DON GRAHAM
THE NEWSPAPERMAN: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF BEN BRADLEE
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

DON GRAHAM
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ON SCREEN TEXT:

The Newspaperman

Kunhardt Film Foundation

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Don Graham

Former Publisher, *The Washington Post*

Joining the D.C. police

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DON GRAHAM:

Well—Ben's involved here. I—when I graduated from Harvard, I was gonna be drafted. And, you know, that's—that's a pretty common story. I let myself be drafted rather than—I didn't have any intention of avoiding it. When I came back, it was July of 1968. But the riot had taken place in April. That lasted three days. A lotta people had died, and a lotta the city had burned up. I was in Vietnam. I didn't witness any of it, but I was stunned when it—when it

occurred. I came out of the army thinking—I really do not know this city and it might be better if I learned it in some other way than a journalist before going to work on the *Post*. And I—interestingly, I thought of being a teacher in a public school, and I couldn't because I didn't have an education degree.

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DON GRAHAM:

So in 1968, the Washington, D.C. police were desperate for people. It was all men. The war in Vietnam was on. And I knew that they were looking hard for people who had already been through the army as I had. And as luck would have it, they called me, going down a list of people who'd been discharged from the army and lived in Washington. I said I was interested. I said I would only serve about 18 months, which was when my wife was graduating from law school. And they said that would be above-average. So you could say that my mother was not entirely enthusiastic about that. And I talked to several other people about it, but I talked to Ben. And Ben said, "You walk into this newsroom and you've been a cop and you know that much about the city. I think that would be a pretty good idea." So that was very influential in helping me make up my mind. And he was exactly right. It was—it was—it was—it was a hell of an education.

Ben Bradlee's time in the navy

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DON GRAHAM:

Well, Ben—used to joke about his Crowninshield and Bradlee ancestors and how they came over, you know, before the Mayflower or something, met the boat. You know, had all these—all, you know, Harvard back to John Harvard's

day. And—but Ben and every man I knew of Ben's generation, with a couple of exceptions who were medically unfit, all of them served. And they all found the same thing, which was they were thrown together with people from everywhere. On that destroyer of Ben's, I have no doubt that—he was the only member of the Harvard class. And—that he had a cross-section of the United States as I did—in the Army and Jim did in the Marines.

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DON GRAHAM:

And it is clearly something that's missing in the—in the U.S. today. Where you can go to—college and then go to a consulting firm, and then go to business school, and then go to a financial company and never meet anybody from outside a very narrow slice of life. That was not Bradlee's story. I also think World War II was very important for him, as it was for my dad, as it was for John Kennedy and others. Because I mean, there were—there were shifts when he was in charge of his destroyer. He was in charge of a warship in the middle of the Pacific in a war zone and was—was shot at plenty. And—that was responsibility. And when you came back, it was a little hard to tell Ben Bradlee that he wasn't ready for responsibility, 'cause he'd had it—he'd had it. And, you know, Jack Kennedy had. And—and my dad had and so did many others. I think that brought– that helped bring Ben and my father together.

Serving in the military

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DON GRAHAM:

Impossible to define, but you—you meet—people from literally the towns you couldn't find on a map to inner city New York to—to—people from every

ethnicity. And, you know what? They're terrific at what they do. And they—they serve together. They—they care. It's a very, it's the commonest story in the world. But I think it—it was—Ben talked about it a lot. There was—there was a famous letter Ben received. A story he often told that—was—that began, "Dear Asshole." No. Wrong. It—it was from a guy saying that—"Bradlee and *The Post* had been undermining national security." And then made all kinds of allegations about-- about Ben personally, that he probably had never served and—and whatnot. And Ben wrote back this letter that started, "Dear Asshole," and—and—described his service in the war. And they became great friends. And—they wrote quite a bit back and forth to each other. And—and—came to enjoy each other I think. So you know, it—it—Ben did take the national security of the United States seriously. But like many other people, like President Kennedy, he'd seen enough of admirals and officers, he probably didn't take every one of them as seriously as they took themselves. He knew there were good ones and he knew there were lousy ones.

Ben Bradlee's defiant character

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DON GRAHAM:

Ben was out on a ship in the middle of an ocean at a time of primitive communications. And you had to act. You couldn't call home and ask for orders—when—when something came up. You had to take action. And—he was used to having responsibility on his own. And if you read any book about any war in history, you won't find universal reverence for the officers you serve under. You'll find that most soldiers—you know, if you're lucky enough

to serve under Robert E. Lee or Ulysses S. Grant, you probably think they're great. But most of the time, that's not the case. And the soldiers—the soldiers don't worship the commanders, and Ben certainly didn't.

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DON GRAHAM:

People in positions like the top of the military, the national security complex, even the president—had to be taken seriously. You had to listen when they called and wanted something from you. And they were right a lot of the time, but they weren't right all the time. And—that he had—he had seen that close up.

Ben Bradlee's appointment to *The Washington Post*

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DON GRAHAM:

I met Ben…I can't remember when I met Ben, but I met Ben when he was the Washington Bureau Chief at *Newsweek*. And—the Washington Post Company bought *Newsweek* I think in '63, maybe '62? I can't remember. And—I knew that Ben Bradlee was the Washington Bureau Chief at *Newsweek*. I had heard my mother and father say a thing or two about him. I do remember him '63 to '65 as that bureau chief. My sister worked in the Washington Bureau for a summer. And—so you know, we—I mean, I knew him. And then when my mother told me that she was thinking of making him the editor of *The Post*, I knew what a crucial choice this was for *The Post* and for her. It was absolutely going to be, you know, fundamentally important to her time there.

And—it—I—didn't know Ben well enough to say, "That's a great idea," but I—I certainly thought he was the type of person she was looking for.

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DON GRAHAM:

It wasn't that she needed to make her mark. It was that she had ultimate respect for the people editing *The Washington Post*, for Alfred Friendly, who Ben was, eventually succeeded and for Russ Wiggins, the overall editor of the paper. They had—my mother was the daughter of Eugene Meyer who had bought *The Washington Post* at this, at a bankruptcy sale in June of 1933. And the paper claimed a circulation of 50,000. Probably didn't have that much. It was the fourth paper in circulation in a five-paper town. And—when Wiggins agreed to become the editor in I think 1950, it was a very big deal. Russ—spent much of his time on the editorial page. And Al Friendly ran the news side. And my mother and Al and Jean Friendly were very very close personal friends, as she describes in her autobiography.

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DON GRAHAM:

And—when she became publisher—she found Al was talking to her more and more about the time he needed to take off and the—his desire to write a book and other things. And she said, she thought to hers—you know, she thought to herself more and more, "*The Post* needs to be better." And she wanted someone at a different phase of their career. Somebody who was full of energy, somebody who wanted to be there all the time, somebody who would get the place moving. And—from her knowledge of—Ben wasn't the first person she offered the job to. She tried to hire Scotty Reston from *The New York Times*, which would have been— who was a wonderful editor and a wonderful picker of people and would have been very good in a completely different way. But Ben had—the energy that she knew she wanted.

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DON GRAHAM:

And I remember her making that choice. I remember that she talked to people like Walter Lippmann about it, that Lippmann—thought it over and thought Ben would be pretty good. She talked to Joe Alsop about it. She talked to Scotty about it. She talked to journalists she knew who weren't on *The Post*. And—one of the things I remember is how within days, she was telling me, "I know this guy's gonna be great. He is there around the clock. He's there on Saturday. He's down in the composing room watching the pages get made up. He's with the news desk people learning how they put the newspaper together. He is so interested in every aspect of it. And he's pushing me. He's asking me questions." And—in other words, he—she was very quick to figure out who he was. And he was very quick to figure out who she was. And—that was very interesting for me to observe too.

Ben Bradlee transforming the *Post*

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DON GRAHAM:

Ben used to tell me these stories about how as a reporter; he used to cover the district court in Washington. And-- one of the people that he cultivated, one of the people that had the same sensibility he did was a guy named Harry Gladstein, who was the circulation director of the paper. Not in the newsroom at all. But Harry would sit in the daily n—front page meeting. And—Ben, who was covering what he regarded as these juicy trials for murder, for corruption, for-- whatnot down at district court, which is where he first met Edward Bennett Williams. Ben would walk into news c—Ben—Ben's stories

would be presented in news conference, and Gladstein would say, "Oh boy, that's—you know, that's gonna sell some papers. That's a good story." So that was a lot of—Ben had the sensibility of an editor, but also had the sensibility of a reader. He wanted to edit *The Post* in ways that people would read it. He wanted stories that people would want to read. Ben was not big for, you know, *Bond Issue Set*. You know, he wanted, you know, *Murderer Escapes Police Dragnet* as well as *White House in Turmoil*.

Ben Bradlee's sense of story

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DON GRAHAM:

In my cop days, every time I walked into a courtroom, I thought, "This has gotta be the most fascinating place in Washington." Every trial is a little story. And of course, the prosecution's trying to tell a story. The defense is trying to tell a story. And you know—the—the truth is not necessarily directly with either one. But Ben got the story. He understood the drama of those trials, and he had the ultimate narrator, the ultimate interlocutor in Edward Bennett Williams who was— who had a fantastic influence on Ben, who was his close friend-- and the lawyer for the paper for many years, represented Ben personally in the Tavoulareas case and—and many others, but was then kind of the kind of—local trials in Washington, D.C. But—Ben wasn't confined to cover Williams, but wa—but it was—it was a great piece of luck that the two of them met there. But yeah, the court was-- was a great story.

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DON GRAHAM:

So Ben then—told me later that he went to see my father and asked him for—if he could take leave to take a Nieman Fellowship. And my father said, "No." He said, "You got one crack at Harvard, and that was enough." And—and—whether it was just because of that or because Ben was just—anxious, he went off to Paris—with—with the State Department. But I guess before that, he also told the story that's also in the book of how he—he covered Civil Rights demonstrations in Washington over the integration of the municipal swimming pools.

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DON GRAHAM:

And I—I don't remember the details of the story. But he found himself summoned up to my father's office and asked to talk to a meeting of civic leaders about what was going on. And—as he described it to me, he got quite mad because they didn't print the whole story or held some of it back, because in my father's judgment it would have, I guess, contributed to an explosive situation. And that situation was diffused because they announced that the pools would be integrated. But I—I've—the—the details are in Ben's book, and I don't recall those details.

The early days of the *Post*

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DON GRAHAM:

The—you could—you could overrate the power of newspapers even in that day. But my father was a publisher of a different kind. A great kind, and he was a great publisher of his kind. But—he went back to the days— *The Washington Post* was founded by a man named Stilson Hutchins who founded

The Post as a Democratic Party, capital-D Democratic—paper in 1877 when—it was right after the Civil War, so all the paper, the Republicans had won. Or Lincoln had been a Republican— So—he saw, Hutchins saw an opening for a Democratic paper 'cause there was none, and the Democrats were coming back some. Started *The Post*—to fill that market niche. When the *Post* would be sold from one owner to another, often it would change political party.

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DON GRAHAM:

So that by the time it was sold to my grandfather, it had been for 25 years in the hands of a family named McLean. The McLean family were stalwart Republicans, to the extent that the previous publisher, Ned McLean, had gone to jail for perjury for defending his friend, President Harding, in the Teapot Dome investigation. And it was Eugene Meyer—Katharine Graham's father, my grandfather, who said, "*The Post* isn't gonna have a party. *The Post* is gonna be an independent newspaper and try to tell the truth." My father was totally content with that. He was, he liked—he was not—not of either political party. The only president *The Post* endorsed in his day was Dwight Eisenhower. But—he was… he, as he put it to me once, "He liked to meddle." And—so I think in the case of the—swimming pools, he thought he could do more good for the community by not printing the story than by printing.

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DON GRAHAM:

I don't once recall my mother making a similar judgment, that she wouldn't print a story not because it didn't deserve to be printed, not because it was untrue or whatnot, but because—because of the outcome it would bring about. But it was—it was a different time. By the time she became publisher

in 1963, I think the—the whole ethos, the whole ethic of journalism had changed. There were way more publishers standing back from active participation in the news than wanting to meddle.

Newsweek

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DON GRAHAM:

It was Ben who—brought—who first told my dad that *Newsweek* was for sale. And I think—*Newsweek* had been owned by a family named Muir, I'm sorry – the publishers had been people named Muir, but it was owned by the estate of Vincent Astor. And—they decided to look for a buyer and had not called The Washington Post Company, which wasn't a terribly obvious buyer. And Ben didn't like the way things were going. He didn't like the kinds of buyers that were being discussed. He thought *Newsweek* needed some energy that might come from a new owner. And he decided to take matters into his hands and reach out to Phil Graham, who struck him as having the kind of ambition and energy that—that *Newsweek* needed. And he couldn't have been righter. You know, my dad was looking for something like this. And—*Newsweek* was a way distant se—second to *Time* at that time.

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DON GRAHAM:

I think *Time* had 4 million circulations, and *Newsweek* had 1.7 million. And—it, but Ben and my dad talked and talked and talked about what *Newsweek* might become. Ben wrote a memo. My dad acted pretty quickly. And—he got it. And then he took Ben's advice about who the editor bench of *Newsweek* should be, picking Oz Elliott, who was Ben's choice. And that

turned out to be a great choice. So Ben was there as the Washington Bureau Chief of *Newsweek* pretty close to our family. My mother knew that story and knew how important Ben had been to the transaction. And when she started looking for an editor—there'd been some complications in the meantime between the two of them. But she—you know, Ben was one of the first people she thought of.

Kay Graham

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DON GRAHAM:

Well, one thing I should talk about is—one of the luckiest things in Ben's life and my mother's life was—his becoming editor of the *Post*. But it was lucky for him that he became editor of the *Post* working for her. A remarkable thing was that he knew it. The year was 1965, is that right? So—*The Post* is—*The Post* then was owned by a private company. A company that was entirely owned by—by my family, except that I think 20% of the stock was with the Meyer Foundation and had been left there by my grandfather. But we were not a public company. In 1971, six years later, we became a public company. And at that time and for several years thereafter, Kay Graham was the only woman CEO of any of the thousand top public companies in the United States, as rated by *Fortune Magazine*.

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DON GRAHAM:

Fortune does a “Fortune-500” issue, but then they pick what they call "the second 500." So out of 1,000 CEOs for several years, she was the one and only woman. And I tell my daughters, I can explain almost anything to 'em, but I

cannot explain what it was like to be a woman manager in a business in 1963. Because you—you could not understand it. One thing it meant was that no man almost anywhere—there were certainly individual exceptions. Dorothy Schiff was the publisher of *The New York Post*, but of course that was not a public company. Oveta Culp Hobby was the publisher of *The Houston Post*, again—one newspaper. They owned some television stations, but it was a private corporation. So almost no man had dreamed of—knew anyone who worked for a woman as their boss. And if men had any insecurities, this situation brought them out.

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DON GRAHAM:

I saw men that I otherwise thought were pretty normal, pretty straightforward—have a very hard time talking to my mother as they would to any other boss. And I didn't—entirely understand that. But I did notice that Bradlee was one of a small number, not the only one, but one of a very small number, who—was direct. Obviously, if you—if you talked to Ben from 1965 until the day he died, he'd have said that, "When Kay Graham talked to him about becoming the editor of *The Washington Post*, he knew he would have a great boss." He knew that she cared about journalism in the same way that he did. That he cared—she cared about the *Post* in the same way that he did. That she want—she thought it was good, but she wanted it to be better. And that was the driving force in Bradlee. He wanted the paper to be better in just the way she did.

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DON GRAHAM:

He wanted to spend more money than she did to get it there. And that, you know, so that created argument at the edges. But centrally, the two of them were absolutely on the same page. And—he was—he was good from the day he walked in there, and she knew it. And she got reinforced a lot by her friends in the newsroom. By the veteran *Post* reporters whom she'd known for years and trusted. And by younger reporters who were telling her, "This guy's great. He's so full of life, so full of energy. We love working for him. And he's shaking, he's—he's driving the place. He's shaking up the place." And that was what she wanted to hear. That was what she wanted for—for the paper. And it made a huge difference to her and to the two of them. To her because every choice she made in those very early years did not go great. She was picking a lot of executives.

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DON GRAHAM:

She had grown up reading—her grandfather—her father bought *The Washington Post* when she was 16 years old. So from that time, she'd had this personal identification with it. She'd cared a lot about it. But she, I think she'd always read newspapers, cared about the world and cared about the news. And I think—she—she and my father had had close friends who were writers, who were columnists, who were editors. She had not had close personal friends who were on the business side of newspapers. She did not grow up knowing about advertising and circulation and accounting and production and whatnot. So when it came to picking people to run those departments, she didn't have the personal certainty about what she was shooting for that she did in the case of Bradlee. Some of her selections didn't work out. Some of them worked out very badly.

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DON GRAHAM:

And—she was, Kay Graham was one of the most self-doubting people that ever came down the track. And this is all over her book. She had, she was constantly questioning herself. She describes herself as "always in tears over the fear that something she did was gonna undermine the future of the paper" and really cause enormous problems down the line. But when she was in one of those moods when she was very unhappy with herself, it always helped that you could remind her that she was the person who picked Ben Bradlee. That that had worked out great."

Ben Bradlee turned a good newspaper into a great newspaper

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DON GRAHAM:

Ben was direct. And—he did not, he—he used everyday language. What he said was very very simple. And—it all started with basic core, "What did you care about?" And Ben wa—rightly picked Kay as somebody who cared about the same fundamental things at *The Washington Post* that he did. As—as he thought of it, how was he gonna make the paper better? And he looked at the paper as a bunch of teams. As a little city with different neighborhoods. And the national people were different from the metro people, were different from the sports people and so on. And he wanted to take every one of those sections, every one of those teams and make 'em better. He once said to me that he had naively thought that he would make– take the national section and try to make that better. Take the metro staff and try to make that better.

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DON GRAHAM:

And then when he got done with the last one, it would all be done. But he said, "Long before he got to—to—the fifth section, the first couple were already tattered and falling apart and needed more work." So but—they both-- they both had great respect for the hiring process. Bradlee wanted to—to—know who the best reporters in town were and hire them all. And he wanted to add young people, interns or otherwise young reporters who were hungry and who were, as he had been—lookin' for a great story and wanted to—wanted to—wanted to make the paper better. Wanted to—wanted to improve whatever it was they were writing about. And—so there was that fund—that, and that was exactly the way she thought. Exactly. Did Ben think about the business purposes of the paper?

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DON GRAHAM:

He wanted the ground under his feet. He wanted to work for a place that was making enough money that they would be able to improve. But no, he didn't—fundamentally care whether the paper was a great business or not. But he did learn how the advertising department run. How did the—one of the—when—when Ben came to work at *The Washington Post*, the big issue facing the paper was not journalistic. It was getting the paper out at night. There were these nightly wars with the people who were setting the type, running the presses and whatnot. And—these hamstrung the newsroom. Deadlines were earlier than they needed to be. There was—less flexibility in gettin' a new story into the paper than he thought there should be. The ads—he thought were too ugly, and they were—they were—there—there—he didn't like their shape. He had all these, and the

advertising director would throw up his hands and say, "What the hell do you know about it?" And they, but they argued and fought and had a great time—you know. And– but he informed himself about everybody else's operations in the way of making the newsroom better.

The partnership between Ben Bradlee and Kay Graham

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DON GRAHAM:

Trust is the key word. So when Ben would call and say, "We got a great story," she did not have an instinct to look over his shoulder. She, if you think about all the stories that, where, that-- made the *Post* famous. The Pentagon Papers and Watergate in particular. There w—in the Pentagon Papers there were arguments on all sides about—whether the *Post* should print a story where the government had made its stand clear that, "No, you shouldn't print it. It's classified. It's top secret." And Kay understood the threats to the business, which Ben didn't care so much about. But she wanted to know and understand what they were. She knew that her lawyers were saying, "Do not print these stories. It's gonna put the paper in grave danger."

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DON GRAHAM:

But she did not look over Ben's shoulder and say, "What's in this story? Did you, did the reporter get the details right? Did you edit it in the right way?" She trusted Ben, and ultimately she preferred his judgment, which was that it was crucial to the future of *The Post* to get this story in the paper that day. No delay. Right then. Rather than the lawyers' judgment, which was, "Wait. Hold on. Let us think about it." And—Ben was absolutely right. That was 1971.

Then Watergate comes along a year later, and it's the same thing. Ben—Ben, his managing—his great managing editor, Howard Simons—Bob Woodward, Carl Bernstein and this famous team that covered the Watergate story, it starts as a burglary.

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DON GRAHAM:

And then story after story after story, they're finding little bits of additional information and sometimes big bits of additional information that are driving the story in a very uncomfortable direction. And my mother loves it and is, fully appreciates how big the story is and how far it's g—you know, how—how important it is. But she does once in a while say, "If this story's so great, why isn't anybody else writing much about it?" But she— In the end, she had learned to trust Ben, and Ben had learned to trust her. They were both right.

The Pentagon Papers

00:32:43:00

DON GRAHAM:

Well, I had been an intern working for the Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*, James Reston, in the summer of 1963. Scotty Reston was a family friend, close to my father and my mother. And they both had offered him jobs on *The Post* to try to get him away from *The Times*. They both loved and admired him. He was the guy who hired half the famous reporters on the *New York Times* or more than half in that day. So—my mother and I were at Scotty and Sally Reston's farm in Markham, Virginia at the wedding of Jim Reston Junior, now a very great author of books, to his wife Denise. And Scotty pulled

me aside and told me that *The Times* that Sunday was gonna break this enormous story drawn from the most classified, top secret papers in the Nixon administration. This was Saturday. So the following day, they were gonna break this story they'd been working on for months about the origins of the war in Vietnam.

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DON GRAHAM:

And he thought the *Post* should know about it. So I told Kay, she called Ben. Ben was—she reported that "Ben was furious." But—that *The Times* had it and we didn't. But as we now know, the ti—a reporter on *The Times* named Neil Sheehan had received a copy of what is now called the Pentagon Papers from—Daniel Ellsberg a historian who had been working in the Pentagon and had been asked by Bob McNamara, then the Secretary of Defense to undertake a history of how the United States got into the war in Vietnam. McNamara had the gun as somebody who totally believed in the war, but by '67—'68 had come to the point where he thought it was a huge mistake. So he asked himself, "Why did we make this mistake?" And he asked Ellsberg to write that story. By the time Ellsberg wrote it, McNamara was long gone as Secretary of Defense. And Lyndon Johnson was no longer president.

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DON GRAHAM:

The president was Richard Nixon. The Secretary of Defense was a very canny former congressman named Mel Laird, who knew tons about politics. But I don't think those were the two people most likely to read the history of how we became involved. Anyway, Ellsberg, frustrated by what he saw as a lack of interest and attention to what he'd written, gave a copy to Neil Sheehan.

Sheehan brought it to the editors of *The Times* bro—and they created a separate special newsroom with locked doors. Nobody could access it outside *The Times* building. And they spent weeks, or I think they spent months doing reporting to create the first stories about what was in the Pentagon Papers. I—I probably have the days wrong, but they—they, the first story ran on Sunday. The second one ran on Monday. They might or might not have written something in the Tuesday paper. And the government sued—saying that, "Publication of these stories was threatening to the national security," and asking a judge to—adjoin the *Times* from publishing any more stories.

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DON GRAHAM:

No newspaper— The federal government had never gotten a newspaper to stop printing a story. They had punished editors, sued for libel or I think during the Mexican War and possibly during the Civil War, they put editors in jail after they printed stories. But they never stopped a paper from printing a story. The case went before a judge in New York who was in his first day as a judge. And after hearing both sides, he issued an injunction and ordered *The Times* to stop printing. *The Times* immediately appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. And the Second Circuit upheld the judge. So *The Times*, of course, appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States, but that was gonna take time. And Ellsberg—eager to see the rest of the story printed called an editor on *The Washington Post* whom he knew. Man named Ben Bagdikian who was then the national editor of *The Post*.

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DON GRAHAM:

I believe Ellsberg was in New York, and Bagdikian went up to see him early in the morning, was given a copy of the Pentagon Papers. It didn't fit in the suitcase he had brought, so I think he had 'em in a box. He bought two tickets on the then Eastern Shuttle in those pre-9/11 days, one for himself and one for the Pentagon Papers. Put a seatbelt around himself and another one around the papers, flew to Washington, took a cab to Ben's house, and dumped the papers on Ben's living room floor. There were gathered Chal Roberts, who'd been covering diplomacy and covered World War II, covered--covered all the big stories for *The Post* for the previous decades, was getting ready to retire. Murray Marder, who'd covered the Army McCarthy hearings and again had covered the State Department for *The Post* forever. George Wilson, who covered the Pentagon. Don Oberdorfer, a great reporter, who like George had covered the war in Vietnam and—and—done a lot of may—and—and continued to do a lot of great reporting for the *Post* over the years and others, and Ben and Howard.

00:38:32:00

DON GRAHAM:

So they spent the day reporting and trying to figure out a story that should run in the *Post* the next day. Now, as my mother described the story, and I—I remember the day pretty well, she—she was getting ready to hol—to host at her house on Orange Street a retirement party for a *Post*— for Harry Gladstein, *The Post* circulation executive who'd been Ben's friend in the 1940s. Great man in the history of *The Washington Post*. And Ben called her with great excitement as soon as they got the Pentagon Papers. So he knew that that was coming. And she also talked to her lawyers in the course of the day. The chairman of the company, Fritz Beebe, was a Cravath lawyer. He had

been the family's lawyer, trust and estates lawyer. But he was a Cravath partner, a very fine lawyer.

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DON GRAHAM:

And he had been involved in the selection of reporters for *The Post*. *The Post* at that point did not really have an in-house lawyer handling newsroom matters. So it brought in two very good young lawyers from the firm of Rogers & Wells. The Rogers in question was a man named William Rogers, a great friend of my father's and my mother's—immensely admired by them, who had been the attorney general of the United States under President Eisenhower and was then the Secretary of State under Richard Nixon. So he was, obviously the Secretary of State was no longer a lawyer at the firm, but we had chosen the firm because he was a part of it. He played no role in the recommendations of the firm. The lawyers at the firm did. But the lawyers recommended that we not print this story, because they were afraid that the district judge in New York, who had issued—an orders—telling *The New York Times* not to print it, would find *The Washington Post* in contempt for violating that order.

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DON GRAHAM:

That woulda been quite a stretch for him, but that's what they were afraid of. And if a judge finds you in contempt of his court, he can pretty much do anything. He can fine you any amount, put you in jail, do anything he wants to enforce that order until a dist—until an appeals court tells him, "You can't do that." So their recommendation was, "No." And Kay wrote that, "At one point during the back and forth between the reporters and the lawyers, one of the

lawyers said, 'What I think we should do is not print the story tomorrow, but go to the attorney general and tell him that we intend to print the story the day after tomorrow.'" To which one of the reporters said, "That is the shittiest idea I ever heard." And—Chal Roberts said, "If you do that, I will move up my re—retirement by two weeks and make it a resignation." So the stakes were going up all day. The reporters were dead set on *The Post* not only printing the story, but printing it the next day.

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DON GRAHAM:

Bradlee—was pushing that recommendation hard. And Kay only slowly came to the understanding that she would have to make the decision. That—there wouldn't be a consensus. That they, the two—the business side and the news side would not join. So—as she was hosting this retirement party, in fact, as she was on her feet delivering a toast to Harry Gladstein, someone came out and asked her to take a phone call from Bradlee. And she had to break off what she was saying in the middle, go to the phone, shut the door-- with other executives sitting beside her and talk to the reporters on—one exten—on one phone and Bradlee and the editors on the other. What she remembered outta that conversation was that Fritz Beebe, this older, very distinguished lawyer, listened to Ben argue passionately that the paper oughta print it.

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DON GRAHAM:

She asked Fritz for his advice, and Fritz said, "Kay, I guess I wouldn't." And she heard him say, "I guess," and she thought he was leaving the door slightly open. She asked him a question or two, and then she said, "Let's go, let's print

it." At which point Bradlee always said he hung up. And did not want to give her a chance to think twice about it. And off they went. And they printed the story in the paper the next day. The federal government went to court against *The Washington Post* and a judge heard them out. Ben went to court. Bring—the client was *The Washington Post*, so it wasn't that Ben was—per—he was there to advise the lawyers. But it turned out to be important, because he brought some of the reporters with him. And the judge, very—the best judge in the D.C. circuit, a very senior judge named Gerhard Gesell, asked the prosecutors, "Okay, you say that this will d-- printing the Pentagon Papers will do grave harm to the national security.

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DON GRAHAM:

What is the greatest harm it will do? What is the most damaging piece of information in the Pentagon Papers?" And the prosecutor, obviously was a lawyer and not a national security expert, said, "Well, let me—let me consult the defense and state department people who are here." And came back in court and said, "The most damaging thing in the Pentagon Papers was the disclosure of something called Operation Marigold." George—which was an attempt at tops—at diplomacy to end the war by negotiating with the North Vietnamese. George Wilson, the defense department reporter, was sitting with Ben and said, "They testified to that in an open hearing in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee two weeks ago." They— Ben asked for— They—they took a short recess. Ben went and George went and got the record proving that that had been disclosed in an open hearing, which greatly damaged the prosecution's case.

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DON GRAHAM:

In fact, the next week, the cover of *Life Magazine* was entitled oper—had the cover line *Operation Marigold*. And the authoration—the author of the article about it was Harold Wilson, the prime minister of Great Britain. And—so the government did not make a convincing case that disclosing the Pentagon Papers would harm national security. The judge in Washington turned them down. But an appeals court sustained the government. The two papers went to the Supreme Court. I can't remember how long it took, but it was a matter of a few weeks, maybe three weeks. And—the judge, the justices ruled 6:3 in favor of *The Post* and *The Times*, which then printed the entire text of the Pentagon Papers. Decades later—the guy who argued the case for the government in the Supreme Court, Erwin Griswold, was the former dean of the Harvard Law School, the Solicitor General of the United States, wrote an op-ed piece in *The Washington Post* saying, "I argued this case for the United States government and I was wrong. The public—the publication of the Pentagon Papers did no harm to the national security of the United States."

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DON GRAHAM:

So Kay had to make this decision on whether to print the Pentagon Papers, and the company was going public that same week. The Washington Post Company was selling stock to the public for the first time. And Kay received a message directly from the attorney general of the United States through an intermediary, from the deputy attorney general, saying—"We want you to know that a company convicted of a felony, for example, violating the espionage act, cannot own television stations." We owned television stations. *The Times* did not. And we were going public, and so this was—a threat to the

basic—a threat to take away—very large assets of the corporation that was doing the publishing. But she did, she knew that. She understood what he was threatening, but she did not… She did not pull back.

Kay Graham's trust in Ben Bradlee

00:47:23:00

DON GRAHAM:

There was enormous pressure on both of them, on each of them. And they'd had eight years to come to the understanding that they trusted each other. Most importantly, I guess, she'd had eight years to come to the understanding that she really did trust him. That when he made a judgment that something was a good story, this was, you know, between publishers and editors, "Should we print this story?" is almost an everyday matter. There's always something in the works that could become very big. And most of the—the newspaper's impulse is to get the facts and print the story. There are occasions when you don't. And—Ben most of the time wanted to print all of the story. There were times when he didn't for what I thought were right reasons. And—but he always listened.

The business side of the *Post*

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DON GRAHAM:

Ben needed to understand there was a constant discussion between Ben and Kay, between Ben and me, about—how does the newspaper fit into the business? How can we get more resources? I don't think you're gonna want to—do this extensively in the biography. But there's a time in 1981 when the

Washington Star goes out of business. And I rem-- and Ben's the editor of *The Post*. And-- there was a discussion, "Should we print a second paper? Should we print a little tabloid in the afternoon?" Ben was not an enthusiast for that and neither was I. But you know, yeah, there were plenty of times all the time. Somethin' would be going on on the business side that obviously was gonna have an impact on the paper. And—Ben—Ben knew he knew the newsroom cold. And he knew that, you know, he was puzzled sometimes by why they had to part and did want something, a new section, a new project, and didn't want it, didn't want something else that he thought was much better. And he thought, you know, Ben had—Ben had some commercial instincts. He—he—when he, you know, he thought—he thought he knew what sold papers. Some of the time he was right.

The style section

00:49:52:00

DON GRAHAM:

The Washington Post of my youth had four sections. The f—the front page, the Metro section, which was called *City Life* until 1960-something. Interesting that it was regarded as a city section, even when a lot of Washingtonians were moving out to Maryland and Virginia. And the sports page, which Ben loved. And—then a section called, *For And About Women*. And Bradlee would always describe it the same way. He would say, the *For And About Women* section would have four days a week a picture on the cover of Mrs. Dean Rusk at an embassy reception for the garden party at the Singapore Embassy or something. And—so—Ben was not an enthusiast for the *For And About Women* section that he inherited. In the press of everything else, of covering

the '60s, covering the Civil Rights Movement, covering the—riots in Washington, covering-- he put off doing anything about it until the late '60s, when he decided with a lot of consulting, with a lot of help from others on the paper. It wasn't a unilateral decision on his part, but he pushed it hard that he would change it to a section called *Style*, which would be about—life outside work.

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DON GRAHAM:

It would be about, not about official Washington, but about—social wa—about part—about the people who made Washington tick, what they were really like. About culture, which was changing faster than you could see. About youth, and there was, these were the '60s. You know, everybody had these—long-haired kids. Ben did, my mother did, you know, who were changing the way people behaved. Who—and—so there was a lot of coverage of—of young people and tons and tons of coverage of women because it was the earliest days of the Women's Movement. And profiles of Washington people, of which Sally Quinn, later Mrs. Ben Bradlee, was a prime architect. She wanted not to write a profile in the sense of a biography, but a profile of something that got you pretty deep into the mind of the person she was writing about.

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DON GRAHAM:

And Sally and – not Sally alone, but Sally best of all the reporters in *Style* had this gift for getting people to say things that they regretted afterwards. And—*The Post* had a gossip columnist named Maxine Cheshire at the time who was great at discovering things that celebrities didn't want discovered

about their personal lives. And—because she had this gift for making Kissinger and others say things that—they—they wished afterwards they had not said. And she wrote about pretentious hosts trying to make their way up in society. She wrote about the—raw ambition of politicians and others in Washington as they tried to make way for themselves. And it was pretty different from the garden party at the embassy. And my mother and Ben probably argued more about *Style*, more about where was it going? What was the right mix of such stories?

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DON GRAHAM:

Kay loved the new *Style*, but felt that it was—flying off too entirely in one direction. And that a lotta people wanted to read more meat and potatoes party coverage, social coverage, celebrity coverage than the paper was giving them. And she made herself heard. And Ben resisted but ultimately felt she was right on a couple of things. Made some—made some changes, changed editors a couple of times. Till he found, in a guy named David Laventhol, later one of the greatest editors in American newspapers, he found somebody who could take his vision of *Style* and turn it into something that day-in, day-out was pretty exciting. And Kay was also a big Dave Laventhol enthusiast. Dave died last year. He was later editor of the *Los Angeles Times* and of *Newsday* and one of the great editors in the United States. Ben brought a lot—Ben brought along a lotta those.

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DON GRAHAM:

He took a lot of people. And—a lot of his best editors were picked off by other newspapers. And he liked having so many editors that he could—keep *The*

Post on very high—in a very high direction but also some—someone like Dave could grow up and become the editor of another paper. And there's a long—long list of people who grew up under Ben and went on to edit other newspapers and magazines.

Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein

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DON GRAHAM:

My mother knew that her problems in *The Washington Post* were not in the newsroom. That she had a great newsroom. And I had the, I had about a year in the newsroom, to which I would later return. But I was then working in what were the problems of *The Washington Post*, which was the business side of the newspaper. But it gave me a ringside seat. And she and I were literally talking every day or almost every day. And—Carl Bernstein and I had shared a lot of bylines. We covered—a big anti-war demonstration together. Woodward was– made a big enough immediate impact as a metro reporter that I remember a dinner party at my mother's house where Ben and she and I—were talking about who was coming along in the newsroom and started talking about Woodward. And Ben talked—Ben was just so excited by the guy, about how hard he worked, how many stories he was breaking, how much he got.

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DON GRAHAM:

And this was way before water—this was months before Watergate. And-- but he-- Ben immediately knew, even though Woodward was way the other side of the newsroom, was working in—in metro, which you could say was

not the center of Ben's attention. But he knew—he knew this was a guy who broke stories. So, you know, Woodward was a young metro reporter. But he wasn't somebody Ben didn't know. Bernstein, he knew very well.

Breaking the Watergate story

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DON GRAHAM:

Well I think, actually that was an easy choice. You know, they were runnin' with it, and they were beating every newspaper in the United States. I was not-- neither Kay nor Ben agonized much to me about, I wouldn't n-- they wouldn't have necessarily. I wouldn't have known. And I know that national editors and national reporters came to Ben and said, "You should turn this story over to us." But I don't think he felt the least inclination to do that. Because Woodward and Bernstein had momentum and had the sources. And they, you know, they knew the people doing the investigation. They knew the prosecutors. They knew the defense lawyers. They knew— And they were making that evident by breaking stories not every day, but every few days or every week or two. There would be something that didn't just repeat what had already been reported. That fundamentally advanced the story, always beyond what anybody else had. And it wasn't just a matter of Deep Throat—Woodward's Mark Felt, Woodward's famous source in the F.B.I.

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DON GRAHAM:

He was very important later in confirming things that they found. But that was important, but it wasn't—he wasn't the person giving them information. They were getting information in the ways they described in *All The*

President's Men. By going to the homes of sources, by calling 'em up on the phone. By working weekends, by working nights, by finding 'em when they weren't on the job. And there were plenty of people who didn't talk to 'em. There were plenty of times when they didn't get something they might have. But—they got it. And—Ben always had an eye for—who was doing a great job with a story.

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DON GRAHAM:

It was tough stuff. It was very personal. And it was very weird. In *All The President's Men*—Woodward and Bernstein described that conversation as, "With a Mitchell who appeared to have had a lot to drink and who almost—cried out responding to their questions." And instead of responding to the substance—I think this was—what really made the decisions a lot easier for Kay and Ben, instead of s-- instead of saying, "It isn't true." Instead of responding to the substance of what Woodward and Bernstein were saying, "Look, if you dig deeper you're gonna find that you're being misled, that this stuff is not true. If you look at this document, it will prove to you that what you're telling me is not the case," what he was saying, what he said in that conversation was quote, "It's all been denied." And—that—Katharine Graham had been around Washington long enough to know that that didn't carry a lotta weight.

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DON GRAHAM:

So yeah, there were threats. She wrote in her book that—friends, Henry Kissinger for one, told her to be very careful. And told her that-- friends, not you know—Kissinger and others told her that the—the people that were the

subjects of the Watergate stories, which were not just the president, but the people running the White House and the people running the administration, took 'em very personally and were very angry at her. But—this was going on where story after story after story turned out to be true. And then first when—Judge Sirica started talking in open court and then James McCord, one of the burglars, confirmed that payments were being made. And then John Dean came forward, and then the Watergate Committee held its hearings.

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DON GRAHAM:

The atmosphere was the same. But constantly you were getting affirmation that the stories they were writing was true— were true. So—that was—that was the main thing she knew. I think that it was Ben who told me that. Or, you know, perhaps it was her, I mean, she certainly was observing that *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, the other—though actually, the *Los Angeles Times* wrote a couple of key stories advancing the story. CBS News, on a couple of very important occasions, summarized *The Post*'s stories and kind of gave them their imprimatur. And CBS was by far the top news organization in TV at the time. That was quite important. But-- there were months before Sirica, before McCord, before the Watergate committee when *The Post* was very much all by itself.

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DON GRAHAM:

And—we weren't used to that. Kay wasn't used to that. But—you know, again—it wasn't because anybody was finding that what Woodward and Bernstein were reporting weren't true. There was one famous episode in the—in the course of all the stories where something they had written about,

something going on inside the grand jury turned out to be exaggerated or partially wrong. And Deep Throat informed them of that or confirmed that. But-- you know, they wrote a hell of a lotta stories. And—these were police stories. They were court stories. If the stories weren't true, there were plenty of people who could have contradicted them or said they weren't true. That isn't what they were saying.

Unraveling the Watergate web

01:02:35:00

DON GRAHAM:

Bradlee was—all over it. He saw that—I should underline— I mean, I think the greatest of all things about the Watergate story is for the weeks and months immediately afterwards, nobody had a clue about where it would lead. It was a story about a burglary, and the initial stories about it afterwards tied that burglary to officials of the committee to reelect the president. To people at the Republican National Committee, to contributors to the Nixon reelection campaign. But certainly, in the weeks immediately after the burglary, when it turned out later from the tapes that Nixon and Haldeman were holding these meetings in the White House discussing how to keep it from coming out, there was nothing in those early stories that said, "The president's gonna resign over this." That would, there was, and there was no, all Ben was doing, all the reporters were doing were following the story.

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DON GRAHAM:

And the story turned out to lead in a very important direction, but not because the reporters knew it or pushed it there or did anything except go from one place to another, follow the story day after day.

Watergate and Nixon's downfall

01:04:04:00

DON GRAHAM:

There was a simultaneous feeling of—exhaustion. The end of something that had been all consuming. And yeah, you know—again, we had been— *The Post* had been identified with that story in a way that's hard to imagine today. One news outlet sticking with something with other news outlets saying, "We don't know." And—we, it had been made very personal. And it, this, Watergate was June of '72 when the election campaign was going on from then to November. The Chairman of the Republican National Committee was Bob Dole. And a guy named Clark McGregor was running a campaign. And the two of them made speeches very critical of the *Post*, very critical of K. And—yeah, so plainly there was some element of vindication.

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DON GRAHAM:

But what ultimately happened was so amazing, the disclosure in the last days of the most damning tapes of all that seemed to show the president conspiring to cover up Watergate from a couple of days after the burglary. And then his decision to resign. But it was so huge. No president had ever resigned. That—and you didn't know what would happen. You didn't know what he would say. You didn't know how it carried out. You didn't know what Ford would say. But—so there was—there was definitely a sense—that we

had had the story right and also a sense of relief. You know, from the time of the Pentagon Papers through Nixon's resignation was a uniquely dramatic time. But—but—being around Ben was always pretty dramatic. He had—he had a flare for the dramatic story, and we had a bunch of them then and after.

The impact of *All The President's Men*

01:06:19:00

DON GRAHAM:

I don't have a word of complaint about the way that movie was made for *The Post*. Individuals at *The Post*, two individuals at least, were treated quite unfairly in the movie, Howard Simons, the managing editor, who is turned into an opponent of printing the Watergate story. The managing editor in the movie is—turned into a critic of the stories. And Howard was the opposite. He was a constant. He—he was—a very important editor in the process and was always pushing the story and always a supporter of it. There was a guy named Barry Sussman who was the city editor, and Woodward and Bernstein's first-line editor who was key in the editing of all the stories and is not a character in the movie at all. You know, it just didn't fit. And you could say there is someone who also isn't in the movie at all, who is named Katharine Graham.

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DON GRAHAM:

But—you know—I remember seeing the movie for the first time in 1975 or '76. I don't know which year it came out, but I saw it as it came out. And being relieved and impressed that it was as faithful as it was, that it was a pretty good telling of what it was like to write newspaper stories in that day. Hard

for a movie to have done better. And I was glad that they didn't hype it. They didn't overdramatize it. They didn't pump things up, to the—if that was done, it was done to the minimum possible degree. So yeah, there was—there were people who were hurt by it. The—I think, imperceptibly a couple of things happened. I think the dramatization—the book, the two books, *All The President's Men* became the number one bestseller in the United States. That is a lot of books.

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DON GRAHAM:

And—*The Final Days*, the second Woodward and Bernstein book did almost as well. And—*The Post* benefited enormously from that. But I also think that—in colleges and journalism schools all around the United States, a generation of reporters grew up thinking, "This is what I want to do." And it might have led to… a little to some over-focusing on investigative reporting, although you might have under-focused on it before. You know, people who felt that if they—if they weren't doing the same kind of reporting that Woodward and Bernstein were doing, if they weren't putting the sheriff in jail, they weren't doing the important work of journalism. And there were sheriffs who didn't deserve to be in jail, you know. That—but that was the most that was a pretty minor—

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DON GRAHAM:

You know, I don't know. I—don't have enough of a view of journalism as a whole. I—I watched what happened at *The Post*. And I don't think it was a destructive thing. I think it was—I think it was kind of a miracle that Alan Pakula directed the movie. And did not do it in a melodramatic way, did not

do it in a hyped way. Did it in a very faithful way. And so I think on the whole, the movie was good for the—for the paper, good for journalism. It was a very good—depiction of Bradlee, though. Bradlee was a very dramatic character, always every day of his life.

Janet Cooke and the story that never happened

01:10:10:00

DON GRAHAM:

Janet Cooke was a reporter on *The Washington Post*, hired as a, what was called a two year intern, hired not as a full-fledged reporter but as somebody who might work their way up to that status. She had been a reporter on the *Toledo Blade*, a beginning reporter. The two-year intern program was an attempt to bring women and minorities onto the paper in the late seventies and early eighties, many of whom came on the paper and later proved to be distinguished journalists, but Janet was hired into that program, and was hired based on a resume that turned out to be overstated across the board. She claimed to have won awards she hadn't won, she claimed to speak languages she didn't speak, she claimed to have studied places she hadn't studied, she claimed to have a degree she didn't have. At that time, but never later, the newsroom didn't have a process for checking claims on resumes, but one experience that changed.

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DON GRAHAM:

I was publisher of the paper from 1979, so I knew exactly who Janet Cooke was. I didn't know everybody in the newsroom, but I tried to know most of the people down there. I did know her. I did know who she was. She was new.

She was young in the sense that she hadn't been long at *The Post*. She was trying to produce pretty big stories. She was writing for a weekly section of *The Post*, as a two-year intern she was assigned to something called the district weekly section of *The Washington Post* where her editor was a woman named Vivian Aplan Brownley, who reported to I think the city editor who was Milton Coleman, who retired from *The Post* many years later as deputy managing editor. And I don't recall… I mean Jimmy's World, the story that won the Pulitzer Prize and turned out to be largely made up, was not the first story Janet wrote for *The Post*.

01:12:19:00

DON GRAHAM:

She had been there sometime, but not that long…and it was a controversial story before it was printed and when it was printed. So the story described the father of an eight-year old boy named Jimmy, described the parents of this child. And described him at the end of the story shooting him up with heroin, the parents were allegedly heroin— The fictitious parents were heroin addicts. One editor friend of mine said that when the story ran, that this was a wildly unusual story in *The Post* in that there wasn't a minister, a teacher, anyone saying yes I know this boy, I know this family.

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DON GRAHAM:

It was just a description of the family, no names, no address, and when the story was printed, the Mayor of Washington first said, "We know the family and we know the situation." Then said, "We've expended a lot of effort and we don't think there is such a family." But since his first words seemed to contradict his second we didn't take that all that seriously. But weeks and

months went by and *The Post* decided to nominate this story for a Pulitzer Prize for feature writing, and luckily for us it won. Luckily because, that triggered a call to Ben in the middle of the afternoon from the president of Vassar.

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DON GRAHAM:

At that time, *The New York Times* ran very short biographies of winners of the Pulitzer Prize. And their little thumbnail sketch of Janet Cooke said that she was a graduate of Vassar and the president of Vassar—Ben told me immediately, that the president of Vassar had called and said "We were pleased to read in the paper today that one of our alumni had won a Pulitzer Prize and we went to look at the records and she did not graduate from Vassar. She was here for less than one year." And as soon as he heard that, Ben knew what he was facing, knew that– that… you know, if you are in the habit of claiming things that aren't true, sometimes that's one mistake and sometimes it's a habit.

The aftermath of Janet Cooke's story

01:15:18:00

DON GRAHAM:

Too many years have gone by for me to remember exactly what happened that night, but Ben was shattered by it. And we went to dinner that night, and talked about what we would do. But, at that point, early in the evening, while editors at *The Post* had talked to Janet Cooke— Bill Coleman had and I think Woodward had, and I think Ben had, but she had not told anybody that the story had been made up. Ben told Milton to get in a car with her or get

someone in a car with her and have them drive them to the apartment, show it to them, and she couldn't. And then in the early hours of the morning, another editor at *The Post*, David Maraniss who was then the deputy metro editor, the metro editor was Bob Woodward. And—so she told Maraniss that yeah, she had made up the story.

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DON GRAHAM:

And told him, too late for that to be in the next day's paper. So we issued a press release, called a press conference for the next day and said that we were returning the Pulitzer Prize, that Janet Cooke had resigned from the paper. And that we were making a contribution to buy some vehicles for the DC Police Boys and Girls Club to compensate for the fact that overtime had been expended looking for this child, and Ben then did something critically important. He and I discussed how the paper ought to cover the story, and Ben, at Kay Graham's instigation, had gotten the paper to hire someone called an ombudsman, who was not an employee, someone with whom the paper had a contract.

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DON GRAHAM:

The contract ran for three years and at that time, it was in the contract that it wasn't to be renewed, so it wasn't someone who owed Ben Bradlee anything, or you know, had anything to gain from him. A guy named Bill Green, now deceased, vice president of Duke University who ran a journalism program at Duke, was the ombudsman. Ben said to Bill, "I want you to report and print the entire story." And he ordered everyone in the entire newsroom to cooperate, and to turn over all the documents, and anything related to the

story. Everybody did except that Janet Cooke did not talk to Bill, and that story ran. I think it was the longest story I ever saw *The Post* print, ran five or six pages in the Sunday paper, and it told in excruciating detail the story of the reporting, the story of two or three editors, one of whom is still at the post Courtland Milloy, who had strongly criticized the story before it ran, said they had doubts about it.

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DON GRAHAM:

Told the decision to print it. Told about her career and what not. And I forgot to tell one thing, which was that in the course of the day, before Janet admitted. One of the things she said on her application was that she spoke French, and so Ben asked her some questions in French and made it clear she didn't speak French at all. So, you know, printing Bill's story turned out to be crucial. Today, a whole lot of other papers have been through something like the Janet Cooke story. *The New York Times* had the instance of a reporter named Jason Blair who, similarly for whatever internal reasons, made up facts he reported in *The Times*. The New Republic had a famous similar episode, and those were not the only ones. But this was, in my immediate memory, the first. It was devastating to the newsroom. Having Green do what he did and report it so thoroughly, that basically nobody's added much to the story since. That was a crucial decision of Ben's, he put it all out there including his own role and I think that helped us get over it.

The impact of Janet Cooke's story on Ben Bradlee

01:20:18:00

DON GRAHAM:

It was a serious mistake. And only if—it was a very serious mistake for the editor of a paper. And he did not emerge without—He knew I was pretty unhappy with him and he knew it in fundamental ways, but it wasn't—then and now, I don't talk about what went on between Ben and me. But, yeah. He knew this was a big, big mistake and he acted in a way that I thought was pretty good and pretty honorably, and he acted in a way that this mistake, *Post* can continue to make mistakes obviously any newspaper can, but he cleaned up what had made this particular mistake possible, which was terrible administrative work on our part, not checking the resume of somebody who's practically, who's resume is practically flashing neon lights saying "I'm making this up."

01:21:24:00

DON GRAHAM:

I had made my decision and I knew the newsroom pretty well and I knew Ben pretty well. I'd know him for--he'd been the editor of the Post for 18 years at that point, and I knew I wanted him to stay the editor of the *Post*, but I also knew that he'd made a terrible mistake in this case and as you say I think he half expected to be fired and that could have happened but I had plenty of help in thinking it over. I was sitting alongside Katharine Graham who had even more years of experience of Ben than I did and we talked it over pretty thoroughly, and I did not think that was that difficult a call.

Ben Bradlee's insistence on truth and fairness

01:22:19:00

DON GRAHAM:

The reporter was trusted way too far. But, you know, trust is pretty fundamental to a paper. When somebody – as somebody said at the time "If David Broder goes and covers the White House and comes back and says the president said this today, you don't call David to the desk and say, "Did the president really say this?" You have to assume that reporters are doing their job, but that puts a tremendous emphasis on who you hire and it makes you be crystal clear if there's ever a doubt about the accuracy about what someone has written. Ben fired reporters for, as he put it, "breaking the fundamental bond of trust" quite a few times, and it was always a serious issue. I'm not sure that—yeah I mean trusting a reporter too much that's obviously the case here.

01:23:17:00

DON GRAHAM:

Trusting them where, Janet Cooke did not disclose the name or anything about her source even to the editor of the story and obviously should have. Didn't disclose, I think, as much about the source for that story as Woodward and Bernstein were doing on Watergate. And that was a pretty fundamental mistake and it was—I think Ben knew that when that story was printed it was going to be a pretty big story and that it was gonna be questioned, but the same rigor wasn't applied to that that was applied to Watergate.

Ben Bradlee's relationship with Kay Graham

01:23:58:00

DON GRAHAM:

So, we talk about Ben Bradlee and Kay Graham. And the crucial thing to remember is that they knew each other—once she became publisher, they

knew each other very, very early in her time as publisher of *The Washington Post*. She was beyond unsure of herself. She was self-doubting. She was as self-doubting as any human being has ever been. She did not know that she could become the leader of an organization. She decided to become the publisher—not exactly knowing what that meant. And I don't think people found her—later in her career, people said they found her "intimidating."

01:01:25:02

DON GRAHAM:

I don't think anybody found her that intimidating in 1963 because she was so unsure of herself. And Ben got to know her in that period, started talking to her about *The Post*—Less than two years later started talking to her about becoming editor of *The Post*. And—she knew she wanted to change. She knew she wanted something different. She knew she wanted something better. And she didn't know exactly what she wanted. She couldn't have sat down and told you, "This is what I want the next editor of *The Post* to do." But Ben had seen leadership. He'd seen it going back to World War II. You know, he worked for some pretty great people in the Pacific as well as some idiots. And you, he learned from the great people and he learned from the idiots. And—he learned how to lead, and he learned what not to do. So he knew from talking to her, because she was compulsively honest. When she was upset about something, when she was worried about something, she couldn't not talk about it.

01:26:04:00

DON GRAHAM:

So she told Ben all her concerns about the paper. And he-- gradually talked through with her—what he proposed to do about it. Now, a key part of that

was, when he came to work—what had bothered her—She was coming in on Saturday. She was trying to figure out the stuff that was a complete mystery to her. Why was the press run late most of the time? What was the—the composing room, why were the printers such a problem? How much of that was bad labor relations? And how much of it was technology? How much of it was inevitable? And-- they were sitting together, working together, thinking about these things constantly. So they were a team before Kay Graham was intimidating and before Ben Bradlee was.

01:27:06:00

DON GRAHAM:

They-- they helped each other figure out how they were gonna get *The Washington Post* to where it got. And I think that was—that was crucial. And he—he was abs— Ben had worked in organizations that were driven. He worked in a *Washington Post* that had very high ambitions and no resources whatever. And he knew the ambition was there in Kay Graham. But now, suddenly there were beginning to be resources. It was only then, only in the early 1960s that *The Post* ever made a profit. Up until the late '50s, *The Post* made no money at all. And Chal Roberts, one of the reporters who covered the Pentagon Papers wrote a book about the *Post* and said that, "The joke at the time was that—*The Post* thought of itself as a paper covering world affairs. It would cover any international conference, as long as it took place in the first taxi zone in downtown Washington, so you didn't have to pay four bucks for the fare instead of two." And—but he, so he and she went back to earliest days. And had talked over so much and gone through so much together that they could very fundamentally disagree about things and not have it throw them off stride.

01:28:35:00

DON GRAHAM:

When they first went to lunch, she wanted—she was ostensibly having lunch with him to talk about *Newsweek*. But she was already, she already knew she was looking for a new editor of the *Post*. So they were talking about *Newsweek*. The subject of the *Post* came up, and Ben said to her, "I would give my left one for that job." A line that was printed in numerous profiles of Bradlee. And Art Buchwald made ceaseless fun of him for 30 years. Every time he would introduce Ben in a speech he would go on, make elaborate jokes about "Bradlee's left one." And—but they were—once when Kay would not let up on him about something related to the direction of the *Style* section, Ben said—Ben said to her, "Get your finger outta my eye." You know, they were, they could-- disagree very strongly about immediate newsroom issues. But there was—I think what they had in common had to do with where they both started. That she-- she needed an editor who was full of energy and drive, but who also had a vision of where that energy and drive were gonna lead. And she found him.

The *Post* and Ben Bradlee's lasting legacy

01:30:05:00

DON GRAHAM:

To me, that question's actually pretty easy to answer. Bradlee comes into a *Post* where there were a lot of people who were pretty happy with the place. Lot of people knew how hard it had been to get to where they were, knew about all the great stories they'd broken, knew about all the awards they'd won. And Kay wasn't satisfied at all, and Bradlee came in and he wasn't

satisfied with one bit of it. I came to work there eight years later. I became the sports editor working for Ben ten years later. And there was not one part of *The Washington Post* that he didn't think could be improved, needed to be improved, he was going to improve. And that was a big difference between us and *The New York Times*. If *The Times* had, which was a fabulous journalistic organization at that point, had any Achilles heel, it was the tendency to think that they had solved the equation. That they—they really had the answers.

01:31:13:00

DON GRAHAM:

And, you know, Punch Sulzberger had to move heaven and earth to get him to go to a four-section paper. Had to practically bring down the house to-- to do it. And Ben—Ben himself and his publisher wanted drive, wanted change, wanted improvement. And I hope and think that's still the way of things at *The Washington Post.*

The job of a newspaper

01:31:42:00

DON GRAHAM:

Well, it's—it's to get—to get the reader a little bit closer to the truth than they were before they picked up the paper, to tell you something you don't know that's-- that matters to you. Sometimes tell you something you don't know that might not matter that much to you, but that's fun. But that you—you—you try to describe the world. And describe the important stories going on, the important things in whatever it is you cover. And get it as close to right as you can, knowing that you—it's—that particular job is impossible. But that you get another chance to try again the next day. So the job is to tell

the truth. As Eugene Meyer said in 1933, "The job of a newspaper is to tell the truth as nearly as the truth can be ascertained." And that's—that's—that's not bad.

Ben Bradlee's success as editor

01:32:38:00

DON GRAHAM:

My definition of a newspaper editor was Ben Bradlee. And after him was Len. But I think Len would, Len Downie, who was the editor, I—I was publishing for about 21 years. And Ben was editor for ten or 11 of 'em, and Len was editor for ten or 11 of 'em. And—Len and I would both tell you, though Len was a very great editor of *The Washington Post*, we both think Ben Bradlee was the greatest editor of a newspaper that we know of. And you ever—and we don't know every story of every newspaper editor, but I think he was the best there ever was. And—why? Because he cared passionately about the fundamentals, about getting the story right. And he inspi—he picked great people and he inspired them. And when he made mistakes, which he did, we, you know, he could make mistakes hiring people that he thought were great that turned out to be not so great. He could turn and make mistakes with something he did organizing the paper. He'd clean 'em up. He'd do better than, you know, and he, so he had this drive to make the paper better and he never lost it. And he knew how to do it.

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