JIM LEHRER INTERVIEW
*THE NEWSPAPERMAN: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF BEN BRADLEE*
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

**JIM LEHRER**
**Co-Founder, PBS NewsHour**
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ON SCREEN TEXT:

The Newspaperman

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ON SCREEN TEXT:

Jim Lehrer

Co-Founder, PBS NewsHour

**Getting into journalism**

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JIM LEHRER:

I wanted to play professional baseball. In fact, I was gonna play shortstop for the Brooklyn Dodgers. And—you remember a guy, I'm sure you don't remember a guy named Pee Wee Reese who was the shortstop for the Dodgers. And my aspiration was to take Pee Wee's place. I was 16. Lived in Beaumont, Texas. And the coach of our team said, "Jimmy, I think you better come up with a—option—another—another—another life's plan 'cause

you're not a good enough baseball player. You're never gonna make it." And so—there was sports writers had come to our games and I go to know some of those guys. This is in Beaumont, Texas. And I thought, "My God, what a life that would be." And—so I decided to be—and about that time, I'm sure you've had—everybody's had the same experience, we had a teacher at a certain time said something. And—and I had an English teacher in this place, Beaumont, Texas. At the same time—I'd written a little paper. Had—calling them themes then about Charles Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*, I think it was. And anyhow, the teacher correctly gave me an A, it was so beautifully run—written.

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JIM LEHRER:

Anyhow, the teacher wrote up in the corner, "Jimmy, you're a very good writer." And that happened at the same time when my baseball thing went kaplook. And so I decided to be a writer, sports writer. And-- that was about it. And I told my mother, in fact, "I'm gonna be a writer." And she kind of tapped me on the head and said, "Okay, Jimmy. I-- be my guest." And—so it was, my decision to go into journalism was essentially a decision to be a writer. And had bought into-- already had begun to buy-- buy into the—Hemingway idea. Hemingway said, "You know, you wanna be a—you wanna be a writer, you get a job on a newspaper." Force you to deal with the language in a semi-coherent way. Keep—food on the table. And if you pay attention, if you're a newspaper man and you pay attention, you'll meet interesting people and—have—see or observe or be a piece of an interesting event that you could later use in your writing. And—so I—I went into all of that. And—so essentially—and—from that point on, anyhow, to get to the

point, I went to work on a high school newspaper in Beaumont, Texas. Then—and then—I went on to San Antonio, was editor of the paper.

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JIM LEHRER:

Went on to junior college, did the same thing. Went on to Missouri to journalism school. Went into the service. Came out and – except for the three years I was in the Marine Corps, from that day in s—when I was 16, until the present, now that I'm retired, I spent my entire life—as a writer or as a journalist. And—it was—but it was driven by writing, not by, "Oh, my God, I wanna get somebody indicted. Oh, my God I wanna—I wanna change the world." It wasn't that. It was that—I wanted—I wanted to be a writer. And to be a newspaperman was the route—route. And then once I got in there, I—I never wrote a sports story, of course. And—I ended up doin' all kinds of other things. And eventually went into other—other routes of journalism.

**Having a sense of story**

00:03:25:00

JIM LEHRER:

Ben and I talked about this. About—the journalism's basically stories. And—there are good stories and they're bad stories. And—and the difference is—the person's who' tellin', 'em. And—there—you can—a good writer, a good reporter can take a bad story and make it a good story. A good—good—and good is—there is no definition of good. There's just good. And you know it when—you know, after you've done it awhile. And—and Ben and I talked about this all the time, in fact, that we were very lucky people. Because we woke every—woke up every day with a smile on our face

for—"Hey, what's gonna—what are we gonna see today? What are we gonna learn today? Who are we gonna talk to today that we had never talked to before. What kind of person are we gonna get to meet for the first time today?" That was Ben's—day and—daily beginning. And that my daily beginning. And—and we—shared that.

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JIM LEHRER:

And we also had—the ability to do something about it. Because we had the jobs we had—we were able to go places and meet people that we would otherwise never have gone or never been—had the opportunity to meet. And—and then to be able then to tell the story, you know, with the beginning, a middle and end. And—people cry, people laugh or people—more importantly—most importantly, people find out something they didn't know. And that's what Ben's whole thing was. And he and I—I remember – he asked me one time. He said, "Well, what do you want people to say—after you've done"—"You know, I want people to say, 'Oh, my God, I didn't know that.'" And that's kind of Ben's—and then Ben said, "That's exactly his, "Oh, oh, wow. Hey—hey, man, I didn't know that. Good Lord." And—he was—you know, the other thing about Ben—that—that he and I shared was this kind of—you know, I always believed and Ben always believed this—this is basic—journalism is basically little boy, little—girl work. This is—this is what kids do.

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JIM LEHRER:

You know, you hear the fire engine. You hear the siren and you say, "Oh, where's—is it a fire engine or is it a police car? Or is it an ambulance?

Where's it goin'?" And if you don't care where the that—care what it is and where it's going, then you shouldn't be in journalism. And because that's basically what it's all about. You're chasing fire engines. You're chasing sirens. And—and that's great fun. And-- and it is—it was—all the clichés you hear about it are-- there—like all good clichés—they're clichés because they're true. I mean—it—the excitement of—the thrill of finding out, "Was it—hey, where is the fire? What happened? How'd it get started? Who got hurt? Did anybody get hurt? And what's this building before it burned down? Why in the hell would somebody do—la, la, la, da, la," you know, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And, "Oh, by the way, that fireman looks—look—hey, he's got a problem on him's hands. Let's go—well, who is he? And where the hell did he come—how did he get to be a fireman?" You know, in other words—one thing builds on another and—and—and Ben had all of that kind of little boy curiosity.

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JIM LEHRER:

And—it was—and he—and he had it for others. And if he didn't see that in others—I didn't work with Ben. Ben and I never ever worked together at *The Washington Post* or anywhere else. But he—and I think that was one of the reasons we were—and—and he didn't work in the news hour. And so we were both free to talk about everything in a way that we weren't—we weren't touching on anybody's lives. And he could say anything he wanted to me about anybody and vice versa. And—it was—but mostly it was about all this kinda stuff. You know, and he—we loved—he loved tellin' me about stories that he couldn't tell anybody else. And I did the same thing with him.

**Ben Bradlee's love for gossip**

00:07:31:00

JIM LEHRER:

Oh, yeah, and by—oh, by denying it all the time. "Oh, oh—all this gossip. You know—you know—you know, God. You know, but did you—nah, nah, nah. What have you heard about nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, nah." And—I—the one thing about—other thing about Bradlee—which is—you couldn't say about a lotta folks. Bradlee—he loved gossip. But if you said to him, "Okay, Ben, I'll answer your question. You know, I'll tell 'ya—I'll tell 'ya—I'll tell 'ya what I know about wah, wah, but I don't want you spreadin' that around." He would—he would—he would not spread it around. And—he wouldn't even--ou know, even to his—to his wife, Sally Quinn, who also loved gossip. I mean, sometimes Ben would know things he would not tell Sally. And—cause he—he—you know, there—if he—if he knew somethin' and he felt that—that—for whatever reason, that he shouldn't tell anybody, he didn't—he didn't—he was not—he didn't pass it on. And he—he was—he was a man of his word on those kinds of—that meant a lot to him. 'Cause it's also part of his work, let's face it.

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JIM LEHRER:

I mean, if you're interviewing somebody and somebody says, "This is off the record," he's old-fashioned and I was old-fashioned. Off the record meant off the record. Background means background. And they're two very different things. And now the world—there are no rules. Anybody who says anything's off the record is a fool or accepts that as—cause that—those rules are gone, gone forever. Background—you know—if you don't want—if you don't

wanna read about it—with your name attached to it on the front page of *The Washington Post* or *The New York Times* or the Wah, Wah, Bugle, "Don't say it, Billy Bob, forget it." And—but the—the days that Bradlee and I—when we—he and I first became friends, first started talking about all this stuff, the old rules still applied. 'Cause we were old—you know, we were old people. And—we were following old rules. And—and—those rules—meant something. And because if you violated the rules, then you—you—you stepped on your own—stuff when you did that. And—but-- and Ben in his personal life, was exactly the same way.

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JIM LEHRER:

I—I remember a lotta times I'd get him—tried to get him to tell me something. And he said, "I'm not gonna tell you that. I'm not gonna answer that." You know, I said, "Well, you—tell—cause you don't know?" "No, I know. But I'm not goin' tell you." And I said, "Well, wh--" I remember one time I said, "Well, why not?" And—you know, just more than once. And he said, "Because—I gave my word I wasn't goin' tell anybody that." And so, end of discussion. And—other –you know, it's—it's—when you have a relationship like that with somebody, it's—it's a real—it's a real—you know the rules. You know, and—and you can talk about anything—anything you wanted to within those rules. And—and you followed the rules. And the minute—and minute you stop—I mean, I always felt with Bradlee that—and I know this for a fact because it happened-- to other people. And he would tell me about it. Where somebody, you know, didn't follow the rules. I don't have to tell you that Ben on—Ben and I also shared—a really good fluent use of profanity.

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JIM LEHRER:

And—those folks—got on that list. And they stayed on that list. Ben—Ben had a memory that he never—I mean, he didn't forget people who screwed him. Or he felt—not—I don't mean personally, but screwed him—screw—screwed up pro—professionally or—or some say or—from an ethical standpoint. He was—he was big on ethics, journalism ethics in particular. And—he didn't like people who violated 'em. And—in fact, he really didn't like it. And—and—anyhow, those are all the kinds of things I—he and I talked about.

**Ben Bradlee's insistence on truth**

00:11:21:00

JIM LEHRER:

He hated liars. He used to say—in fact, he said it in an interview I did with him—2006 or something. You know, he said, "There's—what's the problem with Washington." I—some great question I asked him. And he says, "Too much lying. It's lies—people lie in this town and they shouldn't." You know, I said—I asked him, "President's lie?" "Yeah, presidents lie. They think they have to. They think they have to. In order to govern the country, they have to lie. And there's somethin' wrong about that. And we gotta do somethin' about it." And I said, "What?" And he said, "I don't know." Well—he—then we'd talk about it. And his whole idea is that—journalism needs to be—do a better job of calling—calling lies, lies, without calling people liars. You know—a liar is a judgment call. Lying is a journalism call. In other words, you can reveal a lie—journalistically without calling the person necessarily a liar. But

you—my theory about all that—and—and he and I were in agreement on this. You—you can say— "It rained on Monday."

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JIM LEHRER:

I'm—I'm Billy Bob's news source, "It rained on Monday." And—journalism—a journalist looks and—looks on the—weather thing and it didn't rain on Monday. So is that—you—the way you reveal that is you would say, "The—we checked with the—with the U.S. weather service and it did not rain on Monday." You don't say, "Man, the guy who said that is a liar." The person who reads that says it to himself or herself or to somebody in the room or whatever. It's the – it's the reporting of the lie, is—is different than calling the person who said it, a liar. And—it's a small difference. But it's—but it was—Ben and I talked about it. There's a huge difference when you—you—cause that is a judgment call. And it's a judgment call that should be left to the reader or to the viewer or to—not to journalists. Journalists should not be in the business of—of labeling people—and labeling what they do. They should be in the business of reporting what they do.

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JIM LEHRER:

And—and—so—at any rate—the lying—really bothered him. And – he was frustrated by it. And he told me a lot of stories—none of which I can remember and wouldn't tell you if I could—about incidents that involved specifics at the *Washington Post*. And—where he thought, you know, then there—that—it was just that there—there's too much of it. And—he was—he didn't feel like—that—that we, meaning the big we, we in journalism, did enough to make the American people understand how serious a problem this

is. If you—if the people who are running the government at any level or running any kind of public operation are lying about what they are doing, that's serious business. And— and it oughta be treated seriously. And people in journalism should—should—should report it in such a way that the people can—who read about it or hear about it can be outraged. And they're not outraged now. Lies don't—he said—the—I remember he said to me, "I'm just stunned about how easily people take, 'Oh, well, he lied about it. Oh, you know, what else is new?'" And—that bothered him.

**Ben Bradlee's distrust of Nixon**

00:15:02:00

JIM LEHRER:

He was the one who probably, more than anybody else, influenced Ben in his—in his—feeling—of—how—that we have a serious problem in our country when presidents lie. And the idea that—of justifying a lie on the basis of good government, on the basis that, "Well, in order to—accomplish fill in the blank—a governmental action of some kind, we had to lie." His point was that you didn't have to lie. There are ways to do—you—but he was—he—he was not—he wasn't trying to run the government—to-- at least the—at least the—at least the conversations I had with him. The conversations I had with him were—were not—not, "Oh, my God, you know—he didn't talk like-- a manipula—you know, a big global manipulator who is trying to figure out how presidents oughta—function." It wasn't that. He—it was more personal to him, or more—more human on—on a human scale.

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JIM LEHRER:

People—people, regardless of what their position is—lied too much and shouldn't. And—if they lie—for, like, Nixon, Nixon would've been a liar no matter what his job was, probably. If he—you know, he—he could've been a journalist and lied. But that was his personality. And—but the way – the way—Bradlee saw Nixon lying—was the way everybody saw it was that he lied in order to protect his own skin. And to protect his—his—not only to protect his—his image, but to his project his image. I mean, he was—he was thin skinned. And he was—he was running scared all the time. I mean, Nixon was an insecure man. And—and he used lies—using lies was a manifestation of his insecurities. And—I'm no—I'm no expert on—on lying or—human kind, but the fact of the matter is, under—under most liars, you will find an insecure person.

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JIM LEHRER:

And—because that's why you lie. I mean, you want—you want –you don't tell the truth 'cause the truth might hurt you. And—and Nixon took that, "Well, that would hurt—the U.S. Government in some way or it hurt--" but in his case, hurt his reputation or hurt his ability. Or—he also—lied about people that he didn't like. And—because he—they were the enemies. He saw people as enemies. And I'm talking about people. I don't mean enemies like—foreign powers. I mean, like people down the street who also—could've—some of them worked for him—whatever. And—and he saw—my—I didn't have that many conversations with Ben specifically about—about Nixon. But the few I did have—bore out what—what everybody knew that—Ben thought about Nixon. Most people thought that he was—he basically an evil—evil was the word.

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JIM LEHRER:

And—and once you get that word and then you—you know, it's a word that just immediately flow—flows with tentacles. And those tentacles go everywhere. An evil—an evil—a person who acts evilly, that means he—he or she does all—kinds of things and lying is one of 'em. It's—it's one of the major tentacles of it.

**Watergate's lasting legacy**

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JIM LEHRER:

I never thought it would happen with Watergate. I always believed that it would kind of end inconclusively. And—it would end up with—oh, there would be—you know, half the people would think this and – you know, whatever. There would always be this—diverging opinion about Nixon and—whether or not there was really a Watergate crime and crimes—and all the things that went with it, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And—it—and the tapes—I, "Oh, my God, this thing was really true." And it was proven. And I don't care what your politics are. I don't care what you thought about Richard Nixon. You could be—you could be his—his number one fan. And you had to admit that Watergate really did happen. Here it was. We have the tape. And there're very few stories like that of that magnitude that ever get to that kind of conclu—for instance, you look at—the—the issue of—were there weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

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JIM LEHRER:

That—that debate is gonna go on as long as there-- until somebody finds a—tape, a piece of tape or something. It's still gonna, "Oh, well, they lied." "Who lied?" "Well, they lied." "Well, I don't think they lied." "Well, no, they just—we saw diff--" yeah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." I mean, that—that—that's gonna be—debate's gonna go on and on and on. But look at the—all the thing about Bill Clinton that—that brought—brought his impeachment—the charges of impeachment. And—those things are still—those are still some ways, open questions. And—even the Kennedy assassination is an open question to some fools. And—it and—and it always will be. And—but you're exactly right. Watergate—did Nixon do such and such and such and such? We now know he did because of this tape, very unusual.

**Ben Bradlee's persona**

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JIM LEHRER:

I mean, he had a reputation of—of being—the ultimate—glamorous—personality as well as—newspaperman. He was—Jason Robards, before he was Jason Robards—he was—he was—and he was the guy everybody wanted to be. "Who—who do you wanna be when you grow up?" "Oh, I'd like to be Ben Bradlee. How about you?" "Well, I—Joe DiMaggio." I mean, in other words, it's—it was in that kind of—if you were a journalist of that generation, my generation—Ben Bradlee was your hero and he was—he was not in—not as a reportorial hero. Not—not like—Daddy Long Legs reporter who came up with a big story. It was—he was a force—a force of personality. And—his—relationship with Kennedy—reinforced that.

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JIM LEHRER:

His personality, the way he talked, that kind of rough talk—he—the—his and the way he comported himself. One of their—things that he and I had in common and one of the reasons we were—got—got to be such good friends. I'm—sure—part of it was that he was in the Navy. I was in the Marine Corps. And he really had—he had terrific respect for people who had been in the military and particularly in the Naval service. And he-- and we—he had a lotta jokes—about—about the difference between being in the Marines and being in the Navy. And I—reversed that with him all the time. But it—those kinds of things. But here was a guy—here was Ben Bradlee who—in—and in three sentences I can tell you enough that would make anybody wanna know—wanna know this guy. Here's a guy who was a British—I mean, British. Was a Boston Brahmin graduate of Harvard—was a—on a destroyer—in the U.S. Navy in World War II—was a foreign correspondent in Paris, did a little bit of spying for the C.I.A.

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JIM LEHRER:

Then became—a—news magazine—editor. And then became the leading editor of a—of what became the go, go newspaper in America. That ended up covering and ended up revealing the—the—one of the most grievous crimes ever committed by an incumbent president of the United States to a point that the president had to resign. And this is a man who—who could walk into any room and occupy it just by his presence. A man who could talk to anybody and-- when he tal—when Ben Bradlee talked to 'ya, he's a lot like—and—it was natural to him. He didn't—it's not something he studied or

anything he worked on. But I mean, he—we—he talked to 'ya. He listened to 'ya.

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JIM LEHRER:

He may not remember everything you—you know, but he listened to 'ya at the moment. He reacted to you as an individual at that moment. And that kind of—that kind of thing was—was special with Bradlee. And—and so most people—and I'm included—the—I knew—I knew about him. And then—we had mutual – I don't remember exactly how—we got to know each other. But I know how it all—it grew because we were—we shared all the same journalism values. And I think—as I said earlier, I think that one of the reasons—that he and I hit off was that we shared all the values. We shared the military background. We shared profanity as a mutual language. We—we cared about the same things. We—he also—also believed in havin' a good time. He really believed that journalism was to have a—you were—you were to have—you were to work your ass off.

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JIM LEHRER:

But in the process, you were all supposed to—you also enjoy yourself. And he—and the one thing he could not stand were people say, "Oh, yes, and we have this story here that is going to-- you know. Oh, don't—come on. Just tell me what the hell the story is. You know—you know, is it—is it gonna—are you gonna jump up in your chair when you—when it's all over? And people are gonna—read this god-damn story or they care about this? And—don't tell me they should care. The—question is are they going to care? Can you make them care if you think they—can—can you do—can you find—can you find a

way to write it? Or can you find a way to report it to make sure that everybody who touches the story feels the electricity of it? And—his—I knew about all of that. And—and—he and I hit it off immediately. And we became—as I say, we became very good friends. And I think one of the reasons is 'cause we'd never—didn't work together. In other words, if—there—there—if you were—he was—he was—managing editor and then the executive editor of a major news organization. That's means a lotta people working.

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JIM LEHRER:

And a lotta people working at the—trying to—you know, everybody trying to make their career advance. And the only way, you know, you advance in journalism is you get your story in the paper or you get your story on the air. Or—if you're on the air or you're not in print, you ain't makin' it. So—so there's a lot of—a lot of—lot of stuff. And people's-- assignments, I mean, everything, you know, "Well, Billy Bob covers this and Sammy Sue covers--" those kinds of—those are the kinds of thing. And-- and so as a consequence-- there are a lot of personalities and a lot of careers on the line for every decision that Ben made. And just like there were in the news hour, for every decision that I made, and—much smaller scale than—than, I'm not comparing the two in terms of scale—but in terms of what they were, they were identical. And I could talk to Ben about—my problems. You know, and he could talk to—to me about his problems in a way that we never shared it with anybody.

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JIM LEHRER:

And he could air it. And I could air it. And he could say, "Oh, my God, what—what--" you know—not ask—he wasn't asking for my advice. You know, it wasn't that. And I wasn't asking really for his advice either. It wasn't that. It was just kind of be able to vent it a little—you know, kinda—you know, what—you know, talk about it all. And—and he was also just terrific company. In—as I say, he—listened and he laughed when it was appropriate. And—and he cussed when it was appropriate. And he was—he was always engaged. And he would very—he had—he had a short attention span. And some would say, too short an attention span. From my point of view, it wasn't too short-- attention span. He would just tell me, you know—I mean—I—it didn't bother me for—if he said, you know, "Enough of this."

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JIM LEHRER:

You know, or "Whatever." You know, I mean, it's not—with—but that—that—that was his nature. And his nature was—was—attractive. And—I defy anybody—to, and I was—I was present many times. When I would introduce—somebody to Ben Bradlee, I'd say, "Well, here's —here's--" you know, somebody wanna meet Ben Bradlee. Or be—at some social event and say, "Oh, are you gonna introduce me to Ben Bradlee?" And—and I would do that—with pleasure. And Bradlee would met some—it would be some total stranger. And—Ben would you know, just take 'em on, you know, in a way that was just marvelous. And—it—his ability to charm was—was like-- Joe DiMaggio's ability to—you know, to naturally—throw the ball in from center field.

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JIM LEHRER:

I mean, it was just what Ben did. I mean, he couldn't—he couldn't—he wanted everybody to like him. You know—that was his instinct. Now, sure—over time, he'd—come across people that—you know, that he thought sucked, "Forget it." But as a general—general rule, his instinct was he —but he didn't think about it. In—in other words, it was a natural thing to him. That's my reading of it. Now, the other people may feel differently about it. But that was my experience with him.

**Ben Bradlee's charisma**

00:29:53:00

JIM LEHRER:

Everybody wanted to be Ben Bradlee. And they wanted to be Ben Bradlee—not then—they wanted to be—it wasn't that they wanted to be executive editor of *The Washington Post*. They wanted to be Ben Bradlee. And—the guy who had everything. He had the personality. He had the power. He had-- he had the looks, he had the resume, he had—a life. He had led this life. And—he loved talking about his Navy experiences. And he loved-- and he didn't—and he didn't—he had—he had—there were certain categories of folks that he—I don't say he—he dismissed. But he didn't—if you were of a—of a certain age and you were a male and you hadn't gone into the military, he had less time for you. Because his—his thing was, "What the hell were you doin', you know, when they fought the war?" Fill in the blank, whatever war it was.

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JIM LEHRER:

'Cause he kinda—he kinda felt that that was an obligation that—that we Americans have. And that he felt that we were all better off. He told me a million times. And I even agreed with him, that he was a better—he was a better man because he was in the United States Navy. I was a better man 'cause I was in the United States Marine Corps. And we shared that same feeling t-- about ourselves. We were fortunate to-- to have been in the military. And—and he—but he also—he more—very—felt very strongly that it was an obligation that we had, too. It was a natural—here again, a natural obligation. Why in the hell would you not—you know, it wasn't—in terms of Vietnam—I never had a really long conversation with him about the Vietnam War. But it wasn't that he was—he was anti-war, pro-war. It wasn't that. It was—it was more about the individuals.

**Lessons from the military**

00:31:50:00

JIM LEHRER:

Being in the military—removed all the clichés once and for all. If somebody—later on in life, when I was a journalist or when Ben was a journalist and somebody said to us, "Oh, well, he's just a l—he's just a left-handed kid from Harlem." Or, "He's just—a Boston Brahman, you know, or whatever." "Hey, I was in the Marine Corps with one of those. I was in the United States Navy with one of those. Don't give me this shit about—the—a type of person." You know, and in—in Marines, I learned and Ben learned the same thing in the Navy, you're only as strong as the guy on your left and on your right. You take care the guy on the left and on your right, chances are, they'll take care of you. And if you don't take care of the guy on your right and

the guy on your left, the chances are, you're gonna die. And—and it's just that simple. And once you get that in your head, it doesn't make a damn whether the guy on your left is black or white, brown or purple, short or tall, good or bad, stupid or smart, educated or not.

00:32:54:00

JIM LEHRER:
It doesn't (CHUCKLE) mean a damn thing. And—and—and so somebody comes along and says, "Oh, he was just one--" oh, come on. In my case—and I was in the infantry, so I ran across a lot of—of—people with mud on their boots. And—and of all kinds. And I—and—and it changed my life. It changed my attitude. But when I went in and – in Ben's case, it's exactly the same. But when Ben went into the Navy, everybody he – up to that point—most everybody he knew was exactly like him. They talked the same way. They—you know, they were all part of the same wah, wah. Same thing with me. I was from Kansas and Texas. Everybody—until I went in the Marine Corps, there—we all looked alike, we all talked alike. It's—and suddenly nobody I was serving with looked like me or talked like me. And everybody was different. And once you-- and as a journalist, that's a critical, critical thing, to have learned and learned permanently.

00:34:01:00

JIM LEHRER:
So from that point on—you know, as a working journalist, you know, I—I remember—sometimes I would be in—even our own organization, somebody would say something like, "Oh, well, that's just a whatever." And it really pissed me off. And I would jump 'em, you know? "Hey, hey, hey—uh-uh, uh-uh. Unh-uh. We don't categorize people." There are no categories of

people. Their—each one is—each one is—is—and you learn that—in the military. And—yeah, there are other ways to learn it. I don't say you have to be in the military to learn it. But it—you—in the military, you learn it in a way where it matters. It matters to you—your own skin, if nothin' else. And—the other thing that—that Ben learned in the Navy, that I learned in the Marines is that-- it-- it-- you—you don't—you don't—serve some big, huge—some huge purpose, big purpose.

00:35:02:00

JIM LEHRER:

You—you—you really are—you're real—you're motivated for—by taking care of the little things about an individual. As I say—when – for instance, Ben was—was a—was a Navy officer on a destroyer. I was a Marine officer in an infantry battalion. And that meant there were—other Marines or other sailors who were – who for whom we were responsible. Now, we were responsible for—for their being—getting drunk, for getting—clap, for—dealing—I was VD control officer, you know, as an additional duty for the First Battalion, Ninth Marines. I was also the—you know—the leading hand to hand combat guy. And I also—was the instructor on—for—flame throwers.

00:36:03:00

JIM LEHRER:

And—you know, and all this sorta stuff. And—I—I taught Marines how to improve their skills at throwing hand grenades and all this kinda stuff. You know, and—and Ben—Ben's—Ben's experiences were the same thing with the Navy. And—all of these things—all of these things—they—and—Ben was in the—I don't—I don't remember how long. I think he was in the Navy for

three or four years. I was in the Marine Corps for three years on active duty. Now, —Ben lived for 90 years. You know, I've already lived for 80. And they were only three or four years—in each of our cases, how important those years were. And—there's no question that—that that was critical to—to his and my—why when he found out I was a Marine and I knew he was—I knew he had been in the Navy. And—and we immediately, you know—I don't know. It—it was—part of it. And my—and I hadn't thought of it 'til this moment. But my guess is that—that he and I would not have—been close friends if we hadn't had that—that bond of the—of the military.

**Ben Bradlee's philosophy on life**

00:37:18:00

JIM LEHRER:

He loved livin' in Paris. He loved the whole idea of it, as much as doin' it. But—he—also loved it because he was away from—he— they gave him a lot of independence, apparently. And he got to do pretty much what he wanted to do. And to hang out with whoever he wanted to. And he'd go to any party he wanted to. He loved goin' to the parties there in Paris. And—he said there was always—a lot of good—companionship. No, it was a perfect place to be. And—and—and he knew it. See, that's the other thing about Bradlee. Bradlee always knew—that he was a—he always thought of himself as the luckiest son of bitch in the world. And he said it all the time, "Good God, you know, I" you know, I remember one time, we were—he and I were walking down—and not in Paris. But in another—another place in—France. We were walking down—and he says, "God damn it," he said, "look-- look at us, you know, we're the two luckiest son of bitches in the world. Here we are--" you

know, we—we were not doing anything. Well—all I remember is we—we had somethin' to eat or drink or somethin'.

00:38:27:00

JIM LEHRER:

And we—and we'd been—we were with some really close friends. And the—we were the friend. We—we're just happen to be walkin' down. And we had—fallen together-- to—to walk from where we were going, back to the hotel or whatever. And—that's the way he saw it and I agreed with him. I mean—and the—the—it was an evening and the sun—I mean, the moon was out. And it was—he—the moon was always out for Ben Bradlee. And—and the sun was always shining. And—and he knew it. And—he could – he brought his own light with him. And—to keep the cliché—keep the—the analogy going, he—and everybody who was in his—presence—no, it's not everybody. But at least everybody I was aware of. At least—certainly in my case, whenever I was with Ben, I always felt better. I always felt f-- like, you know, "This is it. This is—this is where I wanna be. I wanna be with Ben Bradlee.

00:39:32:00

JIM LEHRER:

This is fun begin' with Ben Bradlee. Ben's my friend." And— he always—he was very, very careful—about—identifying people who were his friends as his friends. And—he would inter—he would introduce me. And he would introduce others. You know, he would say, "Well, this is my buddy--" as distinguished, "This is—this is Sammy Sue—this is my buddy, Sammy Sue." The—and to me, to be—a buddy of Ben Bradlee's was—was like being told—like—like saying, "Oh, my God, the—good God." "I'd love to be a buddy

of Ben Bradlee's." And—but Ben wasn't – Ben didn't do it for that reason. But he wanted to me make sure h-- he-- he—I think he—he just instinctively wanted people to—wanted people to understand that—that the—that there were people that mattered to him.

00:40:35:00

JIM LEHRER:
And—and he was good at that. That's Bradlee. That was Bradlee. And—he—you know, the—you know, he—he was—a lotta contradictions—in Bradlee. And one of 'em was, you know, he'd always, "Oh, God, I hate going' to all these parties." He loved going to all those parties. He—and—and "Oh, well, they're, you know--" he loved being Ben Bradlee. And that was—that was part of his charm. You know, I mean, that was part of who he was, the guy who was very comfortable being who he was. And he loved being that. But he wasn't—he was—it wasn't in a way that was—that was offensive. You know, he wasn't—he wasn't—he wasn't a strutter. He wasn't somebody who said, "Hey, I'm Ben Bradlee. Who in the hell are you, you poor son of a bitch." You know, it wasn't that. It was—I—he—he was just, he was comfortable, very comfortable, very much at ease with—with who he was and what he did and what he said.

00:41:40:00

JIM LEHRER:
Sometimes he'd do things he didn't like—he—about him—he'd do things that he was—he—wish he hadn't done. And he and I talked about some of those. And-- But he was—he tried very hard to—I think this is all part of his generation and—and also part of—of the way he lived. He—he tried to follow the rules. You know, whatever the rules were. He was a big—he was—he

wasn't—he wasn't a revolutionary in any sense of the word. He wasn't an avant-garde—you wouldn't, you know, see him as guy who was avant-garde. He was—he was old school. But he—within the rules and within the old school, he was very much alive and very modern. And—and as I said, and as—and-- as I say—the—the kind of person everybody wanted to—aspired to be, but wasn't.

**Ben Bradlee's friendship with JFK**

00:42:46:00

JIM LEHRER:

I'm not a good witness to this. 'Cause I did not know JFK. You know, I mean, I just knew him in passing. I did not know—and I never had a really good conversation with Ben about his relationship with JFK. I read all the books and all that sort of stuff. But my—my knowledge of that isn't any—is—is no deeper than skin deep. And—anymore—any deeper than what anybody else—who read about it. If you were to just go to the list, right, here—here are the—here are the resume talking points—or points—of John F. Kennedy—I mean, this list, and this one with Ben Bradlee, yes, there would be—there would be—they would match, no question about that.

**Reactions to Ben Bradlee's friendship with JFK**

00:43:38:00

JIM LEHRER:

It—it's never happened before. And it's not happened since. There's no question. You're—you're right. Very unprecedented. And—it was—he was—criticized for it. And he took heat for it. And—he talked about it. And

got to a point where he finally said, "Look, I'm tired of talkin' about it." "And I'm—I'm not gonna defend it. I'm just glad it happened." End of—end of comment. And that's pretty much where he left it. I think it was un-Kosher. I think it was—it was not—it was something that—my problem—was that—if he was gonna have that kind of a relationship, he shouldn't be writing about it. He shouldn't be—he shouldn't—you—you can't have your cake and eat it too. You can't be a friend of the president and also be his—be a reporter. I think—and it all has to do with—with—perception.

00:44:41:00

JIM LEHRER:

And—yes—Ben could argue—probably correctly, "Well, it wouldn't affect my reporting." Yeah, but who in the hell's gonna believe that? And if they don't believe that then it might as well not be—might as well not be true. And—I think he, there's no question that it affected his credibility—when that—when that happened. And—he knew that. But it was worth the price to him. In other words, the relationship was so special—to Ben that Ben was willing to—take whatever he got—to have it. And—and I think some of the heat was deserved. And—and he—you know, he knew I felt that way. But I mean, this all happened long before I—I knew him. So I was not there to beat up on him at the time it was ha—goin' on. And—whether I would have or not, I don't know. But—I mean, I sure—I really felt that just—just a general principle—specifics aside. But as a general principle, somebody who had those kinds of jobs should not have that kind of a relationship with the President of the United States. And I still believe that.

**Journalistic integrity**

00:46:01:00

JIM LEHRER:

I've had—you know, meals with—with presidents and—and would-be presidents and vice-presidents and would-be vice-presidents. And I think that's a legitimate function of government. And—I mean, of—of journalism. And—it and—and it's defensible and—it's—should be transparent. You should tell people when you're doing it. And—gotta be careful about off the record, on the record. Make sure the rules are followed and all that sort of stuff. And—that's where Ben's thing got—you know, got—got a little bit—tricky in what was—what was off the record and what was on the record. You have—you—you're having dinner with somebody—I-- I've always—for instance, always had a rule. It's my own personal rule. And everybody has their own rules. That if I'm at a social event and there is a newsmaker type person there, a president or a senator or—secretary – whatever.

00:47:03:00

JIM LEHRER:

And that person says something to me or in my presence that is, quote, "newsworthy," end quote, in my judgment, not somebody's else's judgment, my judgment, I would not use it without first going back to the person and saying, "Look—the social event is a social event is a social event." I believe that. And then so people ought to have a right to privacy in social matters. Unless—there are exceptions, unless somebody—over dinner says, "By the way, I was driving Oswald's car," or something like that and say, "Oh, screw the rules." I'm—you know, but—as a general rule, people—have a right to—to relax. You know, even to—to a journalist. As long as the ground rules

are—are known and—and followed. And—by both sides, they have to be followed. You can't—in other words, I've had the experience—where—not very often, but where somebody has said, "Okay, well, this is off the record." And—and they tell me something. And then I—you know, I follow the rules. And then I read about it in the goddamned paper the next day. And think, "Where in—what—hey, hey, hey." But that's gonna happen.

00:48:21:00

JIM LEHRER:

That—those—you know—each person who practices journalism—does it slightly differently, even within—even though there are-- are-- there are basic rules. But—yeah, somebody-- you know, if you're interviewing somebody, particularly in print—it's harder in television. But in print—or even for television, even though it's not on camera and you can still do the same thing. I mean, you—you're talking to somebody. And you say—and you want a piece of information. And all you want is for somebody to confirm something, say. And you say, "Well—just if you look to the right, that means yes. And—if you look to the left, that means no it's true," or whatever. You—you know, all that kind of—you know—movie stuff that—but—that—that really does happen. You know, where—so everybody's kind of covered. Nobody really said anything, but you got—you got—you-- but then you—you—in order to do that, you have to make sure that you're working for somebody in a news organization who understands what kind of rules you are working under, that you've established with Source A. You know—kook, I'm—I'm Billy Bob reporter here, and I'm talking to the boss, talking to the managing editor or whatever—executive editor. And—I'm—I've got this—I've got a deal here with—with—with president so and so.

00:49:46:00

JIM LEHRER:

And—he's willing to—to help me out on this. But—but he isn't going to say anything. But he will do something on the desk or—whatever. You know, and that's got to be fully known and reported and trans—and—and the people he works for got—gotta know all that stuff. But—as—as—I think the rules—the higher you go in government—the rules for on the record, off the record, background, whatever are become increasingly important—what you report and what you don't report and why you don't report something and—what kind of—what kind of—questions—that you ask and with the expectation of what kind of answer you're gonna get. And how to—how to—all of that is complicated. But it's worth it, in order—because—in order to do the job that you should do. Which is to—to—look, the—the real job of a journalist, let's face it, basic job, is to watch what they are doing.

00:50:56:00

JIM LEHRER:

They, being whoever's in charge of whatever it is you're covering, what they are doing, and report back to the public, what they're doing. And you—and so any device that you can use that is legitimate and—and—and—and is ethical and fair to everybody involved—you could, you should use. And—so—in going to dinner with a president and the president says-- "Well, look everything—everything I say here, you can use, but it's on background. You can quote—so forth and so on." Okay, you either accept it or you don't. You can say, "I don't do it that way, Sir. It's gotta be on the record or I'm not eating with you or I'm not talking to you."

**Reporting on the private lives of public officials**

00:51:43:00

JIM LEHRER:

Well, I think it—it really started with Watergate. Up unto—up until Watergate—even after the Kennedy assassination, the real stories about Kennedy did not come out. It was—I don't remember when—when it finally—when it – but—Watergate is what really—really opened up everything. And—and they've stayed open ever since and got increasingly—opened and opened and opened and opened and opened. And—and—there no such thing as privacy, as we all know now. Forget it. I mean—if you did it—you're—your gonna—if it's—if somebody—wants to know, they're gonna find out. And they're—somebody wants to broadcast it or—blog it or tweet or twit it or—or text it or whatever, they're gonna do it. And it's—that is where we have come. We come in a very, very short period of time. And—in many ways—it is the ultimate mixed blessing.

00:52:49:00

JIM LEHRER:

There are-- the upside to it is—that there are relevancies to people's personal lives—relevancies into their person-- into their public lives. Whether or not somebody's having—you know—a—an extended affair with somebody, you say, "Well, that's—nobody's business." Well, it is—it can be somebody's business. If—it—that person has been saying—has been running on, "I'm—Mister—perfect person,—position or something like that and I'm a perfect family man. Ooh, I'm the perfect family man." And the fact that I have this—16-year-old, 17-year-old, 27-year-old,

37-year-old—girlfriend—and—is just—that's not—that's not, that's my private life. My public life is “I'm a family man."

00:53:49:00

JIM LEHRER:

Bullshit. I mean, those days are over. And-- and that's probably-- that's probably a good thing. The bad part of it is that-- that it makes it-- it makes it—the kind of—it then makes public life—only for those people who are perfect. You know, and—you know how many of those people are out there? Percentage-wise, we're talking about 00.2%. If you-- if you're livin' a real life—you're gonna make a mistake every once in a while. And it could be a personal mistake. It could be an embarrassing mistake. And—personal or otherwise. And—some of those things—all of those things shouldn't—be immediately—public—publicly known. But that's—but that—a nickel's gonna get you three and a half cents if you complain about it. Because that's it. That's it, Billy Bob-- Billy Bob. And you—you live with it. So as a consequence, you're gonna—as I say, you're gonna get—there are a lot of really good people who have—either chosen not to go into public life.

00:55:02:00

JIM LEHRER:

Or not to run for office or take public appointments—because of things that—pre-Watergate—had the—had they happened—nobody would've known about and they would never have been mentioned. Robert McNeill, my—close friend and—professional partner for years and years and years was—the second—White House correspondent for NBC—during the Kennedy administration. And he said that—that he knew that there was some—skylarking—or that's not the word. That's—that's—he's Canadian.

And he's—Canadians don't skylark. So I don't know what the—there was a lot of—see, I think the—the way he would've say—we—he put it or—would be that—the—there was—there was—some—hormone in the air, you know, in the breath—all the time.

00:56:08:00

JIM LEHRER:

Because there were a lot of young women around—the White House staff, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And—and Kennedy and the people around him—but that he, as a White House correspondent, did not know about—any of the—stuff that has since come out, all of the—all—about—Marilyn Monroe and Angie Dickinson and all that stuff. He didn't know anything about that. And—and—the lead correspondent was Sandy Van Okrin, Van Orkin's very close to the Kennedys. I don't think Sandy knew about any of that either. And—the issue—he—but they knew enough-- the way McNeill put it—we, "I knew enough that I—if I probably pushed some door, or some button, I could've gotten the story." But those are stories we did not do at the time. So in other words, there was no incentive, professional incentive—at all to find out anything else.

00:57:11:00

JIM LEHRER:

And 'cause you couldn't—couldn't use the story anyhow. And—and it was—it was a more kind of—and that—but that—that all changed. And—one of the Watergate things that—and one—I—I don't remember the details about this, but I'm sure you got 'em. I think it was Erlichman who said—all the stuff —being reported about Richard Nixon and—and you know, whatever, at the same time, you know, and he mentioned—not only—the—the sexual things

of—of Kennedy, but also the drinking of some members of the House and Senate—Rivers of South Carolina who was then chairman of the armed services committee and deciding huge issues about war and peace and all of that, drunk, unable to speak. Had to be held up to speak on the floor. And all this—nobody reported any of that.

00:58:11:00

JIM LEHRER:

And—and there was this kind of—I would call it—a kind of a—a universal mass embarrassment of everybody—all the serious people who practiced journalism—who said, "Oh, God. We can't let this go on anymore." And it just ended. And—and the rules changed. And they changed forever. And everybody knew it. And—and those who didn't, paid a terrible price later on. And—even to this day, there's some people—but there's—they—when the rules changed, there were also—it—always happens. There's always somebody who comes along who says, "Oh, well, they don't apply to me. Oh, they'll never find out about me. And I'm bulletproof, anyhow. I mean, I'm so important. And I've got all the—and besides, I've got 27 aides here all telling me, 'Oh, don't worry about it, you know. Oh, don't worry about it, Billy Bob—they'll never touch you with that.' And they always touch you, Billy Bob. They always get you.'"

00:59:16:00

JIM LEHRER:

And they will. I mean, it's what—you know, it's going on—as we speak, where—whenever we speak it's always happening. And it is—the only—and—and with the proliferation—of outlets now and—more and more people—hundreds of people who are looking for these little tidbits-- they're

there to find. And—and they will be found. And they will eventually, in this new world order we have, this tsunami of information that we're in the middle of—that they will—they—it'll come out as—start as a tweet. And it—and—and end up eventually as the lead story in somebody's major newspaper. And that's the evolution of American journalism as we speak.

**How journalism has changed**

01:00:07:00

JIM LEHRER:

There—there are no rules anymore. I mean—if I were to—forget anybody else. If somebody were to say, call me on the phone or come to my house and say, "Jim, look, I wanna—I wanna talk to you about—I understand that you have some really good information about—president—former president wah, wah. And—I would like for you to tell me this story off the record." I would look at that person and say, "You're outta your mind." I would either tell you the story or I won't tell you the story. But forget on the record or off the record. That means nothing. Now, I'm a practitioner of—I've spent 50 years as a professional journalist. And when I started 50 years ago, I – literally I was one of those guys. And everybody I worked with. It wasn't just me. It wasn't—you know, everyone of us would've gone to jail—literally gone to jail before we would've revealed the name of somebody who gave us something off the record.

01:01:16:00

JIM LEHRER:

You just didn't do that. And when somebody said, "It's background. You can use it, but you can't use my name, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera," that's the

way we did it. And—and there were—nobody deviated from that. And—right now, those—those—there—nobody who even uses the term—I don't think. I mean, you – I mean, who in the hell would you use it with? Who—how are you going to—it's not that in—and it—and it isn't—and—it's almost like it—it's like—it really is like a tsunami. You know, the big storm came and it—and it—and blew a lotta things away. And—there was no pattern to it. There was no decision made to have a tsunami. You know, it just happened. And—when—it—everything got scattered and—including the rules and the practitioners and-- and-- and the more—more—the—competition—for—information, for tidbits—increased – their value went up.

01:02:24:00

JIM LEHRER:

So—and then—but the—the standards for them went down. What—what constituted a publishable story, a publishable—publishable in all it's—in—broadest sense, publishable in print, but also—on a blog or a radio show or a TV show or whatever anywhere. Or in—even in—tweet—all those things—when—and now they have really just completely gone. They have vanished.

**The Kennedy assassination**

01:02:57:00

JIM LEHRER:

I believe the Kennedy assassination was the beginning of calamity as a—as an American—way of life. It was the first major—national calamity. One of those—and I define a calamity—probably—over defined it. But—or under

define it by—something that, "Oh, my God." I was, when it happened. I remember when it happened. I talked to some—in other words, it was such a major event in my life or I saw it as that at the moment it happened, that I remember—what happened. I'm talk about—when I say I—I don't mean I, Jimmy Charles Lehrer. I mean, I, everybody. That—and they—the Kennedy assassination, there—remember there were—after that came—all kinds of things, the Vietnam War, Watergate, the—the RFK assassination, MLK's, all of these events, all within a short period of time.

01:04:15:00

JIM LEHRER:

And—I remember—for me, it—it changed—forever—me forever in one—one critical way, as a journalist. I was—it was 1963, obviously. I had—I had gotten out of the Marines in '59. I—my fir—I—first job was *Dallas Morning News*. I was with the *Dallas Times Herald* on the assassination day. And I was at Love Field and stayed there and then went to the police station. And spent 24 hour—no, I spent the next six months covering assassination stories. It was—it was—it was a huge thing. But what it taught me forever was just how fragile everything is. Now, here's—here's a—one guy takes a high-powered rifle. Gets off three rounds in 15 seconds and literally changed the course of history.

01:05:15:00

JIM LEHRER:

Now, if that can happen once, it can and will and does, and has happened since. And every—I later became city editor of this afternoon newspaper in Dallas. And the first thing I said to everybody in the goddamn newsroom was, when the telephone room rings in that newsroom on the city desk and it isn't

answered after the first ring, somebody's ass is in a ringer. And because these are—every—after the—the Kennedy assassination taught me one thing, that—when I was first—I was—I was at Love Field when I was told that in—in downtown, right after they had left—minutes after they had left and I had covered their departure, that he had been—they had been shot. My first reaction, "Jesus, that can't be true. What? Are you tell—I—it's—incredible."

01:06:16:00

JIM LEHRER:

And it had just happened. And—and—that feeling remains with me to this day. And—and I—you know, I—won't bore with all the details. But I mean, I spent my next six months, you know, crawling under coverts and doing all the checking out all the things. And—and every once in a while—and all the next 24 hours after it happened, I was in the police station. And it was a mob scene—unlike anything I've ever seen or—ever have seen since—a mixture of C.I.A. Agents and F.B.I. Agents and cops and reporters. And we were all in that little police station with this guy named Lee Harvey what? And he did what? He couldn't have—this—the last—couldn't have shot the President of the United States, not just down the—I mean, the whole—and we would—everyone—it was a mob scene, huge noise. And then suddenly, we—I remember in a big—I—was an F.B.I. agent that I barely knew.

01:07:19:00

JIM LEHRER:

I was the federal beat reporter when I started that—we—and—so I knew some F.B.I. agents there. I saw a guy, an F.B.I. agent that I knew. And I looked at him. He looked at me. And we j-- he said, "Did it really happen?" And I said, "Yes." I mean, and he was—he wasn't talkin' to me, F.B.I. agent, you know,

Agent—Agent Wah, Wah, to—Reporter Wah, Wah. We were talkin' as two human beings. And he always—it was a huge event. And—those kinds of things have happened since. A lot of 'em have happened, 9/11, you know, these—and something could've happened—as you and I are talking, as we and all—we all are talk—it's there. It's part of our—it's part of our expectation now—our general expectation. The only probably comparable thing before would have been—the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

01:08:23:00

JIM LEHRER:

But that was a long way away. The Kennedy assassination was very personal—whether you liked him or not, he was our president. He was the President of the United States. And as I say, one guy. This wasn't an invasion by—by a bunch—by a bunch of —flying zeroes from—from—Yokohama and—And Tokyo. This was one guy. And it's—out of a window, you know, out of-- you know, just firing—firing a—crazy Italian made—rifle. And—and—at first, when it first happened, I thought, you know, I believed that—as everybody else did, it was a conspiracy. It had to be a conspiracy. 'Cause I had been an expert rifleman in the Marines. I—there's no way in hell he could've got those rounds off that quickly. So it had to be somethin' else. You know, I bought into all of that. And then I finally, you know, went up and looked at all of that after many years. And realized, "Oh—it's an easy shot."

01:09:25:00

JIM LEHRER:

It was an—very easy shot for—for—Oswald or anybody. Anybody could've done it. It was—you know—anybody—anybody who questioned—just go to the site and look out the window, and you immediately see that would've

been—it was—it would've been an easy thing to do. But that—I mean, that's—that's—that's a side thing. But what—as I said, what it did for me was permanently, as a journalist—make me reach for the phone when it rings and—and expect the worst.

**The aftermath of JFK's assassination on Ben Bradlee**

01:10:04:00

JIM LEHRER:

We were someplace in Europe. And—we used to travel. There were—two or three or four couples of us who were friends and we used to travel together. And—and there were times when there were private moments when—when—not just with me, but with others. You know, we would talk and—one time we got talking about the Kennedy assassination 'cause he—he knew that I, you know, was there and all that stuff. And—he told me the whole story where he was. You know, he was at news—in the new—in the *Newsweek* thing. And he, I don't remember the specifics. He—I—all I remember is that—the more we talked, the tearier we got about it. I mean, it was just—it was very emotional to him, as it was to me. And—and in different—for—entirely different reasons. I mean, he had his—he really liked John F. Kennedy. And he thought he was—I mean, he was—you say—you know, I mean, John F. Kennedy was his kinda guy.

01:11:09:00

JIM LEHRER:

And so there—they—there was a natural fit. And it was a natural—they had a natural affinity for each other. And—and so—it didn't surprise me. And so he took it as—as a friend would—you know, it was—yes, he was the President of

the United States and that would've been horrendous under any circumstances. But it was special—especially horrendous because he was Ben's friend. And—and, but—the words he used—and I don't remember that. All I remember is that he and I talked about it. We both became, you know—it was—it was just-- this is still—still—and—that would've been—we were talking, say, in—I don't know, 2010 or something like that, maybe 2007, '08, I don't know.

01:12:04:00

JIM LEHRER:

So—a lotta time had gone by. And he was still emotional, still emotional. And it was always to him and it was always to me, for-- as I say, for a different sets of reasons. The assassination opened up everything for Ben. And it was-- it was-- it—it probably had the—the effect of a—of a member of the fam—something happening to the member of the family. But—but in its own special way. It was a special—calamity for—for Ben that affected him. I mean, there's no question about it.

**Ben Bradlee's relationship with Kay Graham**

01:12:48:00

JIM LEHRER:

First of all, no question it was special. Of all the conversations I had with Bradlee in—in all kinds of settings and—and—situations, the one thing he never, ever, ever did was say anything even slightly bad about a Graham. He had—terrific respect for-- and affection for—for the Grahams, generally. And for Kay, specifically. And I saw them together many times. She—I mean, she—she—I mean, Kay Graham actually giggled like a little girl when she was

with Ben. I mean, some people say giggled. Everybody giggled when they were with boy or girl, male or female, when they were with Ben. Well, Kay—Kay really, really, really liked this guy.

01:13:51:00

JIM LEHRER:

And—and he really, really liked her. I—I mean, I would—I would—talk to—Ben enough and—about her and around her or whatever, enough to know that it was real. In other words, he wasn't—he wasn't sucking up to her because she was the boss. He would joke about it. He'd—right to her face, he'd joke—you know, he—there's nothing he wouldn't—he wouldn't say to d-- you know, kid—kiddin' about it. And—but—it was real, I—I felt, at least, that—he real—he really liked her. He respected her. And he realized that—that her support—without her support he could not have done what he did. And that's when he said, you know, his famous line, you know, and he—when—when people would ask him, "Well, what your number one—number one advice to somebody who wants to go into journalism?" Said, you know, "Get yourself a good owner," or some words to that effect.

01:14:55:00

JIM LEHRER:

And-- 'cause he knows—he knows-- he knew that-- nothing that—that he wanted to do with—at *The Washington Post* he could've—he could not have done if it hadn't been for the support he got from—from Kay. Kay also enjoyed—she enjoyed his company. She enjoyed his kidding around—he—he enjoyed his kiddin' around with me. We-- he and I used to kid around in front of her a lot. You know—she taught—I think I may be wrong about this, but I—I think she contributed a lot to her knowledge of—of how to use profanity.

And—and—I don't know, they just had—they had—they had—they had a kind of—flirtation is not—is not—probably—it's a coarse—it's a coarse word and it means other things, too. But I think it would be —a fair thing to say, they were in a constant state of flirtation.

01:16:00:00

JIM LEHRER:
Not headed toward the bed, but just headed toward a wonderful time. And they-- they enjoyed each other's company. And they enjoyed making it difficult—doing the difficult things. And they took great pride—both—each one took—great pride in saying, "I couldn't have done it without--" in other words, Ben would say, "I couldn't do without Kay." And Kay would say, "Oh, no, no, no, no. I couldn't have done it, you know—you know, Ben is the one." You know, in other words, they—they loved to share the joy and the—responsibility for whatever good things *The Washington Post* did—during—whether it's—Watergate or—Pentagon papers or whatever-- whatever it was. And-- they were—they were a tandem. They were—they were a two-some.

01:17:00:00

JIM LEHRER:
They were a couple—in a sense—in a way that was—certainly beneficial to *The Washington Post* as an institution and—and to its readers. I mean, I think the better-- the paper was better—got better because of the two of them had this relationship. I think the —the *Post* did things that it wouldn't have done had they not had that relationship. So I think it was real. Bradlee realized that he had a responsibility to explain things to her. And he had a responsibility not to walk over her. And not to try to walk over her, to walk with her or get

her to walk with him, so to speak. And he took that responsibility, I think, very seriously. Here again, I was not at the *Post* so this is all—second hand. But I was—I knew a lot of people at the *Post*. And—and of course, I knew Ben. And I also knew Kay—my wife Kate and I got to be good—very friendly with—with—with Kay, as well. And so—it's—it's a—it's an informed—I don't know how well informed, but it's an informed—opinion I'm giving you.

**Ben Bradlee's competitive spirit**

01:18:20:00

JIM LEHRER:

You know—my feeling—I don't—I don't know for a fact. But—the competition with *The Times* was a huge thing for Ben. He woke up every—every morning—Yes, he was excited for the news, but he also wanted to make damn sure that *The Times* didn't have it. And it was part of his daily routine. And—and when—when—*The Post* got—had a story, particularly when—I mean, they had Watergate. And boy, it—it was a glory, glory, even during the tense times. Because—and that—when they weren't sure—you know, there were times, obviously, when they didn't know what they had. Whether it was re—what it was really gonna—what the hell the story was going to be. They knew they were on thin—thin ice there for a while. But—but he always saw—every day, he saw *The New York Times* looming there. And it was huge—hugely important. But in terms of the—of the—specifically on the—Pentagon Papers—I don't—I—I'm just—I—don't know. I w—I'm—not informed enough—to have any kind of special knowledge on that—any more than anybody else has.

**The basic rules of journalism**

01:19:40:00

JIM LEHRER:

There are a lot of cliché rules about journal—when in doubt, you know, the basic rules of journalism, "When in doubt, leave it out." "When in doubt, write around it. When in doubt, lie." The—it's-- it takes—sometimes more courage not to run a story than it does to run. The—the—you know, the—the front page—mantra is "publish, publish." Well, sometimes that's the chicken shit way out. The real strong—the real—real thing to do—the tough thing to do is to not run the story. Ben knew that. And he and I talked about that-- that-- not in sp-- I don't remember any of the spec—some of the—some of the C.I.A. things—that—there were—there were constant stories when Ben was executive editor that the C.I.A. didn't want published. And—and—there was a push to publish.

01:20:40:00

JIM LEHRER:

And—Ben had to make a decision—with—Kay about whether or not—and sometimes a president would ask that they not run a story. And that's h-- that's tough stuff. And-- and you're right. You read it absolutely right. That-- for somebody like—Ben's generation and background, just like my generation and background to—what—we were brought up to say, when the president says something you say, "Yes, Sir." And you don't ask, you just—you know, do about face and get your ass outta there. And-- this is a – this is different. And – Ben's whole thing—as you know—it got to a point where he truly wanted to—he pushed the envelope on the—he wanted—he wanted—he—cause he got to a point where he realized that he was being

used. He felt he was being used. That—that—national security really was not in jeopardy here, was—was really not the issue.

01:21:45:00

JIM LEHRER:
Embarrassment was—national embarrassment is—was the issue. And making that distinction each time, "Hey, the—if you run that story, it's gonna jeopardize lives. You run that story, it's gonna jeopardize somebody's reputation." And where is the truth? These kinds of stories, run 'em. These kinds of stories, don't run 'em. And—and it—it's all about asking questions of the people who are makin' the pitch both ways, in the news room—to run, in—in the White House, not to run. That's tough—that's tough—tough stuff. And—everybody who's been in journalism for more than three days has had some similar kinds of things like that. I mean, I had those—all those kinds of things like that in, "Oh, you run this story, somebody's gonna kill themselves." That's the common one.

01:22:41:00

JIM LEHRER:
Common—in that it's—it happens. It happens to real people. Somebody's—you—says, "You run this story, I will have lost my reputation and I will take my life." You know, you run this story and God—you know what, they took their lives. That happens to 'ya a couple times and you realize that, "Ooh, my God, this is the real world we're dealin' with." And—and so people like—the—that was Ben's—you know, Ben went to every one of those and everybody who was in those kind of jobs is confronted with that. And—and who wants that on their conscience? Well, sometimes you have to risk it. Because the story is-- that's the other argument. You know, there's a

whole—well—that's—story—is this story worth takin' that kinda risk? Yes, somebody would say. And somebody'll say no. No—and there is no—there are no rules for that.

01:23:42:00

JIM LEHRER:

And—they're no two of 'em exactly alike. And people—the individual people, in other words, the individual C.I.A. director, or the individual president, or the individual executive editor, or the individual reporter or whoever—you know, and—these things are all-- have influences. And—it is—it is when—it's the hardest part of journalism. It doesn't happen very often. You know, it's not everyday, you have to make a decision like this. But every time you do—anybody who says that's s—that, "That's easy," hasn't done it.

**Nixon vs. The *Post***

01:24:25:00

JIM LEHRER:

I was one step removed from all of that. I just was just an observer, reader. And—and—not a participant, really in—at least in the—in terms of *The Washington Post*. But my perception of what was going on was it really was *The Washington Post* versus Richard Nixon. And it was obvious—every day—we would—I mean, I would—I would—I would run in my bare feet—to—in front of my house to get *The Washington Post* to see what the latest story was by Woodward and Bernstein on—on Watergate. And—it's—it was—and that's the only place you could get the story. Nobody was picking up the story. And that's what was making *The Washington Post*—it turns out—I didn't know at the time. What was making Ben and

everybody nervous and why Kay, you know, was—you know had to—remain firm because nobody was picking up on these stories. Usually somebody does a big story—in *The Washington Post*, in *The New York Times*. It's—boom, it's—picks—it goes everywhere.

01:25:26:00

JIM LEHRER:
And it wasn't going everywhere. And it didn't start to really go everywhere until—and history will show when Cronkite at CBS really picked it up in a big way. And—then it became—then became an 'everybody's story.' Before that, it was a *Washington Post* story. And—that was nerve-wracking for the people—at *The Washington Post*. There's no question about it. But it was always—and of course, the—the—seemed to me at least that—the Nixon people wanted it to be seen as a *Washington Post* story. As long as it was a *Washington Post* story, it was containable. 'Cause that was just—*Washington Post* was not a quote, "national newspaper", in terms of distribution. It was a national newspaper in terms of impact. Because—a lot of it's stuff went around and et cetera. And it was *The Washington Post* and it was covering Washington—covering the government and all that.

01:26:26:00

JIM LEHRER:
But—it was containable from their—Nixon's—Nixon administration point of view. But once—once Cronkite made it also a CBS story, then it, as I say, then it became everybody's story. And—that was a huge thing for Nixon, I'm sure, and the Nixon people who were—trying to contain the story. They might have gotten away with it if it hadn't been for the tapes. It goes back to the tapes. The tapes ended all that stuff. Suddenly the *Washington Post* became, "Ooh,

wow. Hey, these guys are heroes." And, "Hey, that book—let's make a movie out of that movie—out of that book." And, "Let's go. This is a big deal." And—without the tapes, it may have—may—might not have happened. And—that changed the nature of everything. And—yeah—it ended the debate about whether or not Nixon really was a scumbag.

01:27:31:00

JIM LEHRER:

And—and he really was a dishonest man. And he was a—a doer of evil as President of the United States. That was over. That little debate was over. It wasn't policy. And see, the thing—and it made—and why? Why was it over? And who—who—there—*The Washington Post*. Now, let's—let's face it. The real—the realists will say, and correctly, that it wasn't *The Washington Post* alone, it also required the use of a federal judge and the use of a federal—it turns out, an F.B.I. Official who was willing to—be a source. There were—there—there was a lot of help, you know, along the way. It wasn't just *The Washington Post*. But from the standpoint of the public—it brought, you know, and—probably tripled or quadrupled the enrollment in journalism schools all over America. They all wanted to be *Washington Post* report—they all wanted to be Woodward and Bernstein.

01:28:33:00

JIM LEHRER:

And "Let's get a president. Let's go to jour—get in journalism and—and get a president." Now, I saw some of those kids and I thought, "Oh, my God." And they didn't give a damn about writing. They didn't give a damn about the facts. They wanted to be—they wanted to be activists. They saw it—they misread it, in my opinion, misread what this meant. They didn't realize

that—what—that it was reporting by *The Washington Post* that got Nixon, you know, or that helped get Nixon. It wasn't—they didn't—they didn't set out, you know, to get Richard Nixon. And—and he—and a lot of these—I say, a lot of these kids went to journalism school and then got-- went to work for somebody and then said, "Well, now who-- when-- can we get the mayor now? Can we get the governor? That's what we do, right?" "No, it isn't what we do, idiot. What we do is report what's happen-- you know, and it—and it's—it's the—the bump in the road that needs fixing. And that's what you're gonna do, that's the story you're gonna do." "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, I came"—you know, how that went. And—with that-- those—those people—most of those people are gone. And—thank God.

**The impact of *All the President's Men* on journalism**

01:29:47:00

JIM LEHRER:

Oh, I think it was huge. It was terrific, yeah. Oh, yeah, it was—it was—it made it all real in a fiction movie. A lot of what was in the movie didn't exactly—it didn't happen exactly that way. But it was—enough of it was true. And it—it made—made all of these folks larger than life, made 'em heroic. And—and that—that—I mean, I think—the opinion polls of the—regard that—the American people had for institutions sky-rocketed for journalism. We had been—you know, journalists were down there with the lawyers and the—and the members of congress. And suddenly we sky-rocketed up there with the preachers and the—and the—and the—and the Marine lieutenants. No, it—it was—it was—it was a major event. There's no question about it. The movie was—it was a good movie, number one, just as a movie. If you didn't know

anything, didn't give a rats about journalism or Nixon or—Watergate—it was just a very—very well-done movie. There's no question about that. And it was popular. And—and it—and it—it certainly affected the image. And here again, boosted the enrollment in journalism schools.

**Jason Robards as Ben Bradlee**

01:31:14:00

JIM LEHRER:

Ben was Robards before he was Ben or whatever—Robards was—oh, yeah, he was—perfect. He was perfect. He played it perfectly. And—the role that Ben played—you know, in the—in the actual—in the real world—Watergate, was slightly different than what was in—I mean, Ben played a larger role in the movie than he did in the real world. And some of those folks—and that caused some problems, as you know, in the *Washington*—within *The Washington Post*. Which I'm not—I was not privy to except—you know, second and third hand. Although Ben told me he realized—you know, and he said, "Not a damn thing to do about it. I didn't have anything to do with makin' the movie. I didn't have anything to do with the fact that they—you know, made Jason Robards heroic." He said, "What am I gonna do? What am I supposed to do?" And—and I gave him shit about that. But—he—it is true. I mean, he didn't have anything to do with that. And—but think about it. I mean, if you were cast in a movie, wouldn't you cast Ben Bradlee? You god damn right you would.

01:32:19:00

JIM LEHRER:

I mean, you'd cast him in anything. You know, it could be—it could be—an animated thing about Goofy, you—you would cast Ben Bradlee. So—that was—that was an easy call. And—but if you happen to work at *The Washington Post* and worked your ass off on—on Watergate and did a lotta work and you're not in the movie. And this guy—you know, this—this very—and Bradlee was—anyhow—you—you could understand why there would be some—some jealousy-- legitimate jealousy—and some annoyance—legitimate annoyance. But—that's—that's the way the cookie crumbles.

**The use of anonymous sources**

01:33:06:00

JIM LEHRER:

First of all, let me tell you my view about it. I think he—and he and I agreed on this, that just generally the use of anonymous sources is a it's—has been misused too much. And—somethin' needs to be done about it. And I will tell you something—well, I'll tell a story about that. Somebody—I don't think it was Bradlee, but somebody decided to try to get a—an understanding among major news organizations about the use of anonymous sources and to try to curtail it. It had gone—this was post-Watergate, okay? And there was a meeting that I went to—I was the representative of PBS at the meeting. And there was Seymour Topping of *The New York Times*. There was the—Ben, of course, was there. The—editors of *Time* and *Newsweek*, editor of—*The Wall Street Journal*. And-- I think that was it.

01:34:06:00

JIM LEHRER:

And the issue was—what – could we work out some guidelines for the use of anonymous sources, that we would all agree to, informally. Because it wasn't—there wasn't—couldn't be any formal thing. And we all agreed, yes, that would be terrific. And nobody did a damn thing about it. We had our meeting and that was the end—that was the end of it. And—because there was apparently one—there was one group, one guy who was at the meeting who said that, "This whole meeting is bullshit, we shouldn't even have it. Who do we think we are? This is—this—you know, this—this is a story of – in and of itself." "I mean, you-- you—we gonna try to-- you know, thah." And it—it—the meeting was less than productive, to put it mildly. My own view about anonymous sources is that—I – I'm—which I am a fanatic about. One part of anonymous sources is nobody should ever be allowed to attack somebody else anonymously.

01:35:13:00

JIM LEHRER:

Now—and—you can use an anonymous source for a piece of information that's vital, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. But never attack somebody. If you're gonna attack somebody, you use—put a name on it or forget it. I'm talking about the straight news reporting, now. It's different. And—and you know, if you're—you're writing a column or you're writing an editorial or you're doing a commentary or something—but if you're on the straight news end of the business, you do—you—people have a right to know who in the hell is saying you're a god damn this or a god damn that. And—and journalists have an obligation not to-- to permit anonymous source attacks. And I feel very strongly about that, okay? That said—in terms of—anonymous sources that-- like in Deep Throat and of course, Janet Cooke and all that sorta stuff. My own

view of it is—this is not Ben's view, my own—I don't know—my own of it—was that—the use—the successful use of anonymous sources in Watergate led to the abuses of anonymous sources.

01:36:33:00

JIM LEHRER:

"Oh, well, hey man, we'd never have got Nixon if we hadn't used—anonymous sources. Hey, hey, hey, you gotta use anonymous sour—"So suddenly you end up with Janet Cooke. And —you don't check, you don't check, you don't check. Everybody—look, there's not anybody—anybody in this world who does this kinda work, journalism work who does not need an editor. I don't give a damn – nobody—it doesn't—it doesn't come out perfectly. It doesn't come out—everything needs to be checked. Everything needs to be-- I mean, that-- that's the business we're in. We're not in the-- you know—it's not—it's not a hardship. It—it would be like saying, "Oh, well--" would be like—you know, bein' a farmer and not, "Well, but we don't have gasoline in our tractors." I mean, you know, it's that critical to what we do, is that you have editors who look at every piece of copy or look at every piece of news footage and—and—and "Where did this come from? Who did this?" Who said that?

01:37:36:00

JIM LEHRER:

How do—who—what do you mean you have an—who—who is the anonymous source? What do you mean you're not gonna tell me? Get your ass outta here, then and take your story with you." You know, and—and—yes, protecting anonymous sources is important. But—but-- you're doing this beha—this isn't—but, "Between you and me, Sweetheart, Baby." This is between us and them, meaning our readers, the public, the people who are

gonna cast votes for President of the United States, the people who are gonna make decisions, you know, on—in our democratic society. Those people are—we're doin' all this for them, remember. It's not so you can have a by-line and be famous. It is—or get into—get in a movie or whatever or—or be a TV anchorman and, you know, make bundles of dollars and live in—in northwest D.C. in all—in a mansion or something. You know, it isn't, "That's not what this is about, friend." This is—this is about—cause you know—it, Ben and I used to talk about this. And we'd get—you know, we'd get—you know, particularly late at night, we'd get—we—fanatic about this.

01:38:41:00

JIM LEHRER:

That, you know, they—the—when they founded this country, they said, "Okay—we're gonna have a free press." And it's—you know, it's amendment to the—you know, it's a big deal. It's very, very important. But they did not—cause the free press—Jefferson said, without a free press you're not gonna have a democracy. Okay, it's not gonna work. 'Cause the people have to know about what's going on so they can cast an informed vote. But they didn't create any—any institutions for this. There's no way to ensure that the people get the information. It's left to the free press to do it. And so that means—when—a reporter going—cover—covering a beat for the *McKinney Courier Gazette* in Texas is—is performing a constitutionally critical duty, you know, for—for our country. And—and this is—the—this isn't—this isn't about, you know, fancy leads. Yes, we want to write nice leads. And yes, we want to make people laugh and we want to make people cry and all of this kind of stuff. But god damn it, this is important work.

**Getting the facts right**

01:39:57:00

JIM LEHRER:

Anybody who doesn't care about whether or not a middle initial is correct, or a home address is correct, or the birthplace of a person is correct, that same person isn't also, in my opinion, probably not gonna care if that quote is correct. If they don't care if that quote is correct, they're not gonna care about fact 2, fact 3 is correct etcetera etcetera. It's all part of the profession. All part of the work. All part of what we do. Six months into my first job, the *Dallas Morning News*—I was writing obits. And I wrote an obituary where I got the name of the deceased mixed up with the name of the funeral home. So I said "Funeral services for Lamar Smith were pending Friday at the Billy Bob Dunn Funeral Home."

01:41:02:00

JIM LEHRER:

Well, it was Billy Bob Dunn who died and Lamar Smith was the funeral home. The next morning—it was a morning newspaper. The next morning, the paper came out. The managing editor came over to my desk. And he said, "You ever make a mistake like that again, you're gone." And I was six months into my job. And I—clearly never forgot that. And—he said a lot more about, you know, people, does—when they die they deserve to have their goddamn names right. You know. But anyhow, my point is, Bradlee felt the same way. I mean—this Bradlee and I came from the—the old fashioned, you know, kind of thing. You know, and—and you show it's a sloppy journalist and I'll show you a shitty journalist. Sloppiness is—is my—how can you be sloppy and be a

real journalist, a – really care about things, you know – you're sloppy names, you're sloppy with facts, you're sloppy with, "Oh, it doesn't really matter."

01:42:08:00

JIM LEHRER:

It matters. Everything in that story—because credibility—your credibility and your believability is—is what it's all about. And say, "Well, if they can't get that right." "I was there. I saw—I was at the event and they said, they—the guy was speaking." That guy didn't speak. Or he's-- didn't say that. He said somethin' else. You know. Anyhow, all that stuff is—is that's the kinda stuff Ben and I talked about. And it was very, very old-fashioned stuff. And we would get—we'd get very excited about it. And we just talkin' to each other.

**The importance of fact-checking**

01:42:50:00

JIM LEHRER:

In my early days, that was before you made any corrections, before the correction boxes, before—you know, and—we—I had made a mistake—for instance, that obit, a good example, in fact. I said, "Oh, well we-- you know, we—say, yes, just run it, you know, the next day, you know, the way it was—should be. And that-- you know, take care of it." And that's—and—and I remember saying, "Well, we—shouldn't we say something that we had it wrong?" I don't know. You can't do that. 'Cause if you ever say you did that—they'll—people won't—will start believing that everything in the paper's wrong if you admit you made a mistake. And that was the—that was the—the theory behind never admitting to a mistake in a newspaper. And—that went by the boards 15 years later, I guess. But it took awhile. It

took awhile. And—it's so—right now, it's—I mean, —now, being you know—2000 teens—late 2000 teens—admitting a mistake is—first of all, very seldom done.

01:44:01:00

JIM LEHRER:

And—it doesn't—it doesn't seem to matter. You know, where you, "Oh—oh, well, you know—well, we were close." You know, that just—that just the feeling I have. And—to me, that is—is a sign of a mass deterioration of the values of what—what—is what journalism is all about. If you can't believe the facts, every one of 'em—then what—then it—it really—begins to infringe. And you could argue that it has. It begins to infringe on the democratic process. The—a representative government doesn't function well if the people don't have a believable source of information. It's what Pat Moynihan used to say, you know, you can have all the opinions you want, but we got—you can't everybody—can't have their own facts. And—right now, everybody wants to have their own facts. And—it's—we gotta do somethin' about it.

01:45:03:00

JIM LEHRER:

And—we're not. In fact, we're probably—we're just kinda goin' with the flow, goin' with the tsunami, going with that storm. There several of them goin' chick, chick, chick all at one time. And— the values of—the old-fashioned journalism values and I hate to sound like what—I mean, they had—yeah, they had—they—they were closed and there were some—really —negative things about them, there's no question about it. There were things that never made print that-- it should've made print back in those days—or made

broadcast, should have—and didn't. We have—and we have a much more open systems—journalism now than we ever had or Bradlee had when he started—I had. And—that's a good thing. But there are some really downsides to it as well.

**Janet Cooke's fabricated reporting**

01:46:07:00

JIM LEHRER:

Ben told me he expected to be fired because of that. And he told everybody that, I think. But—he told me—that he—that—the fact that there were—there were so few ramifications from that, that was—it was a disappointment to some people in the business. And stunningly so. That *The Washington Post* was not practicing what it was preaching. And that—this was a sin beyond all sins. There's no worse sin that a journalism organization could—could commit. And a made up—a made up out of whole cloth story. And how that got through the editorial process of a major newspaper in America in this day in time, the same newspaper that had just done, you know, fill in the blanks. It was stunning. And I was just as stunned as anybody else. In fact, more so because of my line of work and my own strong feelings about that kind of thing. And—I must say, I remain so.

**The aftermath of the Janet Cooke scandal**

01:47:23:00

JIM LEHRER:

The idea of somebody making up a story was beyond his experience. He just had—nobody had ever done that before. And, particularly a story like this.

Nobody's gonna make up something. I mean, it just—it just wasn't—you know, he said that—in retrospect, you know, he should've seen it immediately. I mean, they should—they were all sign—there were signs. If people were looking for the signs. But you had to be looking for the signs. See, my point is that you gotta have people looking for the signs. And not for making up stories, but for everything that you put out there. And McNeill and I, when we first started our program, we had—we never put anything on the air that we didn't—one of us didn't see beforehand. Because we were responsible for it. Our names were on it. We were the editors of that program. And—responsibility means responsibility. And you don't say, "Oh, well, Sammy Sue did that. You know, screw that.

01:48:23:00

JIM LEHRER:

You know, Sammy Sue—it doesn't matter about Sammy Sue. Billy Bob's the one that's responsible." And—I was surprised, as I say. I remain surprised that—and Ben was the first to admit he was surprised too, frankly, that his-- he—he off—you know, he did—you know, he did resign. He did offer to resign. And—they didn't—they didn't accept his resignation. And-- but how all of that happened—the details of how that happened, I don't know. And you know, the one thing I think that—one of the reasons that-- he survived and that the paper survived was they—they—they reported the story of what happened with all the gloves off. I mean, the story was—was absolutely fearless. And—nobody—nobody escaped in print. And—I think that—that helped mitigate the situation that—they reported their own malfeasance—like gangbusters.

01:49:30:00

JIM LEHRER:

And—that was a huge thing. And—that's certainly I think is—what helped—the fact that—they didn't throw Ben over the side and everybody else involved. There are other people besides Ben who were involved in that. And—obviously and—they didn't throw anybody over the side, really. Well, they did and they didn't. Here again, I'm—I'm not an expert in the Janet Cook case.

**The new world of digital journalism**

01:50:01:00

JIM LEHRER:

It's encour—encouraging irresponsibility, in some ways, more and more stuff—to broaden—you know, if you have to go—go on the air 24 hours and you're competing with two others who are on the air 24 hours, you just grab everything, you report everything. And everybody has a blog. And everybody has access to tweets. And everybody's doin' this and this and that and whatever. There—they're not—unfortunately the—the stories that they're—they're going for are—are mostly skin-deep stories. But—the—the basic serious reporting is still being done by newspapers, you know, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The LA Times* and a few others. And—that is the—terrible development here. And there-- there-- a lot of it is now—a lot of—some of it is being—is being replaced by what—non-profit organizations like *Propublica—Publica* and—and others. But—everything is—everything's in a state of revolution in the journalism business. And—and—being in the middle of a revolution is never fun for anybo—any of the participants.

**Ben Bradlee's lasting legacy**

01:51:29:00

JIM LEHRER:

Ben was—probably—the ultimate example of a man who was seen as—a journalist adventurer. In other words, he—he was a man who lived the full life. And—he lived it—he had—he was a—his legacy is—is, "Put some spirit in it, Buddy. You know, put—get – you know, get the story. And—and get it right. But give it some juice. And—and – and tell stories. Tell stories. Stories are stories. They're not press releases. They're—they're stories. They're about people. They have beginnings and they have middles and they have ends." "Tell narratives. They're narr- make 'em narrative—make 'em—make 'em—make—make me want to read. He was the kind of guy who—who believed that—you should—you should edit your newspaper in such a way that everybody opens—looks—opens it up with wonder. "Oh, my God, I didn't know that—oh, Lord, read—oh, Jesus, you see this? Oh, my God, look at" you know.

01:52:55:00

JIM LEHRER:

He was—he was kind of the wonder man—the – of American journalism. And he-- and it was-- it was personality. But it wasn't all personality. It was a combination of-- of a wonder personality with a—serious curiosity. He really cared about all—and he wanted to know about all of these things. And he wanted to know about people. He was—curious about—he—you know, I was with him many times when he would just ask people you know, just, "what—you know—why in the hell you doing this? I mean, where'd

you—where'd you get that?" You know, he cared about—he was curious. And—he also—he also—he was not—now, here again, the people in *The Post* can tell you better than I. But my impression, based on my conversations with him, and he—he cared about writing. But that was not his number one concern. He—he saw that newspaper as—as an instrument of—as I say, of wonder, an instrument of democracy in a serious way. And he believed very strongly that—good information will, in fact, set you and keep you free. And he believed that. And—he just—it just—he just exuded that. And—and that, plus this incredible Ben Bradlee personality was special and—and—probably not replicable.

**END TC: 01:54:41:00**