BOB WOODWARD INTERVIEW
THE NEWSPAPERMAN: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF BEN BRADLEE
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

BOB WOODWARD
Reporter, *The Washington Post*
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Interviewed by: John Maggio
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START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:

The Newspaperman

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ON SCREEN TEXT:

Bob Woodward

Associate Editor, *The Washington Post*

Getting into journalism

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BOB WOODWARD:

Vietnam got me into journalism, really. My last year in the Navy, I worked in The Pentagon and saw the lies. I would see the top-secret reports about the bombing in Vietnam, and then all the brass and the Secretary of Defense would be out saying, "It's going wonderfully." And the reports would show hundreds of sorties and very few hits.

Uncovering the truth

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BOB WOODWARD:

Well, the distrust you had to have when you saw that they weren't telling the truth, and then, when I was in high school, I worked as a janitor in my father's law firm and would go in at night and look at the papers and then, finally, the disposed files. It was very clear the people in this small town had much more…They all had secrets, and the secrets were in the disposed files in the attic. Not as they presented themselves in this small town, Wheaton, Illinois. I think that's a string of accountability but also to find out really what happened, what the truth is and, of course, that's hard. That takes time, and there are layers to it.

Initial interest in *The Washington Post*

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BOB WOODWARD:

My last year in the Navy, working in The Pentagon – Seeing the lies, but having a subscription to *The Washington Post*, and you could see that this was an energy source, and there were stories that there was an editor named Ben Bradlee, who was running the show and was determined to dig in to, not just the Vietnam War, but everything that was going on. I had heard about Ben. I don't know whether I'd read something, but you would pick the paper in this period. This is 1970, and not always, but frequently, *The Washington Post* just vibrated. You could see they were digging and skeptical. It was led— You could see that there was some force, some idea behind this.

Wanting to work at *The Washington Post*

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BOB WOODWARD:

Going to law school, I was 27, so I'd get out at age 30, and that's the end of life. So, I tried to get a job at *The Washington Post*. They gave me a two-week tryout, which I failed, but told the metropolitan editor, "Thank you," and he said, "You failed. Why 'thank you?'" I said, "This is what I wanted to do." Again, the newsroom has that energy, that sense of, "We're working to find out something real."

Interviewing with Ben Bradlee

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BOB WOODWARD:

After working for a weekly paper for a year and doing some stories that *The Post* had to follow, they hired me, but the last hurdle is an interview with Bradlee. And it was known that he could say, "No." He generally said, "Yes." I went in to see him. There was some renovation going on at The Post at that time, so he had a very small office. A dark office, one lamp in the corner. And he didn't want to ask me about journalism or the newspaper I'd worked in. He wanted to talk about the Navy because the Navy was the beginning of his activist life. He wanted to know what the Navy was like for me, and so we shared stories. He'd been on a destroyer in World War II. I'd been on one of the advanced guided missile frigates, and we talked about … It's a hard life, the Navy.

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BOB WOODWARD:

And as we – we bonded over that, I suspect there were not many people coming in to work at *The Washington Post* who'd been in the military. The whole idea was the intensity of Navy life aboard ship is almost like nothing else. And we agreed that after the Navy, everything is easy, not necessarily journalism, but you could see that what was unspoken is the intensity that you live aboard ship at sea, watches all the time. I was a communications officer. Things were always breaking, going down, so you never sleep, really. You are there for weeks. He was in combat. I was not. I was on a ship off the coast of Vietnam. But it was about the Navy. It wasn't about journalism.

Ben Bradlee's time in the navy

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BOB WOODWARD:

I think it's about level of effort. He always wanted to make sure that you never get to the bottom of anything, and so there's more to find out. The Navy is survival, particularly for him in combat, World War II. In a sense, he was saying, "This is survival. We're taking this seriously." As he said it in his memoir, it was at one point, it's an amazing line. He said his love for *The Post*, his devotion to *The Post* was the way a man should be devoted to a woman, total commitment. The joy, never … The common goals, that's the way he presented himself.

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BOB WOODWARD:

In the Navy, you learn that you have to question authority, even though the captain runs the ship—that you have to be skeptical. Often, things just don't work or are misguided, and the real functioning of a ship comes from the

bottom up, and so you – you bring that. It's more than skepticism. It is a level of distrust about the authority. You have to obey it. You can argue with it, and I—in the Navy was a subversive— Ben made it clear he was a subversive in the Navy. Ben was not a military person. I certainly was not a military person. All my time in the Navy was pushing back against it.

Early days at the *Post*

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BOB WOODWARD:

I had the night police peak, but I was so liberated being out of the Navy, working at newspapers. I had to go down to police headquarters 6:30-2:30, and I'd go home and sleep, but I'd come in at 10, 11 o'clock and look for follow up stories or take assignments, so I was pretty much working all the time. The freedom, I call it running room, it was almost a motto that had been had. You have running room. Go dig into things. Go find out. We did a series of stories. I had a source in the health department who gave me the reports on inspections of restaurants, sanitation inspections. Of course the most expensive restaurants in Washington had the worst sanitation, including Ben's favorite restaurant Chez Camille and we got the report and we ran it on the front page, and there was no kind of buckling. There was no kind of, "Oh, that's my favorite restaurant. We've got to give them a break." There was, again, that sense of we'll listen to people, we'll be fair, but no one gets a break. No one, even the owner of this restaurant that Ben knew quite well.

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BOB WOODWARD:

It's pressure also. When you have freedom, you realize you've got to try to get

to the bottom of things, and that was the expectation. Early in that period, I remember I did some police corruption stories. And there was a story about an investigation. And Ben just walked over to my desk. I really had not had much dealing with him in those initial months. He said, "We're leading the paper with this story. Tell me about it. Give me a fill. Where's it coming from? What are the police up to? Is there corruption there?" It was a minute, a minute in a half, but he wanted to assure himself that it was solid. He also wanted to communicate, the work you're doing is important.

Ben Bradlee's management style

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BOB WOODWARD:

You could almost … Physically it didn't happen, but psychologically when there was good story, Ben was running around faster, almost dancing. He wasn't a dancer. It was—he had a nice sweater and he would carry that swagger stick around. It wasn't a show really, but everyone in the newsroom was watching it. What I think we were trying to do was make it better for Ben. You're writing clearly for the readers. Some of the stories are routine, but there was that sense of, "Okay, the bar is this high, well we're going to make it higher. What about this? What about that? What's really going on?" That was the question other editors, reports asked that, but Ben was the spirit of dig. Dig deeper. Obviously we haven't seen everything. Effectively for me, saying, "It's in the disposed files in the attic of your father's law firm. That's where you've got to go to find out what is really occurring.

Ben Bradlee's patriotism

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BOB WOODWARD:
I remember those first months working at *The Post*, it was the lunch hour. Somebody called and said, "There's somebody downstairs who says they have a story. That person works in the Pentagon." I was the only … "Woodward, go talk to him." It was some air force intelligence guy who had a story. I mean, talk about something that made … it was bracing. We have a secret way to communicate with the prisoners of war. So I asked him about it, called the Pentagon. Asked about it, "This is a hell of a story." And got details as Ben would say, "Wiring diagrams." So, I'm calling people trying to find out more and Bob Ellsworth, the Deputy Secretary of Defense walks into Ben's office. I had seen Ellsworth around the Pentagon when I worked there. I thought, "What's going on?" There's an animated conversation. Then I'm called in. And I barely knew Ben. Ben called me in. "Wow, what have I done? Good? Bad?" He was mad. He said, "What the fuck are you doing?" I said, "Well, this guy came in with this story." He said, "We're not running that fucking story." They're – and I learned for the first time, he was a patriot. He said, "Look. This story is a secret. There's nothing illegal about it. The idea that we can get some secret communication method with the POWs…" and it was ingenious what they did. I think I actually shouldn't talk about it now even 45 years later that … that—and it was kind of, "Why are you asking about this?" I said, "I'm asking because somebody came in." Okay that's what we do. He accepted it. But I realized, yeah, keep the inquiry going doesn't necessarily mean we're going to run it.

The media and national security

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BOB WOODWARD:

Ben had a way of finding that line. I saw it most clearly, it was in early 1977. He had the story about King Hussein of Jordan being on the CIA payroll. And it was … I called the White House. Carter had just become president. His press secretary Jody Powell said – I remember vividly the codeword for the apparition of King Hussein was called "No Beef" over the phone, I mentioned that to Powell and he said, "No shit." And said, "You and Ben Bradlee come see the president tomorrow morning." So we went in with the story and Carter was quite open, off the record he confirmed it. Said they hadn't told him about it, that was shocking to Ben. But then Ben said, "If we publish that story, will it harm the national security?" And Carter said, "No, it won't. But I still don't want you to run it." And Ben, when we walked on said, "Look, the president of the United States just said it will not harm the national security." Yeah, he'd prefer we not run it, but that's the line. Are you really harming the national security when the president says you won't? It's almost a green light. We waited 24 hours and published the story. Carter was quite furious. I think people in the White House were furious with Carter that he had confirmed it and talked about it even off the record. Normally, everything gets shut down.

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BOB WOODWARD:

But I remember that going to see Carter and Jody Powell with Ben in the Oval Office and Carter just, not even a month been president, and he said, "Oh during the campaign we were so busy we never saw any movies. And so here the other night we saw, *All the President's Men* (1976)." And he was all kind of, you know, "I want to talk to you, I want to deal with you message – "I'm not

Nixon. I'm not going to be like Nixon." And so he was open, and of course when we ran the story, there was a big hubbub and Carter finally said to Jody Powell his press secretary, "You call Ben Bradlee and you tell him, 'Fuck you.'"

Ben Bradlee's friendship with JFK

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BOB WOODWARD:

Yeah, he was that close to John Kennedy and *Conversations with Kennedy* demonstrates that. Of course, as we learned a long time ago, the public, that JFK had affairs, had relations with other women and I remember asking Ben about that. I said, "What about that?" And he said, "I'm telling you, I did not know." And he made the point you can be close to somebody, he said, "Your best friend is having an affair, are you going to know about it? Not necessarily." And he insisted, he didn't – did not know. Now, was he suspicious, was it possible? Don't know. But the standard of do you know? Do you really have good evidence? Had not been met.

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BOB WOODWARD:

It was a different era but again, I was quite sympathetic, because you just don't know that, even if you're really close to someone, there may be locker room talk and things may—but no one's going to say, "Oh by the way", as Ben would say, "I'm walking off with somebody here." I understand that it would not happen and it certainly would not be an avenue of inquiry in the 1960's that you would make. Ben was troubled by his relationship with JFK and then as a journalist, but like all journalists he found a way to leverage that relationship to his advantage. He clearly got scoops, got information, had an

understanding that probably few people had.

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BOB WOODWARD:

I can see that his behavior was quite reasonable, frankly. But, you know, I don't know the details, you say we'll never know, people say we'll never know. Maybe there's a secret diary that somebody kept. As Ben always said, "The truth emerges. Slowly often, sometimes decades later." So, will that become clear? I don't know. I think if Ben were working the story about somebody else, he would keep at it.

Managing conflicts of interest

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BOB WOODWARD:

It's a navigation problem like none other. And you need to be close to people and have relationships, but you got to make clear you're a reporter. And there are many examples of people I've known who've been friends, I've spent a lot of time with, and that I've written material in *The Washington Post* or in books that they have disliked intensely, and that's the end of the relationship. But I've always tried to make it clear, "Hey this is who I am." I can't all of a sudden not be a reporter. If it's something going on that describes what's really happening in the government, particularly the White House.

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BOB WOODWARD:

You are trying to get information, do your job, but you're letting somebody have their say, sometimes in excess. But that's the nature of the transaction. And I'm not worried about it as long as you make it clear, "Hey, this is who I

am." And you have meetings, you have lunches, you do all kinds of things with people and out comes the notebook or even the tape recorder with their permission. So nothing is masked in that relationship. I think people in government at times, even presidents, think, "Well, you've spent so much time on this," and just like you, you're nodding and, "Oh yes." And that is taken as approbation for approval. You're nodding because "Hey, that's a good story, I like that information." There is a distance you're gonna have to have from people as a journalist. I think Ben realized that and I never found … If anything, with presidents after JFK, he kept his distance.

Ben Bradless as an outsider

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BOB WOODWARD:

Frequently people would say, "Ben, part of the establishment." Actually, he wasn't. He was an outsider and preserved and worked hard at keeping that outsider status so no one would get a break unfairly. And he was –his relationship with Katharine Graham, lots of her friends would be subject of stories in *The Washington Post* and they would complain to her, and she would pass the complaint on to Ben. And as best I could tell the wall went up. "Hey, look, you know, we're gonna do it," and it would cause, I think, Katharine Graham some consternation. I know that. She told me that.

Ben Bradlee and Katharine Graham

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BOB WOODWARD:

Katharine Graham lived about two or three blocks from where I lived. And it

was sometime in the 70's, uh, Sunday she called me over and said, "What do you think of the paper?" And I said, "Well, I think a lot of things are good, but I think there's a lot of weakness in the reporting." And she said, "Yes, I agree." And she was quite down on Ben and the paper. And she said, "We're talking between us," and I said, "Yes." And so I'm sure I amped it up a little bit, because you can always criticize *The Post*, and I did. I kind of unloaded and thought, you know, I was being honest with the ultimate boss. Then, a day or two later she called me. And I still remember she said, "Bob, I'm so sorry."

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BOB WOODWARD:

"Why are you sorry," and said, "Well, Ben and I were having a discussion and kind of a fight. And I said to him, 'Even Woodward thinks the paper stinks or that there's this defect in the reporting.'" I thought, "Oh boy." And so, I called Ben. I'm sure this had happened 1,100 times before where somebody had unloaded. So we met. I remember going to his house and going through the paper and the reporting. And he listened and he kind of took it all in, but there was no recrimination because he knew Katharine went around and sucked people in to criticize the paper. And I think, at least in this case, I was astounded he didn't take it personally.

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BOB WOODWARD:

It was kind of, "Okay, more information, more critique. People have criticisms of the paper." There was a little ice in the discussion with Ben about that, but it melted. And I thought it was kind of the classic Graham way of managing, of going around and getting the dirt on Ben and the paper. And it was their way of raising the bar, her way of raising the bar. I remember once he told me, he

said, "You know, part of this job, being editor, is learning to manage the Grahams." I think at core she was a subversive herself. And she, yes, the establishment figure, but she liked raising hell. And I think she used Ben as much as he used her.

Ben Bradlee's relationship with Katharine Graham

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BOB WOODWARD:

Well, they used each other but when she called me up that Sunday she wanted — she was voicing some distrust. And what is fascinating and powerful about it is— now who knows what was going on inside of Ben, and of course this is a subject for 10 psychoanalysts on all kinds of subjects, but he just kind of weathered it and dealt with it. And then he made me the metropolitan editor and I think it was kind of his way of saying, "Okay, it's hard, and everyone's going to be shooting at what you do. And you go ahead and try it." And of course I was unsuccessful at that. And he knew, ultimately, if you want to understand Ben, he knew how to protect himself. And those protections were to be aggressive, yes, manage the Grahams, assure himself about stories as best he could. But as he once told me he said, "I can't go out and do the reporting for you, for my reporters. They have to do it. So it was, you know… Yes, it was a platonic relationship, but she could bust him.

Ben Bradlee and his quest for the truth

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BOB WOODWARD:

There's a – there are turning points in Ben's life as editor, clearly, and there's

a point in his memoir after Watergate, after Nixon leaves. He said quite openly, he said, "After Watergate, I made sure, after I heard the official version, then I could start working on the truth." What he means is, okay, the official version of anything is likely to be BS. And so, take that as a starting point and go to work.

Ben Bradlee and the Pentagon Papers
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BOB WOODWARD:
He says in his memoir that there were rumors that *The Times* had a big blockbuster story, and he and people at *The Post* made efforts to find out. They'd moved out of the newsroom to a hotel and couldn't find out what it was. It makes one of the classic points about himself. He said, "It's bad enough when you get beat, but when you have to wait knowing you're going to be beat, that's unbearable." And I'm sure—I was not around then, but you know, it clearly was a moment, but it was catch-up. He didn't like to play catch-up. And *The Post* did a great job on it, and the decision to run it by, again, subversive Katharine Graham, contrary to legal advice and so forth, was a big deal. It was, again, one of those turning points for him, obviously, but you knew it was catch-up.

The Pentagon Papers and the *Post*
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BOB WOODWARD:
Ben had a group of reporters at *The Post*, Murrey Marder, John Roberts, who were very experienced in this, and they were able to help him find the line, or

they found it themselves, and *The New York Times* was publishing this. *New York Times* was ahead on this story. They'd worked months putting together the tale, and… So it was, in a sense, an easy call, I think, institutionally getting Katharine Graham to say, "Go ahead and publish" was an important moment. The *New York Times* was premier, and that was a way to measure yourself. On the Pentagon Papers, I just thought of this story, and this is a lesson. The Pentagon Papers was the summer of 1971. I was working for this weekly paper in Maryland, and I had a friend who was a clerk in The Supreme Court. He told me that *The Post* and *The New York Times* were going to win the case.

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BOB WOODWARD:

I thought, "Wow. This new ... " This is before it came out, so I just walked over to *The Post*, and that's when you could walk in and tried to talk to a couple of editors and say, "Hey, I know what's going to happen," or "I have a good source," and everyone kinda looked at me like I was mad and crazy. I never saw Ben or anyone that I was hired three months later, not because of that, but it was a really important lesson. Take those phone calls. When the guy, the person, walks in and says, "I have a story," always listen because if they'd listened to me, and then worked the case … Now maybe they wouldn't have ever run this story saying, "Oh, hey, by the way, we're going to win" when we're a party in this case, but here I was literally walking around the newsroom, looking for somebody to listen to my story, and no one would.

Spotting a good story

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BOB WOODWARD:

I came after the Pentagon Papers, and I was intensely focused on the stories I was working on. Got to understand what it was like then at *The Post.* There was a lot of space that actually had levels of editors that were terrific, very experienced. Len Downie was a city desk editor, went on to become the executive editor, and they were good, and so if you came in with stories … My rule, and I pass this on to people, is get there an hour or two before the editors do in the morning and start calling around, or go someplace and then say, "I have this story I can do. I can finish it by deadline, or if you'll give me two days on it, I think it's really a good story." And they were delighted to have somebody leaning in to the news or possible stories.

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BOB WOODWARD:

And… So, you could do lots of stories. I've never gone back and counted, but I know I did dozens and dozens of stories, front-page stories on this or that that I ran into. And this is the running room that Ben gave you. Nothing was off-limits. You were told, as a police reporter, "If you have to call The White House, go ahead and call The White House about something. Just tell The White House correspondent that you've done it." There was always a story. I've worked on weekly papers, so you had to hold things. There was a story every day. I remember coming in one weekend and just kind of … This was my life. I did not … I wasn't married. I had no family, no really serious girlfriend in town. I remember literally walking in on a Saturday night and say, "Any stories?" and "Well, no, nothing" and so.

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BOB WOODWARD:

Somebody mentioned to me, "Oh, they're digging on Connecticut Avenue for

the new metro, the subway system. Okay, so I went over there and went down in the underground where they— and talked to the people who were working, and wrote a story about this group of people who were digging under Connecticut Avenue, and it was on the metro page. It was a feature, but it told you something about— So that immediate connection to the real world and the paper … It only took a couple of hours often, if that. So everything was go, walk, listen, call The White House, you know, just do it. I think the first front-page story I had was from night police.

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BOB WOODWARD:
Four children were killed in a fire, and it's the first time I'd seen a dead body. I went to the scene, and it was awful and talked to the mother and people about it. Then I came in the next morning and, "Is there any follow?" "Well, no one was saying..." Someone mentioned, "Well, see if this was a rented apartment. Were there code violations in the apartment?" "Okay." Another front-page story the next day, massive code violations in this apartment. Message, there's always a follow. You either think of it yourself, and again, the editing culture at *The Post* was, "Hey, look at this. What about this? Is this happening?" Of course, Ben's chief question always was, "What about the CIA? What is the CIA up to? What do they know? What is really going on? Who are these people?" Of course, Ben came from covering JFK and the Bay of Pigs, and the Cuban Missile Crisis, and so forth. He knew that the CIA had … That question, "What about the CIA?" was, again, almost one of those mottos from him.

Ben Bradlee's skepticism

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BOB WOODWARD:

He recognized the possibility of a conspiracy, and of course Watergate was a real conspiracy. In a sense, Ben's disposed files were in his hand. That is, "Okay, they're saying this. Ah. It may be the opposite, or it may be – there's more there. There's always a follow-up. The truth emerges." It was a way of looking at the world. It wasn't angry, and it wasn't necessarily cynical, but it was kind of, "What don't we know? What don't we know?" And of course in that era, I think even now, what we don't know is massive.

The Watergate break-in

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BOB WOODWARD:

Saturday morning, June 17th, 1972, a city editor called me. It was one of the most beautiful days in Washington. The editors kind of said, "What is this story? Who would be dumb enough to come in on this beautiful day?" And my name was at the top of the list. City editor said, "Go to the local courthouse for the arraignment, where they bring the burglars in." So, I sat in the front row, and the burglars had business suits. I had covered night cops, and cops, for nine months; never heard of or saw a burglar in a business suit. The judge asked the lead burglar, James McCord, "Where did you work?" McCord went … The judge said, "Speak up. Where did you work?" McCord whispered, "CIA." The judge … "Say it so I can hear you." And so McCord finally said, "CIA." And in the front row, I kind of blurted out, hopefully under my breath, "Holy shit." Burglars, business suits, CIA … I went back and told the city editor, and it all kind of was— In a way… The CIA? This was the beginning of

my knowledge of Ben's inquiry, "What's the CIA up to? What are they doing?"

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BOB WOODWARD:

Then Carl Bernstein and I came in, we were the only ones. The next day, a Sunday, and discovered, not through our own reporting but by the Associated Press, that James McCord had been head of security for the CIA and was head of security for the Nixon reelection committee. You can distance yourself, as the Nixon reelection committee attempted to do, but only so far. This was one of those things where you're going, not just "Holy shit," but, "Wait a minute. What's – how could the head of security be doing this all on his own?" Of course, which was the line they were peddling, and it was absurd.

Uncovering the Watergate scandal

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BOB WOODWARD:

It was Gene Bachinski, night police reporter, who had a fabulous relationship with the cops and the evidence they had taken from the burglars they had, and Bachinski went to see it and the entry into the address books, one of them I think was W House-H Hunt. Another was White House or just WH, Howard Hunt. And so, he passed it onto me on Monday. And what's this? Carl Bernstein likes to joke, W House could only mean one of two things. The Whore House or the White House. And I called the White House and just asked for Howard Hunt. Operator was friendly. It was a different era. Oh yes, well he might be in Mr. Colson's office. Chuck Colson, Nixon's special counsel, celebrated Hatchet Man. What's going on here? So I got Hunt on the phone and just said, "Why is your name in the address books of two of these people

caught in the Democratic headquarters?"

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BOB WOODWARD:

And he screamed out, "Good God!" Slammed down the phone and left town. Went into hiding. Now, this was an important moment, but I can have your name in my address books and go do something and it doesn't mean you're part of it. So this is when I called Mark Felt and asked, "What is this?" And Felt— Could it be innocent?" He said, "It's not. This is a substantial connection." And that was the kind of, okay, now we really have a story. Here it was. Connection, right to the White House the second day. You can now listen to the tapes of Colson and Nixon talking about this and oh, *The Washington Post* is trying to draw some connection that *The Washington Post*, it's all their fault. At the same time saying, "Hey we got a little bit of trouble here."

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BOB WOODWARD:

Of course the atmosphere at the time was, the White House can stiff anybody or anything. And so, there was not this hand wringing, or at least you couldn't hear it, on the tapes. They were going to manage this. They were going to use it. But for Carl and myself, it was wait a minute, CIA, White House, “Good God.” There was a, I am packing my bags quality to Howard Hunt's voice that I think I'll remember for the rest of my life. Why is he slamming down the phone? Why is this a surprise to him? Then Mark Felt's very clandestine, hey this is a big deal. Now, in the memoirs and in the tapes you can see that Felt was talking to Dick Helms, the CIA director, about Howard Hunt.

Recruiting Mark Felt

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BOB WOODWARD:

When I was in the Navy, the chief of Naval operations sent me over to… I was a courier, with documents that were all sealed up. I don't know what they were to take to National Security Counsel. And I was there waiting one day, and there was this white haired man sitting next to me being forced to wait also and like two strangers on a long transatlantic flight, we started talking. It was Mark Felt who was in a very key position in the FBI at that point. So I took his phone number and talked to him, more kind of as a career counselor because – law school – he had gone to law school. He had taken some classes at George Washington University as I had. And so, it was a… just phone kind of mentor, the person being the mentee, me. And then when I went to work at *The Post*, that's when I started using him. And he was – he was not the classic whistle blower. He was not a volunteer. He was really a recruit, at least as I saw it. That I would go to him and say, "What about this?"

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BOB WOODWARD:

The first real business we did was the assassination attempt on George Wallace, which was a month before Watergate. And the FBI was convinced Arthur Bremer, the would-be assassin, had acted alone. And so when I could call Felt about this, it was in his interest to get some stories out that this was Arthur Bremer acting alone and he'd stalked Nixon. Felt was very helpful. Gave me some good stories that fit together, were new information, and of course, served the FBI purpose of, hey this was not a massive conspiracy.

Breaking the Watergate story

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BOB WOODWARD:

We did some stories about a general accounting office investigation into the funds, but the real story was August 1st when Carl went to Florida and found the 25 thousand dollar check that had been deposited in the bank account of another one of the Watergate burglars, Bernard Barker. This was Carl at his best and strongest. I mean, he was just barging into this investigator who had the check and literally called me that night I was at the *Post* and said, "There was this 25 thousand dollar check made out to Kenneth Dahlberg. And, what is it? Who's Kenneth Dahlberg?" Nothing in the clips. This is an era when no Google, no way to search anything except in the library. One of the librarians looked for photos, and found a photo of Dahlberg and Hubert Humphrey together.

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BOB WOODWARD:

So okay, this is Minnesota, so I got the … Literally, we had the Minnesota, Minneapolis phone directory out and there was a Kenneth H. Dahlberg, and I called him and asked why his check had gone into the bank account. And Dahlberg was kind of forlorn and kind of said, "Well … " Again, it's one of these people who's not a volunteer, but a recruit. "What happened?" "Well, I gave the check to Maurice Stans on a golf course." Stans being the chief fundraiser for Nixon. And we put together that story and the city editor, Barry Sussman … I remember, it ran in the middle of the front page. It was the night that George McGovern had kicked Eagleton off his ticket. Eagleton running as

vice president. Barry Sussman turned to me after we finished the story and said, "We've never had a story like this before."

Anxiety around Watergate

00:52:39:00

BOB WOODWARD:

There was a kind of anxiety that we could be… but no one … See, people didn't believe Nixon or the White House. Nixon is too smart to be involved. There was very much the conventional wisdom that had permeated. And, uh… Then Howard Simons, Ben's deputy, the managing editor was always calling us in and the city editor's metropolitan. You know, where are we on Watergate? Let's keep going. This is a lot of retrospective knowledge. People knew it was big, but didn't know it was big. Yes, it was. No, it wasn't. And the approach of reporters at the *Post* was not like Carl. To go to Florida and go get the check. And we were kind of… That's what we did. We went places, knocked on doors, and as best as I can recall, I guess there was some … Later came out, we've got to take the story and give it to the national staff, but it never… I didn't feel that our position as the lead reporters was in jeopardy.

Continuing the Watergate story

00:54:17:00

BOB WOODWARD:

There was a clear sense of, keep going on this story. What was interesting, and this is a — Editor, managers, has to weigh when to be involved to encourage people, but also not to tamper with what they call, the regular process. Ben wasn't tampering at this point, and I don't recall any specific

conversations with him. The one that really rankled Carl didn't upset me too much, was about Howard Hunt investigating Teddy Kennedy. And we had some intimations of that. We went to the Library of Congress looking for books that the White House might have checked out.

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BOB WOODWARD:

And we had, kind of, a story and we showed it to Ben and clearly he was sensitive about the Kennedy's. We really didn't have it. I remember him slapping and he said, "You know, you don't have it. You don't have it." It didn't mean we're not going to run it. It meant, you haven't convinced me and I think he ran this story inside the paper. And of course it turns out that they were doing all kinds of things on Kennedy as we later learned. It was the right trail, but we didn't have it. Carl felt we were further along. It was weak at that point. We had regular stories. Sometimes they'd run on B36. I remember about an expensive receiver that the burglars had in their monitoring post across from the Democratic Headquarters and it was 3500 dollars. And we wrote a little story about that or actually a long story. And of course what it meant, quite frankly, we didn't realize, 3500 dollars for a radio receiver was a lot of money then. And the point being that we didn't understand is that the money is just … They're awash in money for Watergate and the ancillary espionage and spying and sabotage operations they were conducting.

Following the money

00:57:13:00

BOB WOODWARD:

Literally, he did not say, as people have pointed out, at least according to the

notes, “follow the money,” but the essence of it was, this is about the money and get your hooks into that. And so we started writing about this secret fund. One of our sources was the treasurer for the Nixon campaign, Hugh Sloan, who handed out all this money, who had quit, who was uneasy about what was going on, and the structure. What's interesting in a story like this particularly in retrospect, the structure you have is not … It's one you impose. And the secret fund became, kind of, who controls it? And who are the people? One of them was John Mitchell and Carl should tell that story about that because that was a remarkable moment. What is shocking, in retrospect, is the former Attorney General of the United States threatening the anatomy of the publisher of *The Washington Post*. And—we ran the story and there was no press solidarity. No sense of what the hell is going on here? It was quite remarkable and the remarkable part was also the silence by people. Oh well, this is what happens. Well, it isn't what happens.

Unraveling the Watergate web

00:59:10:00

BOB WOODWARD:

It was quite clear that there were connections and we were looking for the connections. The whole question was, what's this about? And Carl got that call from somebody saying, talk to a guy named Shipley in, I'm sorry, Tennessee or Alex Shipley. Carl tracked down Alex Shipley who had worked in the attorney general's office of one of the states, and he was recruited by somebody or they tried to recruit him to do dirty tricks for the Nixon committee, and Carl wanted to write a story and found a couple of other people who been asked to do this but had not done it. And I was—we don't

know what this is, and this is when I contacted Mark Felt and we had that meeting October 9th.

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BOB WOODWARD:
And he said, "Look, it's all part—" " Watergate's a part of much more. A whole campaign of spy and sabotage." With their fifty people like Donald Segretti out there. People thought that it was preposterous. We ran it in the paper the next day, and people in the White House like Len Garment who've written books about this said, "This is the story when somebody finally understood Watergate." Said the connective tissue here is not just spy, passively but hire people to go out and do dirty tricks. And it turns out when the Senate Watergate committee looked at this, there were more than fifty people doing this.

Attacks on the *Post during Watergate*

01:01:24:00

BOB WOODWARD:
The megaphone was Ron Ziegler, and he just said, "Anonymous sources, a fountain of information" ... I'm sorry— A fountain of— I mean, his attacks were very specific, "Anonymous sources", "Unreliable". "Ben Bradlee is somebody who's a Kennedy Democrat." "Fountain of Misinformation" and it was, you know, all … "You can't believe this. This is not true." And the reaction we had, I think was one of alarm on one level, and the other level we knew we had good stories, good sources, there's clearly more here. And at one point we did this story about the House cleaning at the committee to reelect where they destroyed documents and Gordon Liddy, one of the

Watergate leaders, was behind this. And so we felt some alarm, my god, this is the spokesman for the leader of the free world.

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BOB WOODWARD:

And on the other hand, we're on solid ground. And there was never anybody saying, “Don't keep going on this story, don't keep working on it.” So when we were attacked by Ziegler, Clark McGregor who was Nixon's campaign manager at that point, and Bob who was the chairman of the Republican National Committee on one day we did this story connecting a Segretti operation to Dwight Chapin, who was Nixon's appointment secretary, this took it right into the White House, and that's when we got both barrels, or three barrels from the Nixon apparatus. And Harry Rosenfeld, the Metropolitan editor was very concerned that night, and was apoplectic about, you know, "Are we sure we got it? We've got to write a story about these attacks on us." It was a really intense moment. But, again, it's regular order, keep working on it, Ben always encouraging, always vetting stories at the end, but not coming in and tampering with how that process worked.

Protecting anonymous sources

01:04:25:00

BOB WOODWARD:

I don't think Ben had a lot of trust. I think Ben was, "Where's this coming from? Are you sure? Are you careful?" And, intuitively, I think he thought we were on the right track. He understood Nixon and that whole mentality, I think, quite well. The identity of Deep Throat, Ben didn't ask. He – it was all part of, we had other sources, okay I've got this source in the Justice

Department and I had to protect, Felt was quite paranoid to say the least, of meeting in an underground garage at 2 am. I was kind of new to this, I thought, "Okay, maybe that's typical." So it wasn't something that necessarily surprised me, but he was really all in on the idea of protecting his identity.

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BOB WOODWARD:

And Ben didn't ask really until after Nixon resigned, as best as I can call. He says he was astonished that he didn't ask. And of course if he'd asked, I would have told him. But I wasn't going to come in and say, "By the way, so and so is risking a whole lot, or maybe everything. And here's who it is." Because, you know obviously, secrets are not kept very well. So I was protective about that. And I told Carl, because Carl needed to know. But it was, again, the mosaic of … and Felt, except in a couple of cases, wasn't really forthcoming. That October 10th, 1972 story is the key to telling people, "Hey this is a big thing. This is well funded. There are many tentacles out there."

01:06:47:00

BOB WOODWARD:

And as we got into it you realize that … Nixon campaign and all the saboteurs and spies were quite effective. They really hurt Musky, Senator Musky who was the front-runner. And little things, big things, taking shoes from the hotel, taking keys from the car. Turns out hired Musky's chauffeur as a spy who would Xerox documents that were going between Musky's headquarters, presidential campaign headquarters and the senate. And so once again, this was months, or actually years later we learn this, but it all fit together and it kind of made sense. What Nixon had done is declared war on the Democrats and he, I don't know whether it's useful, but after decades, Carl and I wrote

this piece for *The Washington Post* about the Five Wars of Watergate. And first was against the anti-war movement, which Nixon was just hyper about the anti-war movement and it was causing him trouble, needless to say.

01:08:18:00

BOB WOODWARD:

But then they took the same people and the second war was a war against the press. And 17 wiretaps of reporters, people in the White House, and the third war is take that Hunt Liddy operation and move it to the Democrats. Then when they got caught in Watergate, the fourth war was the war against justice, the cover up. And the fifth was Nixon's last war, which was the war against history. To say, "Oh no, this didn't have – didn't happen this way. I didn't intend this." And of course, history's going to be written, or has been written by those tapes, where you see Nixon was the leader of the charge.

Felt's warning to Woodward and Bernstein

01:09:22:00

BOB WOODWARD:

What Felt was saying, "The stakes are so high, lives could be in danger." This is in an underground parking garage. This is all of the paranoia that Alan Pakula captures in the movie version of *All The President's Men* is true. It's just… he looks— lives are in danger, but then what he said is that everyone's involved. There are covert operations everywhere, which it wasn't until years later we learned the extent to which the CIA was involved in all kinds of activity. And so, Carl and I — I told Carl about this, and Carl said, "We got to tell someone. Let's call Ben."

01:10:20:00

BOB WOODWARD:

In the middle of the night, and woke him up, went to his house on Dexter Street, and laid it out as what … This is one of these cases where the movie version is a little exaggerated. Where Jason Robards, after he's told this, as well, go take a bath, get back to work, not much is in danger. Just freedom of the press, and the future of the country. And what happened, we told Ben this, and this is in our notes, and in *All The President's Men*, and actually Ben's answer is better, and the good one, and more honest. After learning all of this, Ben said, "What the hell do we do now?" Because you couldn't, you didn't – you wouldn't give a speech about the first amendment at that moment. Ben, very practical, "What the hell do we do now?" And then we met, and I think in retrospect I think it was a little bit my paranoia, the sense of yeah, the stakes are that high. I don't think our life—lives were in danger, but as we later learned, Howard Hunt and Gordon Liddy tried to kill Jack Anderson, or developed a plan to kill the columnist Jack Anderson, so it was not outside the boundaries of what they might do.

Paranoia surrounding Watergate

01:12:22:00

BOB WOODWARD:

There was a lot of worry. They brought in people to check our phones at the *Post*, and I know at my apartment and Carl's. They didn't find anything. That didn't make you feel comfortable about it. It was the whole thing. Ben said at one point, "You go home with a lump in your stomach." And that's true, and there were lots of nights with lumps in your stomach because what does this mean, where is it going, are we exceeding the bounds of normal journalism,

are we absolutely sure we didn't have video or tapes at that point? So—we're in truly what he always called the unchartered waters.

The Haldeman mistakes

01:13:29:00

BOB WOODWARD:

A real important turning point was the Haldeman mistakes we made. Which really did, but this tells you a lot about Ben. Because who controls this secret fund? We named four people, including John Mitchell, including Nixon's personal lawyer, Herbert Kalmbach. It turned out was handing out all this money for the cover up, and for dirty tricks, operations. But the fifth name was Bob Haldeman. And we thought we had nailed it because Hugh Sloane, the treasurer, seemed okay with the idea of us writing the story based on Sloane's grand jury testimony. So we said Haldeman's controlling this fund. The fifth person, according to Hugh Sloane's grand jury testimony, well, it was wrong.

01:14:29:00

BOB WOODWARD:

And it turned out, Haldeman was controlling the fund. He had his own fund, it turned out. We learned many months later, of $350,000, and that's what he went to jail for. And—but we had the attribution, Sloane had never testified to that. And, the reason he'd never testified to that, they never asked him. The inquiry, the official investigation by the US Attorney's office and the grand jury, was to prove that it was an isolated operation, five burglars, Howard Hunt, and Gordon Liddy, and that's the case they put on in the first trial. No higher ups involved. And – but that was – Ziegler blasted us, and under that

pressure, Ben memorably said, "We stand by the story."

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BOB WOODWARD:

And he interrogated us to find out where we'd made the mistake, and Mark Felt later said, "Oh, it's a Haldeman operation." Now you look at the tapes, you look at all of this, and that was a Nixon operation conceived by Nixon, and executed by Haldeman. The whole thing. And of course, we didn't know that. We thought we should resign, how did this happen, we—in a way I'm not proud of, Carl's not proud of. We went to an FBI person who had, we thought, confirmed this, and confronted him in a way that was — I'm embarrassed, that in the moment, in the pressure, the sense of we've really screwed up, to go to somebody who'd been a source like that was unforgivable in my view.

01:16:46:00

BOB WOODWARD:

This was instinct. This was kind of we're on the right track here. This is what we do. Now that you look back decades later at this, it was almost foreordained. A given that we would make a big mistake. Because what it did, this was two weeks before the '72 election. It gave the White House, you know, hey look this is all B.S., you can't believe it, Sloan's attorney was out there saying "never gave that testimony." And—so, it is a great human lesson, and over the years, talked with Ben about this, about you're right, but you're wrong. And we were right, but we were wrong, and we were too eager, we were impatient, we were pressing the envelope, it's kind of- we knew this was the case, but we didn't know. We didn't have the evidence, and we made a giant mistake. It was one of those things that— I was as depressed and angry at myself, I think, as I've ever been. And it was a failure of method.

The turning point in the Watergate scandal

01:18:25:00

BOB WOODWARD:

An important moment is in January, '73- we'd written these stories, Nixon's re elected, people didn't believe, and it was kind of "Where is this going? Where are we going?" Senator Ervin called me up and wanted our sources, said he's gonna head a senate Watergate investigation. And I said, "We can't give our sources." He said, "We're gonna do it anyway, maybe we'll find that the deputy campaign manager was involved." This investigation was approved by the senate, 77 to 0. Dozens of Republicans voted to investigate their Republican president. Astonishing! And I don't think we realize the significance of it, and it turned out lots of Republicans knew enough about Nixon to have suspicions. (cough) It we be almost impossible to not have suspicions about Nixon.

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BOB WOODWARD:

The senate Watergate committee is the gold standard of senate congressional investigations. They got testimony from everyone, John Dean, Nixon's white house council turned against Nixon, and gave days of detailed testimony about Nixon's involvement. Dean was such a potent witness. In many ways equivalent to the tapes, because he did what the tapes couldn't do, said "I met with Nixon, we had these conversations. Our motive, my motive was to obstruct justice, was illegal." So, you have the intent established. On all the tapes, Nixon never says, "Oh, my intent is to break the law." He just says, "Stonewall, why?" It's clear that Dean was a potent witness, and then I was-

that was June, 1973.

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BOB WOODWARD:

In July, we had — Carl and I had close relations with the senate Watergate committee employers and staff, and after Dean testified, the question was: is he telling the truth. And what evidence corroborates, or contradicts what he has said. So they did a full inquiry to what they called satellite witnesses, and one of the investigators said to me, "Who should we talk to?" And I said, "Well ..." and there was an obvious list. But, there's a guy named Alexander Butterfield who Hugh Sloan had told us was in charge of internal security, which meant wire tapping really. I'd gone to Butterfield's house and he wouldn't talk to me- or somebody—the drapes opened, closed- peeped. So I said, "Butterfield!" So they called Butterfield, and Butterfield went through a real kind of, "What do I do? Should I testify?" He had a moral choice to make, he had a legal choice, he had a personal choice, and they called him in and he was the one who had supervised the installation of the taping system, all at Nixon's direction.

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BOB WOODWARD:

And he told the investigators it was a Friday—I think it was July 13th, 1973, about this secret taping system. Well, I got calls saying, "You won't believe it. Nixon bugged himself." And it was — it was, "Was this possible?" What's the threshold of dealing with the inconceivable in Watergate. There's got to be something that's — it just, it made sense, but it didn't make sense- seemed impossible. So that's Friday – Friday night. Saturday, I'm stewing about this- "What should I do?" Carl was, I think, out of town, and so, at nine o'clock

Saturday night, I called Ben. And I think I woke him up, frankly, and maybe he was with Sally, who knows. I didn't know. And said, "Nixon taped everything, there was a secret taping system. And – of presumably all these conversations that Dean has testified to." And Ben was skeptical, reluctant- "So what do you think?"

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BOB WOODWARD:
I said, "Don't bust one on it. Overall?" He said "It's a B+." Okay, B+, don't bust one, so I took Sunday off, and Monday they called Butterfield as this surprise witness. And there is the memorable question, "Did you know about taping systems?" And Butterfield, in that kind of former Air Force Colonel- direct, perfect posture, said yes. And it was one of those things, it was like an electric current going through Washington, the newsroom. And Ben, to his credit, came by and knocked on my desk and said "Okay, it's better than a B+."

The Nixon White House tapes

01:24:54:00

BOB WOODWARD:
Of course, the tapes came out very slowly, and there was a batch, and there was a batch that the Watergate prosecutor wanted. Finally the Supreme Court said yes. I mean it's a whole other chapter in this. There are chapters, and chapters, and Nixon released edited transcripts of the tapes, and some of them were out through the impeachment investigation. And, again, it was part — One of the themes here is the cover-up was so clumsy and stupid, and not managed with kind of the precision that you would expect given the stakes, and then when you heard some of those tapes and saw transcripts, I

mean I've spent too much time listening to these things because it's astonishing, and it's … the extent to which Nixon used the presidency as an instrument of personal revenge. "Get the IRS on these people," you know, "Get this, get that," the CIA cover-up which ended his presidency when that tape finally came out at the end, and the Nixon orchestration, the Nixon anger and hate is astonishing.

Nixon's resignation

01:26:42:00

BOB WOODWARD:

The final tape came out that Monday, August 5th, and Carl and I did a long story about how the tape showed he had ordered bringing the CIA to call off the FBI, clear obstruction of justice. I mean, it was again, tend to be as… try to be as unemotional as possible and just kind of, "Okay, now look what happened." That night of the resignation, we knew he was going to resign. Ben did go around to everyone and said, "No gloating. Be real. No gloating." And I think he really felt that, and after Nixon's speech he and I were going to the elevator to go down to get something to eat or a cup of coffee or something like that. The elevator opened, and there's Sergeant Shriver, the embodiment of the Kennedy legacy, Peace Corp director was the… what was he, he was married to Eunice Kennedy, Jack Kennedy's sister, and somebody Ben knew really well. And the elevator opens and out jumps Sergeant Shriver, "Oh, Ben, no I just couldn't, I couldn't be happier. I just had to come."

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BOB WOODWARD:

And Ben was just poker-faced, this was the worst thing that happened, that

somehow a politician like Sergeant Shriver was coming in and kind of embracing this as an important political moment. Ben wanted to have nothing to do with that. He wanted to get down there and make sure we got the paper out and explained this as well as we can, and he… I think he was in awe and shocked about the moment and the sequence, which of course he had lived.

Nixon's impeachment

01:29:16:00

BOB WOODWARD:

What was important, the Republicans. The Republicans and the impeachment, six or seven of them on the Judiciary Committee voted to recommend Nixon's impeachment. That was astonishing. In the end, it was Barry Goldwater who turned against Nixon and told Carl and myself, had us out to read his diary after Nixon resigned. And the meeting with Nixon the day before Nixon announced his resignation, Goldwater said, "You know, you're going to be impeached in the House and the Senate conviction. That vote, you're only going to get four or five votes." And then Goldwater said, "One of them's not mine." That was the end. And Ben had this pipeline to Goldwater, and Goldwater was saying, "Don't write that he's going to resign, don't, you know, be careful, if you make it clear he's going to resign then maybe he won't."

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BOB WOODWARD:

But that, I always thought that relationship with Goldwater was proof that Ben was not an ideologue in any way, that Goldwater was the conscience of

the conservative Republican party, and that Ben and he could have this relationship, and that Goldwater was one of the people who turned on Nixon in a way that Nixon could never recover from.

Nixon's lust for power

01:31:05:00

BOB WOODWARD:
Sam Ervin said it best. What was Watergate about? It was about the lust for political power. The uncontainable drive, the unmanageable drive by Nixon to retain power in '72, but the day Nixon resigned I think he said it himself. Fascinating moment covered on live television his farewell to the staff, his friends in the East Room of the White House, and he—this was a speech Nixon gave, no notes, unscripted, he was sweating, talked about his mother and his father, and he was just so … people were, it was a psychiatric hour on live television. And then kind of waved his hand, and this is why I called you here, and he said, I think the most memorable line from Nixon ever, which is, "Always remember others may hate you, but those who hate you, don't win unless you hate them, and then you destroy yourself."

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BOB WOODWARD:
He got it. Hate was the piston that drove him. It was an organizing principle. Get so and so, screw so and so. They're political enemies, there are no boundaries in the law or good judgment or good taste, and that was the poison, hate. Again, bring in the panel of ten psychiatrists, at the moment he's leaving the presidency, he gets it, and he says it. It's too late, he can't say, "I understand what happened, I'm going to stay," it was over and he realized

that and he realized what a lesson for politicians, kids, humans, anyone about with all he had deep contempt or hate for somebody or something, and don't nurture it, don't act on it, don't let it drive you. Why? Because it will destroy you.

Watergate and Ben Bradlee's lasting legacy

01:33:56:00

BOB WOODWARD:

The lesson for journalism, which is what Ben cared about, is keep going after the story. Keep digging. He was not a philosophical person. Ben's writings and speeches about this are about truth and that the remedy for politicians, for humans, for journalists is the truth. He thought that once you go down that path of untruth, the truth will emerge.

Attempting to talk to Nixon

01:34:50:00

BOB WOODWARD:

Carl Bernstein and I tried many times through intermediaries, through letters, through lawyers to talk to Nixon. Nixon always said no. We never talked to him. And that's understandable. We weren't doing it in a way to pester to him. It was if he wanted to say something to us, but he was quite angry at us. And he's allowed that anger as far as I'm concerned.

All the President's Men

01:35:30:00

BOB WOODWARD:

Well, it was Redford who was – got onto it and decided to make it. Ben had the approach avoidance of , "Oh wow, this is interesting. Oh, wait a minute. Stay off the stage" as he used to say. He was ambivalent about it. This story, I think, is important about him and about what it means to be editor of *The Post*. Redford and Hoffman and Alan Pakula, the director, are sitting around saying, "We have to get somebody to play Bradlee." And Redford knew Jason Robards and the similarity between them is spooky. This is 1975. Robards is at the bottom of his career, had been in an automobile accident, had a drinking problem. So they called him in and said, "We'll pay you $50,000 to play Ben Bradlee."

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BOB WOODWARD:
Robards, "$50,000. Wow, this is a windfall so give me the script." Took it home, came back in and said, "I can't play Bradlee." Pakula, "Why?" And Robards said, "Well, I read the script." "Well, what's wrong with the script?" "Well, all Bradlee does is run around and say, 'Where's the fucking story?'" Pakula said, "That's what the executive editor of *The Washington Post* does. That's his job." Robards, "Huh?" Then they said, "All you have to do is find 15 different ways to say where's the fucking story." "Oh, okay. I get it." In the movie you see Robards finding those 15 ways to say where's the fucking story. It's Ben, he can't do the reporting for you. All he has to do … He's an agitator. He is somebody to inspire the reporters. He's somebody to ask the question, but underneath it all is where's the story?

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BOB WOODWARD:
Get the story. Find out to my satisfaction. And I think that realization explains

the massive power an editor of *The Washington Post* has, but also the limitations. That he has to, or she has to, be out there listening, prodding, encouraging, being stern when necessary, but always be on the prowl. And Ben was on the prowl for a good story, as best I could tell, 24/7 except for the time he told me the taping system was only a B+ story.

The spotlight on the *Post*

01:39:00:00

BOB WOODWARD:

There was a spotlight but it was … Ben kind of preferred to, again with this approach avoidance, yes and no. He knew better. He knew that we belonged offstage, but he loved lots of it. His whole relationship, marriage with Sally, became defining to his life and that whole persona. I want to tell the story of—this is 2011, so Ben is at the last part of his life. And we got a request to come to the Nixon Library to be interviewed by the director, Tim Naftali. And I called Ben and told him about this and he was, "The Nixon Library? They want us?" And I said, "Yeah." And he was kind of, "Wow!" It was one of his favorite lines. “Think about this for a minute.” It's gone from enemy to now we are being asked to come. So, we arranged to fly out together from Washington, and went to the airport, and going through TSA security, and Ben had no photo ID because he didn't have a driver's license at that point in his life. He didn't bring his passport, and so he got out his AARP card, tattered, torn and showed it to the guy. You know, no photo ID, retired person association card isn't going to cut it and so, we're not going to be able to make the flight to get there. We're stumped.

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BOB WOODWARD:

Then all of a sudden we hear this voice, and it's the voice of Moses. In this case Moses was Vernon Jordan, the African-American, large fixture in Washington, had been head of the Urban League, political player like no one else. So, Vernon steps forward, goes to the head of that TSA unit, and he says, "Brother, this is Ben Bradlee, the former editor of *The Washington Post*." The guy, "Ben Bradlee? Oh," and waves him through on his AARP card. Ben gets through the scanner and everything and turns around to me and goes, "The fist, made it again, beat the system. No one can interfere." And I thought of that as, you know, that's the Bradlee. That is—and so, we went to the library and we were interviewed. They just loved it. And Ben was just so kind of disbelieving.

Ben Bradlee's sense of story

01:43:05:00

BOB WOODWARD:

He enjoyed beating the system because, in a sense, all of journalism, all of really good journalism, is beating the system because the system doesn't want you to beat the system. Because the system doesn't want you to know. And his … The most important thing about Ben is … *The Post* would do stories, we'd do stories, I'd do stories, and you know, they'd be good, they'd be fine, and there's kind of an atmosphere of high-five of, you know, we've really done … But what Ben knew, is you had to find the really good stories. You had to know what matters. What is essential to dig into. That you have to be able to kind of separate the kind of fine stories, good, everyone's happy, from the few, from the handful, where you have gone to the absolute core of

what's going on.

01:42:21:00

BOB WOODWARD:

He once said to me, "You know, that happens a couple of times in a career." And I think he's right. And the capacity to not be overwhelmed, to not drown in the routine, but to say, "You know, we got to really go for the big one, here." We've got to keep working. We've got to not give up. There is that … He had that extra layer, that extra knowledge of, sometimes, things weren't just journalism. Sometimes, things defined a moment in history, an era. And what you want to do is grab them.

Knowing a good story when you see it

01:45:27:00

BOB WOODWARD:

You don't know. And that is the important, practical lesson. Okay, something happens, and you go at it. You try to find out. You dig into it. You don't give up. But no one, in the morning of one of the Watergate stories, said, "This is gonna be one of the most important days of your life." No one … You don't get that message. So you do it, and you … then sometimes, there's that payoff. But you have to … you can't … Again, this is the method. Talk to everyone. Go back. Surround the story. Do it in a way that is just not routine. And that was the running room that he provided on Watergate and on lots of other stories.

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

01:46:34:00

BOB WOODWARD:

At this moment, Carl and I'd done *The Final Days*, which was the second Nixon book, which was just coming out at that point, and showed what it was like, the turmoil and anguish of Nixon's last year, and the legal battles for the tapes, and the concealments to people who were close to him, to his lawyers, the whole dance to get him out of office. Al Haig, his chief of staff's worry that Nixon might take his own life in despair, and so forth. So that book was just coming out. So of course the Bradlee lesson is, get your ass out of here and get back to work. What have you got for me tomorrow? So the movie was, for me, momentary. And I think Ben treated it that way. Yes, it's part of his resume, it's there, he's Jason Robards. Jason Robards wins Best Supporting Actor for playing Bradlee, rightly so, in my view. But what's the lesson? Move on. What have you got for me tomorrow? And I think I was working on a couple of stories. That's the final lesson of Ben, the joy of work and the joy of journalism.

Ben Bradlee's persona

01:48:20:00

BOB WOODWARD:

He entered the stage, contrary to his own advice, and he used it. He knew it gave… that he was the editor of *The Post*, leverage, and a presence. But I think for him, in the discussions I had … what are you working on? What have you got? What's going on in this administration? What's the next book? What's … Move on. We know. He … I don't think we ever had this conversation, directly, but there were so many people in Washington who never move on. And his lesson, to Carl and myself was, you know, this is – nose down. Ass up. Moving continually forward.

The difficulties of being an editor

01:49:24:00

BOB WOODWARD:

I was not a good editor. And I was impatient with people, I'm a reporter. And one of my mistakes is not to learn from Ben, which is to be engaged, but not over-engaged, that you can't … I would second-guess reporters. "Did you talk to this person, did you do that?" You know, I just was not good at it. And we had the Janet Cooke incident. Failure, on my part, which was a big blow, and a mistake. And instead of throwing me over the side, which he could've done, he kinda … He rescued me.

Lessons from the Janet Cooke scandal

01:50:18:00

BOB WOODWARD:

Janet Cooke was this young, Black reporter that we hired. Lots of talent. Good writer. And she made up a story about an eight-year-old heroin addict, allegedly. And we ran it. I supported it. Some people were skeptical about her and about the story. And I didn't listen carefully enough. And 42 paragraph story, won a Pulitzer Prize. And, again, somebody from, I think, the Cleveland paper, discovered that she had not gone to Vassar, as she said. And that unraveled the whole thing, and she finally acknowledged it, and it was a massive wound for everyone at *The Post*. Ben in particular. Myself in particular. I was the Metro editor supervising that and what Ben did, he got the ombudsman to do a full investigation. One of the great internal investigations done. And it was no excuse. We'd screwed up. I screwed up.

01:51:33:00

BOB WOODWARD:

I only talked to Ben about this once and—but it was many years later. I finally concluded that not only was it a journalistic failure, but it was a moral failure. That here we had a story about an unidentified 8 year old who was being shot up by the boyfriend and the mother with heroin, essentially killing this boy. And we worried about the journalism and not the boy. And Ben has children; I at that point had one daughter. And if you learn that a child is being abused and essentially murdered, you have an obligation to do something about it. And what I should have done is called the police. I should have insisted we find out who this was and where … drop a dime. We could still do the story, save the kid. But I was oblivious to the kid.

01:52:49:00

And – that kid … suppose we'd learned the kid was being tortured to death. It would have been obvious to call the police, right? But I didn't get it. And didn't do that. Now if I'd done what I think is the human responsibility to help a child that's being abused, allegedly. If I had done that, I would have insisted, where is this kid? Who is this kid? We're going to help this kid. We're going to get it a doctor and the police, or mainly a doctor. If I'd done that it would have exposed the journalistic fraud. And there would have been no Jimmy. It's a very powerful moral lesson if you follow it through that as a reporter, yes you have responsibility to journalism. But if you are going down the street covering something and somebody starts beating somebody up, killing them, you can intervene.

01:54:04:00

BOB WOODWARD:

And then you'll write the story. But you can't stand on the sidelines,

particularly with a child. And I stood on the sidelines and never quite have unraveled my … where were the human instincts, which should have driven me to save the child? And it would have been no Jimmy scandal. Talked to Ben about that and he agreed many years later. He said, "I see that point." But that's the big lesson. Jimmy … take journalism seriously, focus on it, but if a human being is in danger and you can intervene, particularly with a child, 8 years old. This was supposedly an 8 year old. Easy call. Moral failure.

01:55:09:00

BOB WOODWARD:

I think lots of things blinded us, and this- this was after Watergate there was that sense that we can dig into anything. There were people who said, yeah this … something like this could happen. This is where Janet Cooke got the idea, from people saying, "We've heard there are children being made into addicts." And so forth, but there was no witness. No first hand evidence, the ultimate lesson of journalism. And so she made it up. She became the witness. I think it was a heady time. And the mayor said, "Oh yeah, we know who the kid is." And there were all kinds of things to take us off the hook. We thought so. And … Stupid, stupid, stupid. The police and the mayor was involved. And we were haughty. We were kind of, "Hey, we're not going to say who or where or what he is." And a lack of thorough kind of, blocking and tackling reporting and a failure … a moral failure of, "Hey, we can save this kid or help this kid."

Ben Bradlee and the Janet Cooke scandal

01:56:46:00

BOB WOODWARD:

He was crushed. He was crushed. But his instinct took him to get Bill Green to

do that no excuses investigation and he hung us all out and rightly so. And then Ben ran it on the front page. And his only order in that was he wanted to make sure that nothing came out later that wasn't in Bill Green's story.

The aftermath of Janet Cooke's story

01:57:21:00

BOB WOODWARD:

During this period, after the expose of the fraud, I went to Don on a Sunday night at his home and said, "I think I should resign. This really is my fault, I'm kind of the reporting guy." And Don said, "Well, if you resign, then Ben has to resign. And if Ben has to resign, I have to resign and I don't want to resign." It's that simple. Okay. Because all the … again the strength of the institution was demonstrated by, we're going to … collective guilt, everyone up and "Hey, I screwed up." And remorseful and okay, we did it. We did it to ourselves and shame on us, and I think in an odd way this made *The Post* stronger.

Loyalty to the *Post*

01:58:31:00

BOB WOODWARD:

I had an offer from CBS and he [Ben] wrote me a letter, a personal letter, confidential. "Dear Bob, a light will go out in this place forever if you – if and when you leave." Then he said he was going to set up this investigative unit, which he did. And we still have it. It was just, "You'll have a staff. You'll stay here," but then, this is the part of the story that never gets told. He then had Don Graham, the publisher, take me to lunch. Don, as Don always is very, "You'll always work here. You're part of this institution," all the kind of laying

it on very thick, but then he said, and I always suspected, I never asked Don this, but I think Ben put Don up to this. Then Don said, "You know, we're close and we can be honest with each other. You're not going to be good at CBS. You're not good on television." I thought that was … He was, and you know he was kind of, "I'm just telling you, you're thinking about doing something you're not going to be good at." I think I was not going to leave after I got Ben's letter, but I thought that was a kind of artful bagger, that right to the, gee, I play hockey and I'm thinking of switching to basketball and I'm four feet two, which is essentially what Don told me.

Ben Bradlee's ability to forgive

02:00:45:00

BOB WOODWARD:

At least with me, he was never harsh, when we screwed up on Watergate, when the Janet Cooke thing, he just kind of, you know, as he said in his memoirs, "I'm interested in the what-ness of something, not the rightness or wrongness, what happened." Then when you untangle it, there was no kind of retribution. There was no—and this became so clear to me. It was 1984. I did a book on John Belushi, the actor's drug overdose death, a book called *Wired*. I was out promoting it. It was Diane Sawyer who worked for CBS and got me in a room with the cameras going to talk about Belushi and drugs and so forth, I think for an hour and half for some two-minute clip.

02:01:42:00

BOB WOODWARD:

And she got me loose and I said, "Oh cocaine, you know, it's everywhere." She said, "Oh, at *The Washington Post*?" And I had heard from Tom Zito who was a

style reporter, not necessarily a reliable witness, said that there are more than 40 people who use cocaine at *The Washington Post*. I said this, "There are more than 40 people who use cocaine at *The Washington Post*." First rule. Never use numbers. Never— and I said, "Well I don't know that I've heard this," but this—I gave it authenticity by stating it. Of course, then CBS did it in the little two minute clip was about me saying there are all these people who use cocaine.

02:02:33:00

BOB WOODWARD:

Of course Ben saw this or heard of it. You know, it was kind of, "Woodward, get your ass in here. What have you done?" I said, "Oh, I'm sorry. She got me and you know, it's my technique. Sit with somebody for an hour, hour and a half, and let them say things that maybe they shouldn't. I'm really sorry." What was interesting, he gave me amnesty, a pardon. Said, "Okay. Christ, you idiot." But there's no penalty. There's no kind of, it was a gesture of brotherly affection almost of, oh my God. He issued a statement, "I don't know about anyone who uses cocaine. If I do, they're out of here." You know, big kind of—and I thought that kind of … It's hard to forgive. He was capable of forgiving. In a way that was kind of, "You idiot and how could you do this?" Okay. Move on. Nose down, ass up. Move forward. What have you got for tomorrow, almost? I don't think he literally said it at that moment, but there's not a lot of forgiveness. Ben actually was a forgiving person. Lots of people on the staff, people close to him screwed up.

The real Ben Bradlee

02:04:39:00

BOB WOODWARD:

Well, I think it was the curiosity. He's the master of curiosity and people say he had a short attention span. He did if something bored him. If something didn't bore him, then the lights went on and you got the full Bradlee attention. I think he remained curious. I think he remained open. The sub-theme in all of this is they're doing things in the government that they're not telling you about that may be screwing you or screwing the population. He was suspicious and doubtful and I guess that carried him, but it's a great mystery why some people … He retired at age 70, yeah, and lived for another two decades plus. I think no doubt Sally kept him energized and relevant. That was a real love affair. And she ran his … I'd hear him on the phone, "Hey Sal, what are we doing tonight?" He had no idea what they were doing. Any night really. And she controlled him. It kept him going. I think he cared deeply about this country. I think it's a difficult word to use, "patriot." I think he was a patriot.

Ben Bradlee's rules

02:06:24:00

BOB WOODWARD:

I don't think he had rules. I think he had to play it as he always said, "You play the hand that's dealt you." And this guy comes in with this stuff before he goes to Jack Anderson. And these things, not to over dramatize, but to not understate, these are the sort of things in the Cold War that would've allowed us to do certain things that would've almost be unimaginable, and if there were a war or to give us an edge that people didn't know about. It's the equivalent, in World War II, of breaking enigma the Nazi code, to put it

simply.

Ben Bradlee was a dangerous editor

02:07:24:00

BOB WOODWARD:

Oh, he loved being dangerous. That was part of the awe. We're going to find out or we are going to try to find out. So that perfectly fits the description. It was dangerous for people who were hiding things. We haven't talked about Vietnam, really. But Vietnam and Watergate, one to two punch to make you very skeptical, and I don't think he used that language with me, but I think the message was: Be dangerous.

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