Influences  What shapes the minds that make the news

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and director of Penn’s Center for
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Quotation to live by: “Things explain
each other, not themselves.” — George
Oppen

Books on my nightstand right now:
Oranges, by John McPhee; The Lay of
the Land, by Richard Ford; IFLIFE, by
Bob Percelman; Darfur Diaries: Stories
of Survival
(http://go.philly.com/darfurdaries), by Jen
Marlowe, Aisha Bain, Adam Shapiro
and Paul Ruesabagina.

Favorite author, fiction: Grace Paley.

Favorite author, nonfiction: Roger
Angell.

Favorite poets or poems: William
Carlos Williams and Emily Dickinson.
Poems: Williams’ “To Elsie”
(http://go.philly.com/toesie); Dickinson’s
“I dwell in possibility”
(http://go.philly.com/possibility).

Favorite beach reading: Any good
book about baseball.

Book or author other people praise,
but I never liked: Night, by Elie
Wiesel.

A book that influenced how I live my
life: The Periodic Table, by Primo Levi.

TV show I’m not ashamed to admit I
watch: Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip,
on NBC.

TV show I hate to admit I like:
American Idol, on Fox.

Favorite comic strip: Don’t read them
at all.

Movie I love so much I’ve watched it
more than twice: Fail-Safe (1964).

Web sites I visit regularly: UbuWeb,
by Kenny Goldsmith (www.ubu.com);
Human Rights Watch (www/hrw.org).

If you turned my car radio on right
now, it would be tuned to: WXPN-FM
(88.5).

Magazines I read regularly: The New
Yorker.

Favorite type of music: Bob Dylan —
himself, or anyone covering a Dylan
song.

Last concert/performance attended:
Francis Dunnery at the Tin Angel,
June 16, 2006.

Recording I play when my soul needs
a lift: Patty Griffin, “Making Pies,”
from her album 1,000 Kisses.

Person in my field whom I most
admire: Bob Lucid, who died in
December. Bob, an emeritus professor
of English at Penn, first had the idea
(in 1995) of creating the Kelly Writers
House.

Living person I’d most like to join for
dinner and conversation: Pete Seeger.

Heroes from history: Kazik (Simha
Rotem — a leader of the Warsaw
Ghetto Uprising); Roberto Clemente;
Rosie the Riveter; Marian Anderson.

If I had the power to order all of the
Philadelphia region to read one book,
It would be: The Periodic Table, by
Primo Levi.

And here’s why: The book is in part a
plea for nonspecialized, ethical science
— for a form of empirical
understanding that depends on
the poetic sensibility, a sensibility that has
the power to prevent genocide.