informatics and Safety (ISIS); The Environment Institute (EI); the Space Applications Institute (SAI); and the Institute for Health and Consumer Protection (IHCP), would like to establish better contact with scientific writers interested in furthering the scientific awareness of the general public and who would like more information about the JRC and its research.

Our working languages include English, German, French, Italian, Dutch and Spanish. And given a little time we are also happy to respond to queries in other EU languages. So whatever language you speak – if you're interested in science stories, we're keen to speak to you!

For more information contact:

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Or

Visit the jrc website at: www.jrc.cec.eu.int

Who does what at the JRC:

- The Institute for Reference Materials and Measurements (IRMM), Geel, Belgium.
Created as part of original Treaty of Rome, IRMM acts as the independent Trans-national Measurement Institute of the European Commission in a similar way to national measurement institutes in Member States.
- The Institute for Transuranium Elements (ITU), Karlsruhe, Germany.
ITU Provides reliable and impartial scientific expertise on nuclear safety and safeguards for the protection of society against risks related to the use and storage of highly radioactive transuranium elements.
- The Institute for Advanced Materials (IAM), Petten, the Netherlands.
IAM carries out testing and evaluation of the performance of materials in components, structures and industrial processes. It works closely with industry and provides a channel of communication between industry and European policy makers.
- The Institute for Systems, Informatics and Safety (ISIS), Ispra, Italy. ISIS applies technology for the safety and security of the citizen and society.
- The Environment Institute (EI), Ispra, Italy.
EI focuses on protecting man and his environment and on the quality of life and goods in Europe. It is a centre of scientific and technical expertise in support of EU policy for the protection of the environment and the citizen.
- The Space Applications Institute (SAI), Ispra, Italy.
SAI promotes the use of space-derived data and data information from other sources in order to provide timely, accurate and policy relevant spatial information services for European decision makers.
- The Institute for Health and Consumer Protection (IHCP), Ispra, Italy. IHCP was created to meet specific EU priorities on food, chemical and pharmaceutical safety as well as electronic commerce protection.
- The Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS), Seville, Spain. IPTS was created to help Europe make the most of trends and changes that occur in technology. It promotes and enables a better understanding of the links between technology, economy and society.

A sad story

The failed study visit to Denmark

Study visits to member countries form the backbone of EUSJA activities, and this year the Danish Association of Science Journalists (DASJ) planned a study visit to Denmark in September, 2000.

But unfortunately, we had to cancel it. The reason: We were not able to raise enough money from sponsors to cover the expenses. Even the new possibility of obtaining financial support from EUSJA was not enough to save the project. We needed to raise 130 000 DKR to sponsor the study visit in the usual manner, that is for us to be able to treat participants as guests and to cover all their expenses while visiting Denmark. Even if we opted for a 'discount' version of the visit, and asked participants to pay their own hotel expenses, we still needed to raise 60 000 DKR. But at the end of the day we were only able to raise 45 000 DKR, so we decided to cancel the visit. The Danish Association of Science Journalists (DASJ) has no income of its own other than the annual subscription paid by our members. And this is used to cover the costs of local arrangements.



He doesn't look very sad, though.

Lessons learnt

But we did learn some lessons from this sorry affair, and these could be of relevance for other national associations trying to set up study visits:

- The programme was only finalised 6 months before it was due to take place. This restricted the amount of time we had to raise funds. A longer period could have proved critical.
- We raised the "journalistic flag" too high. Our only criteria in planning the programme was the desire to present world class science. In hindsight it would have been wiser to include some large pharmaceutical or industrial companies, who would probably have offered some financial support for the visit.
- It is tough for a national board made up of busy people to find sufficient time to set up a study visit – especially when they have to do all this work for free. This is no excuse. It's just a fact.

The DASJ may consider trying again to arrange a study visit to Denmark in 2002 – but that's a decision that our new board, to be elected in February 2001, will have to make for themselves.

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Do it yourself

A chance to get your hands dirty

You spend your working life writing about laboratory-based research. Now you can do some yourself. The European Initiative for Communicators of Science (EICOS) is once again offering journalists from any European country the chance to take part in research, working alongside researchers. It is being organised out of the Max Planck Institute for Biophysical Chemistry in Go[umlaut]ttingen.

EICOS Fellowships provide financial support for up to three weeks, including travel, housing and food. And they also give the opportunity to meet other European journalists.

The idea is to help develop a dialogue "in which journalists gain a deeper understanding of the scientific endeavour and attitudes of scientists, while scientists learn how science is reported to the public...".

The "Hands-on Laboratory", as it is called, takes place from 12 May to 19 May at a number of German biological laboratories and the Pasteur Institute in Paris. The research areas covered include the cancer, plants, biochemistry, disease, molecular biology, and environment and health.

After the Hands-on Laboratory, you can also take up the option of spending one or two weeks on an extended laboratory assignment.

Eligibility is fairly straightforward. You need to be reasonably competent in English, have at least two years' experience and, preferably, have a staff or freelance writing position (though scientific illustrators and photographers will be considered). But since the idea is to offer journalists a new outlook on their work, people with recent advanced degrees in biology or with extensive laboratory training are not encouraged to apply.

Application forms and further information is available on the web at <www.eicos.mpg.de>; or from the ABSW International Representative, Pete Wrobel, at Nature, 4 Crinan Street, London N1 9XW (e-mail p.wrobel@nature.com). You can also obtain more information and an application form by writing to:

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The deadline for applications is 10 February, 2001 with notification of acceptance on or soon after 10 March.

*Pete Wrobel, ABSW
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La vie en sport

Francophones en Londres – c'est pour vous

I've just taken up the position of Editor in Chief for an organisation called The IBSV (Institut Biomedical Sports et Vie) was established in 1989 as a research and assessment centre for elite sports such as Formula 1, World Rally Championship, Le Mans 24 Hours and sailing. Since then IBSV has gained a significant reputation in the sports world by helping individuals and teams to maximise performance through using validated assessments, implementing tailored performance enhancing programs and providing both "hands on" and distance follow-up.

With this in mind, we are now turning our attention to corporate health and are currently developing an online health and wellbeing product to be sold to bluechip companies on a bespoke basis. Our model will focus on 5 key themes - stress, sleep, nutrition, physical exercise and professional behaviour.

Our site is being developed in English and French, and while I feel can confidently access quality health and fitness writers for the English site, it's becoming increasingly clear that we need a native French speaker with excellent bilingual writing skills. Translation will be a huge part of this role. It's a full-time position, based in London and we offer very competitive salaries and benefits packages. Contact me for more information.

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Beat the heat

Parisians prove thirsty for knowledge

Science, apparently, refreshes the parts that other subjects cannot reach. At least that's what you might be led to believe if you visited Paris this summer. A daily public lecture series marking the year 2000 and known as the University of Knowledge, filled the auditorium at the National Arts and Trades Conservatory day after day this summer.

'Exit polls' indicated that the lectures were attended by a broad spectrum of society numbering tens of thousands, and that an overwhelming majority of those attending the lectures have a positive view of science. Lecture subjects included topics in law, social sciences – but among the best attended were lectures on genetics, informatics and other hard sciences.

The series organiser, himself a philosopher, opted for a pro-science bias when choosing lecture topics because

"today science and technology are omnipresent and weigh heavily on our lives. Biology alone is forcing us to rethink our humanistic assumptions." Meanwhile, an estimated 40 000 people every month log on to the University of Knowledge website at www.celebration2000.gouv.fr/sites/utls/

Nina Morgan, ABSW

[<ninamorgan@compuserve.com>](mailto:ninamorgan@compuserve.com)

Support for East-West exchange and study trips

Travel allowances

EUSJA support for foreign visits

The General Assembly of the EUSJA delegates decided at its last meeting in May, 2000 to promote the international exchange of science journalists. In general EUSJA will offer financial support (up to a limit of FF 26 450) to help journalists from Eastern European countries visit scientific sites in Western Europe. But it may also offer support (up to FF 30 000) to associations in Western Europe to help them organise events for members of the EUSJA associations. The rules governing EUSJA support for foreign visits can be found on pages 14 and 15 of the Board meeting minutes, posted on the EUSJA website [<www.esf.org/eusja>](http://www.esf.org/eusja). They are also shown below.

Get active!

Werner Hadorn

President EUSJA

Regulations for exchange visits of journalists from Eastern European countries to Western countries:

1. Journalists taking advantage of the scheme must be members of their national association, and this association must be represented in EUSJA.
2. They must work out a plan for their visit of a scientific site in a Western European country including indications regarding publication (where? what? circulation?). Projects can involve individual journalists and/or small groups (2-4) of journalists.
3. The applicants must present their project proposal to their national association and obtain the written approval of their board. The national associations should ensure that as many of their members as possible stand to benefit from the scheme.
4. The applicants must contact the national association of the host country, either via its president or its EUSJA representative to submit their project proposal. The partner countries are expected to give support, particularly in the form of general information, contacts for the sites concerned, accommodation (if possible) as well as local travel expenses (if possible). A journalist from the partner country is expected to accompany the visiting journalists on their visit.



5. Once the project is defined, the journalists must prepare a detailed budget making clear what costs are still not covered. This should be sent to the EUSJA president together an outline of the project and evidence of approval by both the host country and their own national association. EUSJA funds are intended mainly to cover international travel expenses, but they may possibly be used to cover accommodation and local travel expenses within a reasonable limit.
6. After the visit, recipients of EUSJA funds should send examples of the publications that result from their visits (in the form of clippings or tapes) to their national associations, to the partner association and to the EUSJA Board. Journalists who do not send in examples of the publications that result from the trip without a valid excuse will not be allowed to participate in the scheme again.
7. Recipients must also send EUSJA an account of their expenses. Funds allocated by EUSJA that have not been used must be refunded.
8. The EUSJA Board will give credits under this scheme within its Budgetary limits, and not exceeding 20% of the global budget at disposal for any request, in the order of the arrival of the requests (i. e. requests will be considered on a first come, first served basis.) Once the global budget has been used up, visits will have to be postponed to the following year.

Regulations for support to be given to National Associations for organising EUSJA visits:

1. In order to promote the organisation of visits to scientific sites EUSJA can support organisers who are not able to cover their expenses by means of sponsors or own financial contributions.
2. Organisers must be members of EUSJA and of their national associations.
3. Via their delegates, they must submit a request to the Officers stating their financial needs.
4. EUSJA can contribute towards the costs for accommodation, local travel and international travel from Eastern countries up to a limit of normally FF 6 000 (not exceeding FF 10 000).
5. Credit can normally only be given if the visit will provide free accommodation and local transport for the

participants. Visits should not exceed 20 participants and 2 per country (as a rule).

6. The organisers should send their request (or hand it in at the general assembly via their delegates) with a description of the project and a detailed budget.
7. EUSJA will pay its contribution as soon as the Officers have agreed to support it, so that the money is available to the organiser before the visit. The credit is regarded as a forfeit.
8. The EUSJA Board will give credits under this scheme within its budgetary limits in the order of the arrival of the requests. Once the budgeted credits have been used up, visits will have to be postponed to the following year. If the budgetary limits have not been reached in the current year, the remaining sum may be added to the budget credit of the following year.
9. The organisers will be required to send a detailed report of the visit to the EUSJA.

Broadband...

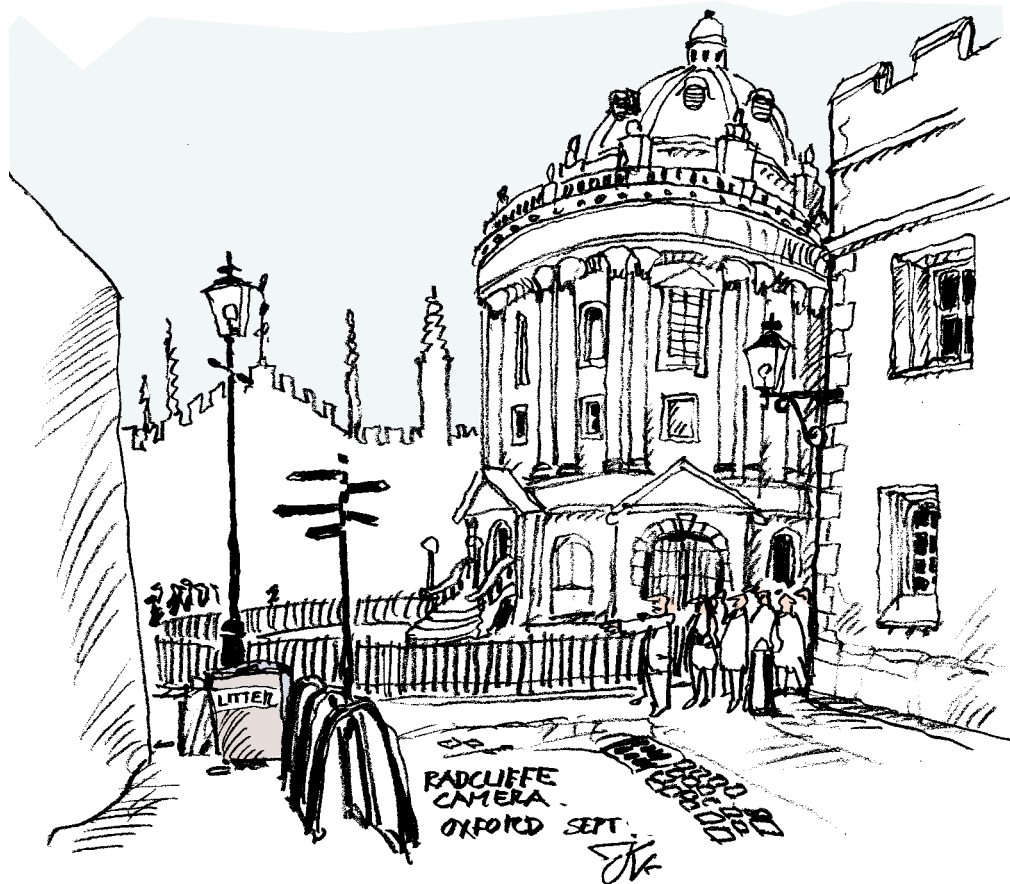
Continued from page 1

take only fifty milliseconds. If you get fifty emails a day, well, that's two and a half seconds extra capacity that can be added to your working day. Isn't technology wonderful!

But, casting cynicism aside, for those of us whose journalism spans TV and radio as well as print, broadband could make a big change to our lives. Just as the world wide web has revolutionised the way organisations communicate with web sites of text and graphics, so the advent of broadband means that these same organisations can communicate with sound and moving pictures. Commercial concerns can own their own TV-style media. Brands can become broadcasters.

This does sound wonderful until you recall the last turgid press release you saw drafted by a product manager. Imagine the same product manager as a wannabee movie director. Oh dear. But again, the good news is that there could be a lot more work for professionals to help commercial concerns communicate using these new media. Broadband is coming. Watch this space.

*Mike Tomlinson, ABSW
<m.tomlinson@btinternet.com>*



Kaianders Sempler

To profit from EUSJA

Having friends and contacts in foreign countries is not only fun, it can also be quite profitable.

A couple of months ago I read in a news bulletin that cosmologist Stephen Hawking was raving mad over a new theatre play about his cosmology and his private life. The play called "God and Stephen Hawking" had just opened in Bath, and would run the next week in Oxford.

I immediately decided to go to England to see the play and write a story about it. But it is no fun going to the theatre alone. Did I know anyone in Oxford?

Yes I did. I had met Nina Morgan on an Eusja study trip to Slovenia three years ago. Since then we have had regular contact over the internet. So I mailed Nina and asked her if she was interested in going to the theatre. She was. And what's more, she vounteered to get the tickets and invited me to stay at her house in Chadlington outside Oxford over the night.

So I took a cheap flight from Stockholm to London Stanstead (Ryanair flies daily, round trip is about 100 euro) then a blue coach from the airport to Oxford, had dinner with Nina and her mother and then we all went to the theatre.

The play wasn't all that good, but as it had infuriated the omnipotent Stephen Hawking, the review of it made a good story in my magazine, *Ny Teknik*.

To sum it up: Not only did we have fun, talking and laughing, but the trip was also easy to plan and very cheap. As a matter of fact, it didn't cost me more than I

spent last year when I went to Göteborg on the Swedish west coast to see Michael Frayn's fantastic play, *Copenhagen*. All thanks to Nina. But also thanks to Eusja that brought us into contact with each other.

Kaianders Sempler
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Keep in touch!

News, views, stories, announcements, ideas or even cautionary tales -- they could all be of interest for the next EUSJA News, due out in May, 2001.

Send me yours by 9 April. Get in touch by e-mail:

ninamorgan@compuserve.com;

or by phone or fax (the number is the same for both) on +44-1608-676530;

or by old-fashion post at:

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Planning a journey? Your colleagues in Europe can help

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