



KATIE COURIC INTERVIEW
THE THREAD SEASON ONE

Katie Couric, Journalist
June 12, 2022
Interviewed by: Nancy Steiner
Total Running Time: 20 minutes and 6 seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

KATIE COURIC:

There are a lot of things that make me mad and pissed off. I would say injustice. People who. Are just. Unfair. You know, I have this strong sense of fairness. What's right? What's wrong? You know, people who make rash generalizations about people based on their own ignorance. That really makes me mad.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Life Stories
Katie Couric
Journalist
From Tragedies to Triumphs

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NANCY STEINER:

You. You had a really wonderful childhood. Mhm. Do you think that you draw on that daily or regularly that it still informs who you are as a human being?



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KATIE COURIC:

I think everyone is informed by their upbringing, by the values taught to them. By example by their parents and family members. I think we're all products of our environments and of the values imparted by our parents. My parents taught me the importance of being honest. I think they taught me very early the difference between right and wrong. They taught me the importance of hard work, and they didn't lecture me about these things. I think they lived their values and they passed them on to me. And I think the fact that I had such a strong foundation allowed me to ride the highs and lows of my career and the highs and lows of my personal life as well. And if I had one wish, I would wish that everybody had the kind of parents and the parenting that I had.

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NANCY STEINER:

What key incidents from your youth created the person you are today?

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KATIE COURIC:

There are many life lessons I learned growing up, but I guess a few do stand out. When I was in kindergarten first grade, I thought I had to learn all the words what, when, where, why? And I was hysterically crying to my parents because I thought I had to know them the next day. They worked with me that night, and I told my teacher the next day. I knew all the words and she said, you didn't need to know all those words. But isn't that weird that I remember? I did, and I was very proud of the fact that I could identify them



and read them. So I thought, wow, I'm I'm pretty driven and neurotic. I ran for president of my elementary school and one and my dad helped me write my speech, and my mom helped me draw my posters. And we it was always a family affair when we ran for office. So I think we were expected to be leaders. Um. And I remember in eighth grade, the gym teacher picked captain of the cheerleaders. Even though it was supposed to be a democratic process and the cheerleaders were supposed to elect the captain, the co-captain. Instead, the gym teacher picked her favorites. And my sense of fairness was really that was such an affront. And I remember being so upset about that. And I think that was an early lesson, that life isn't always fair, that things happen, that. You know, aren't the way they should unfold. I also think that working at a camp for blind kids in Washington, D.C.. Taught me the fact that there are so many different people in the world from different backgrounds and different socioeconomic situations, and I think it really exposed me to a microcosm of humanity that made me see the world in a much more inclusive way. And to recognize that not everything look like it did on 40th Street in Arlington, Virginia, where I grew up. But there were people from all kinds of backgrounds and experiences. So those are some of the things. I think that shaped me as a kid also. The fact that just. I could not tolerate dishonesty in myself. I broke the banister of my parents four poster bed and I glued it and. I remember saying to my mom when she was washing the dishes, mom, I have something to tell you. Because I think she was blaming it on our housekeeper, Emma. And I said I broke. I broke your bed, not Emma. And I felt so much relief being honest. And I still have nightmares about. Lying or covering up something that I've done that's bad and not being able to tolerate it. So I think I have this very strong. Moral compass about being honest.

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NANCY STEINER:

How have you tried to impart these life lessons for your own children?

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KATIE COURIC:

I think kids watch what their parents do. They watch what they say. They watch how they behave and interact with other people. I've always tried to be someone who my kids could emulate in the best possible way, and that means being kind to people, being courteous, being respectful of everyone around me no matter their station in life. And I think because of that, my kids are exceedingly polite and compassionate and have a lot of empathy.

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NANCY STEINER:

So let's take the word moxie. It's a term your father used when he heard how you landed your first job in TV news. How has having moxie helped you professionally?

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KATIE COURIC:

My dad once said I had moxie, and I have forever taken it as a huge compliment. And I think he saw me someone who was utterly uninhibited, who would have no compunction about saying something or approaching someone. I think, really, I don't have a shy bone in my body, and I'm completely and utterly without guile. And so moxie to me is spirited determination. And I think it's just something I was born with. Maybe it's



because I'm the youngest of four kids or, um, you know, I got a lot of positive attention for being outgoing and smiling a lot and being friendly, but I think that that kind of behavior for me was reinforced. And I think as a result, I it was kind of my, my go to. Personality. And I really think having moxie means you go for it. You. Just are determined and you figure out how to get around obstacles that might be in your path. And you are just. You know, very directed. And I always loved that word. You know, it's also the name of a soft drink that's manufactured in Maine. And I always like the symmetry of the word, because X is right in the middle. And I don't think it's conceited to say you have moxie. In my case, I think it's absolutely true.

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NANCY STEINER:

Can you describe the hurdles you had to triumph as a woman coming up in journalism, which was largely, at the time, a man's world?

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KATIE COURIC:

I think my early days in TV news were challenging because it was very male dominated in the 80s. This was an era when cranky old guys would want to get the broad set of broadcasting. And I always joke that when I entered television news harass was two words instead of one, which always gets a big laugh. But, you know, I think it was hard because. I think I also didn't necessarily fit the mold of what was a desirable broadcaster back in the day. I wasn't, you know, super glamorous. I looked extremely young for my age, and I think I didn't have sort of a tough exterior. And so my packaging didn't necessarily lend a ton of credibility to my craft, if you will. So I think all those



things, the, the sexism and in some cases, misogyny that was pervasive in the media business when I entered it in 1979, the fact that I didn't necessarily fit the mold of what the male executives were attracted to at the time. And you can. Take what you want from that statement. Uh, made it made it challenging for me. I don't think anyone said, hey, you've got a real future. So I had to kind of make my own future because I had a lot of naysayers, uh, basically discouraging me and telling me I was never going to really make it in the business.

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NANCY STEINER:

In 1986, there was a Newsweek article called The Marriage Crunch. It had a big effect on you. How come?

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KATIE COURIC:

In the 80s, there was a lot of conversation about making choices as a woman. Either you decided to be a stay at home mom or a working woman, but it was very hard to merge those two. I came of age during the second wave feminism and I very much wanted to have a career. I did not want to depend on a man to support me. Now, not everyone feels that way, but that's something I knew I didn't want. And Newsweek had a cover story that said women over the age of 30 had a better chance of being killed by terrorists than finding a husband. It might have been over the age of 35. And I remember thinking, whoa! I mean, I love my career. I think I want to work my entire life. But I don't want to wake up one day and say, oh my God, I forgot to have children, or I forgot to get married, or I ignored that part of my life. And coming from a really happy,



healthy nuclear family. I also knew that was something I wanted. So I think that was a bit of a wakeup call for me to say yes. Focus on your career. But also if this is something that you would like in your life, a family, a husband. Not necessarily in that order. Then you need to pay attention to that as well. So I think when I got to be 30 or so, I thought, I need to really make sure that I'm focusing on this, because I think I was very pragmatic, and I knew that I didn't want my childbearing years to necessarily pass me by.

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NANCY STEINER:

When you became the first female anchor of a network evening newscast, how important was it to you to be first in that position?

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KATIE COURIC:

I've always thought that it's very important to be aware of the images projected in media, whether you're talking about television news or scripted shows or billboards or advertisements, that it really influences the way we see ourselves as a society. And I thought it was really important to take on the job as a solo news anchor, because it was a first, and I didn't want people to think that was only the domain of men, and that a woman could do that job with confidence and competence. And so I thought it was high time we had someone in that role that wasn't wearing a blazer and tie. I might not have been the best person to be the first woman. It might have been better to have someone who had just covered the State Department or Capitol Hill who had been, um, really only perceived in a very serious way. And I think people probably unfairly rejected me because they saw. That I could also have a



personality and be funny and kid around, and as a result, it was hard for them to take me seriously as a serious news person. So I think I thought society was really ready, but in many ways it wasn't. And particularly, I think for a woman like me who. Had been vulnerable and open and exposed, sort of every aspect of my personality.

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NANCY STEINER:

When you were working at WRC in Washington as a general assignment reporter, you covered a horrific human tragedy involving the accidental death of two teenage girls killed in a car accident. You had to meet up with one of the victim's mother and you, right? I was struck by how two complete strangers would find a way to connect in a crisis. This is something that you would have to do over and over and over for the rest of your career. Does it ever get any easier?

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KATIE COURIC:

I think covering tragedies never gets easier. And I think if it does. Perhaps you've been doing it for too long and you've become jaded. I think every tragedy or sad story I have to cover. Affects me profoundly, and I've often wondered what would make someone talk about that in a public way. When they're suffering, it's almost indescribable. But I've come to understand that people want to commemorate the life lost. They want to feel like that person mattered. And sharing it in a more widespread way, I think helps affirm that. For the people left behind. And I do think. Recognizing that, validating that



life and even celebrating it in a way, posthumously. Brings comfort. To the people left behind.

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NANCY STEINER:

The way you describe the death of Jay is as powerful and poignant as any such depiction I've ever read. It is brutally frank. It's beautiful, and it's very, very brave. Given what you know about the dynamics of privacy and family, how did you draw the line between what you wanted to share and what you didn't?

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KATIE COURIC:

You know, for for many years I did not talk about Jay's illness and death because I felt it had happened to him and not to me. But 20 years after he died, I wanted to share the experience because I know how many people go through similar experiences, and we need to be able to talk about illness and death in a much more transparent way. And I also. Want to convince people to make sure that they're screened. And I think by giving these details of what it's like to die from a highly preventable cancer may motivate them to. Take care of their health and spare other families from experiencing what mine did.

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NANCY STEINER:

Jay said that you were born on a sunny day. What does that say about you? How has your organic positivity helped get used to your life?

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KATIE COURIC:

I think what he meant is I am a very positive person. I'm very upbeat and outgoing, and I think that's made me someone who has been a full participant in life. I'm very aware of my surroundings. I get energy from other people, but I'm also an energy giver and I think. That when you're hardwired for happiness. And you're basically a positive person that. Even when you face disappointment or failure or even unspeakable loss. You're able to be resilient. You're able to absorb the blow, but then you're able to come back and still somehow find joy because that is your default. Position. I think I'm someone who looks for joy in life. Most of the time there are other times I get very down. But in general. I think, borne of loss in a way. I've tried to stay positive, because I think loss, in a weird way, has made me realize my own mortality and the fact that we are all terminal. And so while we have the opportunity to be alive and to exist, that we have to make the most of it. So in a way, my loss is absolutely affirmed. My positive outlook, if that makes any sense.

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