

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH JIM NAUGHTON

Interviewed by Russ Eshleman

Conducted under auspices of the  
Pennsylvania Newspapers Journalists Oral History Program  
Department of Journalism  
Penn State University  
2010

Eshleman: This is an interview with Jim Naughton, formerly of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. This is September 17, 2010.

Naughton: Hello Russ, it's good to see you again.

Eshleman: Thank you, Jim. Let's start out with the bio stuff. Tell me about where you were born, when you were born, parents, siblings.

Naughton: Okay. I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in Mercy Hospital, where my mother was a nurse and I was the second child that she gave birth to. My sister, Mary Douglas, was about 18 months older, and I was born on August 13, 1938. And my mother had been warned because she had rheumatic fever as a young woman that she should not have any children because it could kill her. But she had two and then stopped. And the rheumatic fever did eventually do her in but many years later. So I spent my first two years in Coraopolis, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Pittsburgh, which you may know is where my father's family was from. And my father worked for Pittsburgh Coal Company, and he was involved with their Great Lakes shipping of coal and ore. I don't know whether you would call him a dispatcher or a clerk, but he was a person who put this much coal on this ship and take it to this port. And when I was two years old, my dad took the family to Cleveland working for Pittsburgh Coal there. And at some point in my childhood – I don't recall the exact year – he was hired by M. A. Hannah Company, which had him do the same thing but for a much larger conglomerate. The head of the M. A. Hannah Company at one point was secretary of the treasury in the Eisenhower administration, so it was kind of a well-fixed company, and it had its offices in the Terminal Tower in Cleveland. And at that point, the Terminal Tower was the tallest building between New York and Chicago.

It was quite a kick for a kid to go and go to the top [of the terminal] and look out and do stuff like that. And we lived on the west side of Cleveland on 101<sup>st</sup> Street; I don't have a lot of memories of that. We lived on 2144 W. 101<sup>st</sup>, and I remember the address because we then moved to the exact same address on 100<sup>th</sup>. My dad moved a lot of times. He believed very strongly, and he lectured us as kids that it was a mistake to buy property. Now he was raised obviously in the Depression, so it may have been a result of that that colored his thinking. And he said if you took the money you would invest in a house and all the upkeep and maintenance and taxes and so on over the years and invested what you would save by renting, then you would come out way ahead. He may well have been correct but he forgot to do the investing part. So he rented all his life, and, just as an aside, when I was in the Marine Corps, I worked for a colonel, Byron Magnese, who lectured me quite to the contrary. He said, "Wherever you are, if it's in the military or not, buy a house. It's the only investment you can live in and make money on." And he was right. And if my wife and I had not done that we probably would have wound up like my father who on his death had a bunch of penny stocks in a Philippine mining company that turned out were worth a total of about \$76.00 So that was my sister and my legacy, and we fought over which one of us would have to take it.

In any case, I went to school at St. Ignatius Grade School, and as I said, I have very few memories. One of the strongest of them is that I was the only kid in my first communion class who wore knickers with a white dress shirt, and I was incredibly embarrassed because they were hand-me-down knickers from a cousin in Altoona, Pennsylvania,

which is where my mother was from. And her father was the stationmaster in Altoona, which was probably not a high-paying job, but it was a good job because there was a big railroad town. And so we learned a lot as kids about the Horseshoe Curve, and we saw the railroad yards, and over the years saw the decline of Altoona as a result of the decline of railroads. So it was our practice as a family every Christmas, and every summer the family would go to Altoona and spend time there. And the rest of the family would stay with my grandmother in Altoona. She had a house that was split up into four apartments so she had one [and] the other three to get income after my grandfather died. And I would be sent out to live with a cousin in a suburb of Altoona with an uncle, an aunt. My uncle was a radio announcer in Altoona, and he did a lot of sports play-by-play, and when I was probably 12 or 13 – somewhere in that era – he took his daughter and son. His son was a good friend of mine, Billy, but a couple years younger, and they stopped in Cleveland and picked me up because of this bond that Billy and I had developed over the years, and I went on this road trip with them around the Midwest, and one of the places that we stopped was Notre Dame, where my uncle had graduated many years earlier.

And looking back on it, I think the idea was that Billy would fall in love with Notre Dame and go there. And Billy didn't go there. He did fall in love with it, but he didn't go there, but I did. So that was the start of Notre Dame. Anyway, I am rambling around here. I hope this is not inconvenient. We moved again to a rental house in Painesville, Ohio, when I was approaching fourth grade, so I would have been about nine that summer. And our first rental house was a big white house on a corner in a very nice area of Painesville, which was then a very sleepy, county seat, nice place. And the house was owned by the county sheriff. So the county sheriff would send a trustee out to cut the grass. And he would show us his office. He had a collection of very fancy canes. One of which he would unscrew, and it had a shiv in it so if he was ever attacked while walking with his cane, he was protected. And another of them had a flask, a little glass flask, in case he was thirsty.

And then we moved at least three more times in that area growing up. It was a wonderful place to grow up in the Eisenhower era. At that point, Painesville was an attractive county seat and had a bandstand right in the middle of the park [and] two movie theaters. It was the location for two movies that were shot there. One of them was kind of an art house film called *One Field, Two Potato*. That was about racism in a small town, although there wasn't much in Painesville that I recall. But the movie was about an interracial couple and the trials they faced, and the second movie was called *Safety for Small Fry*, and it was sponsored by the AAA, and it starred a police officer in Painesville called Johnny the Cop. As he was well known in town, and Johnny the Cop was in charge of the school safety patrols. And Johnny the Cop I first met when I was in eighth grade, and I joined the school safety patrol at St. Mary's School in Painesville. And became a good friend of the family, and as it turned out, married his daughter, his only child. I suppose even in that period there were places where being in the school safety patrol was kind of a nerdy thing or not an attraction, but in this case, it was an attraction in part because of the quietness of the town – I think in large part – because if you were in the safety patrol you could be eligible for the Cavalier's Drill Team which had these really cool blue and white uniforms and competed every year against other school safety patrol drill teams in Washington, D.C. So we would have a road trip every year to

Washington. And my first year was the first year of the safety patrol, and we finished third in the competition.

And the second and third years, I was the drill sergeant, although I really didn't have the voice for it. And we finished third again. And then I became an advisor to the drill team, and it had a very elegant Jamaican-American, tall, deep-voiced drill sergeant who was just wonderful, and they won three years in a row. So that was a kick. St. Mary's School is largely responsible for my being a writer or journalist. In the fourth grade [or] something, I started listening after school to a lot of radio serials. One of which was about the FBI. And I don't remember if the name of the radio show was "The FBI in Peace and War," but that was the theme. And when I was nine years old, I wrote to J. Edgar Hoover and asked him what I had to do to become an FBI agent. I was very taken with the Hoover mystique, which of course, we later learned was largely invented. And I got about a week or two later, a giant envelope with stuff all about the great FBI and J. Edgar Hoover. And the gist of it was, to become an FBI agent, you had to get either a law degree or a graduate degree in accounting. And I was not eager at that age to spend that much time in school. And I must have been moping about it in class because Ms. Ryan, Peggy Ryan, who was one of the few lay teachers at the St. Mary's School, asked me what was wrong, and I told her. And she said, "Awe, you don't want to do that. You want to be a writer." And so I started thinking about that. And I had one of those little-do-it-yourself printing presses that you cranked, and I made a neighborhood newspaper.

I had a Sunday dress-up hat – you know, with a brim – that I put a made-up press card in the hat, and by the time I was in high school, I was a shoo-in to be on Harvey High school's newspaper and be its editor. And I look back, and I think part of it was Catholic school where they were pretty rigorous about standards in writing and language and English usage, and my parents were also. I don't remember many arguments between my mother and father growing up. There may well have been. My father was a Taft Republican and my mother was a Roosevelt Democrat. So they clearly did not see eye to eye on politics, but they were both very much into correcting us when we were in error and that included grammar and spelling and usage, and so when I was a junior in high school, I walked in one day to the local newspaper, the *Painesville Telegraph*, which was a daily with about 18,000 circulation, and I asked for a job. Amazingly they said okay, and they hired me for 75 cents an hour to work on Friday evenings, taking phone calls from high school coaches and students who were feeding information about, at that point, basketball games and later other sports. And so I would write up these very basic sport stories for the paper, and one day I was there and they were short a proofreader in the back shop. And so they asked me if I would be willing to proofread some copy. I went out and proofread galleys of copy, and because of this training, I was not bad at it, and that basically cemented the relationship, and every summer and during the school year after school, I spent every waking hour at the *Painesville Telegraph* doing everything they had to do.

Eshleman: Were you a voracious reader as a kid?

Naughton: Yeah, I don't know that I was any more voracious than other kids. But I liked to read.

Eshleman: Newspapers?

Naughton: Yeah, I read newspapers at home. I listened to news on the radio, and I certainly got hooked on this whole notion of being a newsperson. Which was an appealing idea. And the notion that it gave you kind of a front row seat on, not always important, but interesting things that were going on in life was very appealing. And the *Painesville Telegraph* gave me the chance to write about politics and government and elections, and the same company that owned the [*Painesville Telegraph*] owned a few others around northeast Ohio, one of which was the *Cuyahoga County Times*. And when its editor went on vacation one summer, I edited the paper, and I learned a few things, including that they really didn't want hard-hitting editorials. There was a strike at a small—I think it was a rubber factory—in Cuyahoga County, and there were threats of violence, and so I wrote an editorial decrying the possibility of violence and urging common sense behavior on both sides, and it never got published because I think the company thought, "No, we don't want to get in the middle of that," especially when this guy was only there for two weeks. So it was all in all a great experience, and I met some really interesting journalists who took me under their wing and taught me various things.

Eshleman: What kind of lessons do you remember?

Naughton: Well, I remember being asked to write about women's issues and features at that time when they were in the women's department. And I was initially put off by this notion, but the woman who was in charge of that part of the paper, Hilda Fastman, was one of the people who became a mentor to me. She taught me that whatever the subject was, if you could write elegantly, if you wanted to. And Hilda—I don't recall exactly how this first began—but she was among the people who helped me become a photographer and that was partly a necessity that reporters in that era at smaller papers took pictures as well, so I had this gigantic Crown Graphic which seemed like a 40-pound battery pack that you wore on one shoulder and on the other shoulder was a bag full of these gigantic film packets that went in the back of the camera. And for Hilda Fastman, I could go to places like Lake Erie beaches and just walk on the beach with this gigantic camera and walk up to young women and say, "Would you like to have your picture in the paper?" and get their names and addresses and phone numbers, and then I would ask these young women, "Well, would you like to be in a photo shoot in the paper for one of the local stores?" and so the paper would, once a week, would do photo of the week from women's stores, so I got to take many of those photos with these young women I met on the beach.

Eshleman: What did your parents think of your, sort of, gravitational pull taking [newspapers] towards you? Did they think it was a worthwhile occupation?

Naughton: I think they did. I think they were both very heavily into words. My father in particular loved crossword puzzles and did them all his life and took great pride in doing the *New York Times* puzzle in ink, and even at one point when I worked for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and the *Plain Dealer* was on strike, the guild started a strike paper, and my dad created crossword puzzles for the guild strike paper as long as that lasted.

My mom loved to read, and that was part of the upbringing of the young reader, so I think they were both very happy about it. And neither of them had been educated at college. My mother had gone to nursing school. My father had gone to work right out of high school, and I think they were pleased to have anything that seemed like it might be a career path, and so they encouraged it. And when I was a freshman in college, I had a history professor who was a bit of a radical, which was fairly unusual for Notre Dame. At the time, I was less aware of that, but the campus was kind of conservative in many respects. But he was quite radical, and one day he said, "Here's what I want you to do. I want you to write home and tell your parents you decided one of two things: You are going to go into politics or into newspapering." Well, I wrote home and said, "Hey, I am going into newspapering," and they said, "Yeah, we knew that." But he was trying to test how aghast the parents of my classmates would be, and of course some of them were aghast and tried to say, "No, don't do that." I was taken both to journalism and to the possibility of journalists writing about politics. So for me it was a no-brainer.

Eshleman: And as a young man who was interested in what was going on in current events politics, did you find yourself getting caught up at the end of the Eisenhower administration this young senator from Massachusetts.

Naughton: Well, I don't think I did as a kid. I certainly was aware as a very young kid of the end of the war and the hoopla that ensued, and I remember vividly the day that Roosevelt died and my mother sat sobbing, and as a college student I became much more interested in events and affairs, partly as a result of professors and classes like history, partly as a result of being in the Navy ROTC. I mean, we were a little bit after the Korean War, but it was conceivable that events would pull me into something so I was more aware and I was very involved in—well, I was going to say in politics. That's not quite right. As a junior, I ran for the Student Senate at Notre Dame at Dillon Hall, which was one of the largest residence halls, and my campaign slogan, which I put on posters all over the place, was "Graft and Corruption." And then there was an asterisk, and in small type at the bottom it said, "This would be the name of the newsletter that I would issue if I was elected." And somehow that worked. So I got elected to the student senate, and then as a junior, the guy who got elected president of the student body asked me to be his running mate. And I was sort of blown away by this because I didn't think of myself being all that big [of a] deal.

Eshleman: Presidential material.

Naughton: Yeah, and his name was Bruce Babbitt, who later became, of course, attorney general, and then governor of Arizona, and then [U.S.] secretary of the interior. He was a really good guy, a very straight arrow. And there was a classmate of ours also named John Sears who was responsible at Notre Dame for running the John Kennedy campaign in the mock election that was held the year before the 1960 election and was successful, of course, in nominating a Catholic at a Catholic university to be president. And how John Sears kept his real beliefs in check I don't know, but, of course, John wound up as the campaign manager for Richard Nixon in his comeback and was later very involved in Republican conservative politics. So I had I think the benefit, partly from my parents having grown up without really being pushed into one camp or another, which, as a journalist, turned out to be an advantage. I wound up having very strong personal

feelings about issues and events mostly as an observer seeing things that were kind of radicalizing, but in high school and college I go back to the fact that it was the Eisenhower era and things were much less polemic in that era – and even somewhat beyond it – far unlike what they are today, of course. But it was nice growing up. And I remember taking great pride, not necessarily in his politics, but in the fact that at my commencement at Notre Dame, the commencement speaker was Dwight Eisenhower, and my best friend growing up was graduating from Ohio State, and I don't know who his commencement speaker was, but I liked rubbing it in that we had the president.

Eshleman: Right, so Notre Dame first and then the Marine Corps.

Naughton: Yes, I did a two-year stint in the Marines. I took the Marine option, obviously influenced by my future father-in-law, Johnny the Cop, who had been a Marine. And got schooled at Quantico. That's the reason I am here to see you today; I am headed to the 50<sup>th</sup> reunion of my officer training class at Quantico. I remember vividly being in one of our classes and an officer telling us – because we were typical of the era. We were paying attention sometimes but goofing off in class, also. And some of us would look for places in the back row. You might catch a snooze, and I remember this instructor saying, "We were just like you. When I was in basic training and I wound up in Korea and I wish I had paid better attention." And I of course, [I] thought, "Yeah, yeah, that's not going to happen to me." So we graduated basic school and the guy who was my roommate and I applied for infantry in Okinawa, which was where the third Marine division was based. I wanted infantry because I wanted to be like my future father-in-law and Okinawa seemed like an interesting place to go because I'd see part of the world. So I got what I later learned was commonly referred to in the Marine Corps as "O-3," meaning the military designation for "infantry, oh shit, Okinawa," which was not one of the more coveted assignments it turned out. And we were both – my buddy and I – assigned to the third anti-tank battalion which was a nonsensical organization that had these middle-track vehicles that in theory were tank killers but in fact would be greatly at risk of being put out of commission quite easily by not only a tank but a 50-millimeter slug. But I had a platoon and got to go to Hong Kong and the Philippines as a member of a battalion landing team afloat. But when my buddy and I got to Okinawa, almost all of the Marine Corps battalions and regiment were on ships off the coast of southeast Asia because there was some unknown blowup that was occurring in southeast Asia – at that point they thought Laos was going to be the first domino to fall. And the Marines were poised to go into Laos.

So the instructor had been absolutely right, although fortunately for me, because I was so gung ho, I would have probably been among the early casualties. Lieutenants did not have a long life in combat, second lieutenants particularly. So here we were learning that it was potentially dicey. But I did not get in combat ever and thankful to God for that. I did get to go interesting places, mostly Japan, and as a kid growing up, Japan was the enemy. And I don't really have a fixed notion of what I thought of Japanese people or the country, but I had no idea what a beautiful place Japan was. My battalion was sent twice while I was on Okinawa to Japan to train in a tent camp that was located outside of a town called Gotemba on the slope of Mt. Fuji, the sacred Japanese mountain. And it was just gorgeous. I got to travel a bit around Japan and see how beautiful the country was and the people were, and it was a wonderfully broadening, eye-opening experience

for a kid who grew up with those people as the enemy. And so when I got back and wanted to become a reporter, [I] think I had a more open stance mind-set about what things really were, and that also was advantageous.

Eshleman: What's the chronology? You left the Marine Corps. Did you find a job right away in journalism?

Naughton: I did. I had a standing offer to go back to the *Painesville Telegraph*. I didn't want to do that. I wanted to move on. I had probably a cockamamie notion that I was ready for the big time; I did have an interview at *Life* magazine. That I got through a connection, a friend who was another lieutenant in that battalion in Okinawa whose father knew somebody at *Life* magazine. Through the father, I got an interview and it went well, and they said they didn't have a job, but stay in touch. And in the meantime, my mom started getting seriously ill with heart problems, and it was a useful thing to be around home; although if the *Life* magazine thing had happened, I am sure my parents would both have said, "Go." I applied to a number of places, including the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, and the *Plain Dealer* one day called and asked would I come for an interview and I did. I took a bunch of clips. I think they liked the fact that I had known the next county over, and so they hired me to be a beginning reporter.

Eshleman: What kind of clips did you have? Do you recall what you had in your portfolio?

Naughton: I still have many of them. Actually now they are now at the Poynter Institute, because I never threw anything away. And I started giving everything to Poynter a year or so ago. I had features. I had hard news stories about politics. I never did anything investigative, and I never in fact in my life thought of myself as investigative – curious, yes, but skilled in talent, no. I guess you would say general interest coverage. I thought of myself throughout my career as more writer than reporter. So they were writerly pieces. Where I could be inventive with leads and schmooze a little bit in the story about the subject or the person.

Eshleman: I actually remember you asking me that when I was interviewing with the *Inquirer*. Did I consider myself more a writer or a reporter?

Naughton: That was one of my favorite questions, and as a hiring editor, I didn't discount people who were principally reporters and they were greatly talented people. But I was drawn towards writers. And that was true at the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, at the *New York Times*, at the *Inquirer*. Every place I've worked, I've always believed that while reporting was an immensely valuable tool and a skill, that some people had much greater than I. If the story did not engage readers and that was the work of the writing, then it was less likely to be successful. So to me that was a very important skill, and I was very drawn to your writing. And we always thought of you as a writer; I didn't think of you not as a reporter, but you were and still are a very fine writer.

Eshleman: Thank you.

Naughton: So I was like everybody in that era assigned to the police beat, and early on I blew a story. I made the rounds of all the important locations and the central police station, and somebody up in one of the offices – it might even had been homicide. He used the name that didn't mean anything to me, and it went right over my head, and I didn't tell the guy who was in charge of the police beat, and it turned out that the *Cleveland Press* beat us to the story, and I didn't get chewed out. My boss at the police beat got chewed out because we missed it and he covered for me. That was an object lesson. He didn't say, "Yeah, this kid Naughton blew it." He told me I blew it. But he didn't say that to my editors. And he tutored me in being more attentive to key things that would be said, and he also tutored me in pranks. He became one of my best friends, Donald Bean. He and I worked most nights 6:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. and Bean and I would call around and he would say, "This is Don Bean," as in "Navy bean." And so he would show me how to do that. And we'd get great stories out of people on the phone.

One night we were at the police beat and I said, "Well, what do you do when it's this quiet?" And Don said, "Well, why don't we see if we can pull a prank on John Hernandez?" who was the lone reporter on duty at night for the *Cleveland Press*, which was an afternoon paper, and so they were short staffed at night. And so we carefully reported out where you might be able to see an airplane landing on Memorial Shoreway, the main east-west highway in downtown Cleveland, and we picked the street and suburb surrounded by the city next to Lake Erie called Bratenahl, and so then Don Bean got on the phone and he called a certain home that he had found in the crisscross directory, and he engaged the people on the phone so that if the press reporter might call this person back, you know, and I was going to fake myself to be the person. The line would be busy. And now I got on the phone and called the press reporter, going through our switchboard to the *Cleveland Press*, and then down to the adjacent office in the police station, and I pretend to be a guy named Fred Semen on Curvy Avenue in Cleveland. And I said, "Holy cow, I wanted to let you guys know about this. A plane just landed on Memorial Shoreway," and he said, "Oh my God, what kind of a plane?" And I said, "I don't know but it looks like a four-engine job." And he said, "Oh, thanks very much." And we knew what would happen. He would meander into our office as he did two or three times a night. Just to be sociable, right, but he was really checking to see if we were onto a big story.

And there was a kid named Don Conway, was a copy kid and who aspired to be a staff photographer. And he spent all of his off-duty hours hanging out at the police beat hoping to get a tip on a big story that he would go shoot, and he would put the staff photographers to shame. So Dick was in and he started putting all of his camera gear together. Bean, when he came into the office, pretended to be on the phone to somebody like the Coast Guard saying, "Well, is the Coast Guard on the story?" I pretended to be on the phone to the police and I was saying, "Are you sure it's four-engine?" We were in this part of the police station where we could open a window and climb onto a ramp where our police beat car was parked, and the idea was Conway would go out and rev up our cars if we were going to head out to the scene. And the press guy would run out and get in his car and go to the scene. And we would call him on these new-fangled radio telephones that we had in our police beat cars. And we would call in after a certain period of time and say, "Well, we found out it was a false tip, come on back."

So sure enough, Conway got in, revved up the car. The kid from the [Press] got in the [Press] car and took off for the scene. Well, what we didn't realize was he didn't take the time to take the key that was on his key ring and unlock this phone which you had to unlock first, and then he started the car and to drive off. But his phone wasn't working so we figured, well, you know, he'll figure it out. He'll come back. Among other things he won't see a plane on Memorial Shoreway. And after a while, we heard this call on police radio: "This is Car 596. We've got a [Press] reporter who says there's a plane down somewhere on Memorial Shoreway, and all hell broke loose and cars are streaming there from all over and the Bratenahl police drove over the fancy golf course looking for the plane." Then the Coast Guard searched offshore. And Don Bean and I were just cruising in the office thinking, "Oh my God. We could go to jail for this." And I don't think the [Press] reporter ever figured out that we were responsible for it. But that was the beginning of my prankster career.

Eshleman: What did you do next?

Naughton: I went to night rewrite, and I had two experiences on night rewrite that were formative and helped in a career sense. One of them was that the publisher of the — actually his titles were publisher and editor — Tom Vail of the Vail family that initially had owned the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, and at some point while I was there sold it to Newhouse, and this was a move on Tom Vail's part to wrest control of the newspaper from portions of the family that saw it more as an investment than a newspaper and whose shares were in trust and the bank was making very difficult for any investments to be made in the paper. Holding these trust shares. So Vail wanted to get control, and he did do it by selling the paper and making the Newhouses agree to a long-term contract to retain him as the publisher and editor. Then one day, Vail came out and he went to the city desk and he said, "I have to give a speech to some local group and I'd like somebody to write the draft for me." And the night rewrite guy looked out, and there were two of us on night rewrite, and he said, "Ask Naughton." So he asked me to write a speech, and so I interviewed him about what it was he wanted to say, and I looked at a couple of speeches he had given to get some sense of his rhythm, and I wrote a draft, and he tinkered with it some, but basically he gave the speech. And then he would come out to me periodically every so often and ask me to write another speech. And so I think it didn't hurt my career any that the publisher wanted me to be his speechwriter.

And the second thing that happened was that I was on night rewrite and there was a race riot in Cleveland. This was in about 1965. And again there were two of us on night rewrite. One of them was a grizzled veteran who wrote everything with two fingers, and the fingers on one of his hand he had lost his index finger. So it was kind of an interesting technique and he was a real hard-boiled, old-styled just a facts man, kind of reporter and writer who had been one of the reporters for the *Plain Dealer* in the Sam Sheppard case. The notorious case that the *Cleveland Press* had greatly blown out of proportion. And so my expectation was he was going to be the lead writer on the story but the city editor, the night city editor that night, was a guy named Russ Cane who was again a writerly kind of writer himself and he said, "Naughton, write the name bar." Well, I was terrified. And I was too busy to be terrified. And started taking feeds from everybody on the phone and Jim Flannigan, the other rewrite guy, was wonderful about

it. I am sure he was disappointed and in some ways angry, but he sent me information that he was getting and some of it complete paragraphs. And so that turned out to be an illustration that I could do things relatively quickly on deadline. And that helped my career. So after that I was given a beat. First Federal [court] beat which I loved. And I became – I asked you this question, too, when you were hired – whether you preferred beat reporting or generalized reporting. And there were great people who did either, but I always felt guilty on general assignment if I didn't have my own story to pursue. I just felt terribly uncomfortable sitting there waiting for some editor to have a bad idea. And to get stuck writing something that I really didn't want to pay attention to. And on general assignment some of the stories were great. But if I was on my own beat, I could be out on that beat talking to interesting people all the time, and there were really interesting people on the Federal beat.

There was a guy named Merle McCurdy, for example, who was an African-American and in that era very unusual as the chief federal prosecutor in that district. And Merle McCurdy had never gone to college. But he had gotten a law degree by acing the law exam to get into law school because he was really smart, and he did a lot of studying when he was a night bellhop in [a] hotel in Cleveland; he learned a lot about human activity as a night bellhop, and he was just a fascinating guy to watch in court. There was a case involving trafficking in arms, and all throughout the case [he] just sat in the middle of the courtroom a dolly on wheels that had all kinds of, you know, machine guns and rifles and handguns, and it just sat there throughout the case. And occasionally refer to weapons and such and in the closing argument that Merle McCurdy made, which I am sure he had not only memorized but had practiced several times. There came a point when, for dramatic effect, he reached out without looking at the pile on this dolly of weapons and pulled out the absolute most ferocious one of all, some machine gun, and held it aloft and you could just see the eyes opening wide on the jury, and it was a brilliant, brilliant ploy, and he of course won the case. So being able to observe that kind of behavior and then write about it and make Merle McCurdy into this figure of some amazing note was just great fun.

So I did the federal beat and then I was assigned to city hall. And I remember my wife when I would come home from work at city hall, she would say, "What did student council do today?" And she was absolutely right. What she meant was they're as dumb as any student council is and full of people who just are bizarre, and it was true. There were lots of fruitcakes in the city council. There was a guy who was actually not on city council. He was in the state senate but typical of some of what I wrote about. He represented an African-American district in East Cleveland, and he was a really nice guy, but he wasn't the brightest guy in the state legislature. And one day I was in the office, and he called me and he was just in a panic. And this is like, you know, the civil rights era, and he said, "I don't know what to do about this. I just read in the Congressional Record that there is nobody named H. Rap Brown. It's a guy who was a fraud, and he's working for the government undercover and his name is actually Greene," and I said, "Well slow down, Morris. Where did you read this?" And he said, "It's in the Congressional Record." And I said, "Okay have you got it there?" And he said yes. I said, "Will you read it to me?" And he said yes. And he started to read it, and it became obvious that it was a humor column in the *New York Times* by Russell Baker, one of my favorite writers, and I had read it and started laughing, and I said, "Morris,

calm down. It's okay. There really is a guy named H. Rap Brown, and he does say what he says and it's okay; you can go home." But again an interesting human being, and I guess I fell in love with political coverage partly because of all the flaky characters who were involved in it, especially in that era. And I got to know and see up rather close Carl Stokes who]got elected as the first African-American elected mayor of a major city, and I saw him when I was covering the legislature and was very impressed with him and covered his campaign, and I am sorry to say was embarrassed by him in a debate. When he was first talking about running for the legislature, and I am sorry for the majority, and he was in the legislature and had gotten elected from what was a black, historically black, legislative district and in an era again when racial tensions were rising to a very much of a peak in Cleveland as elsewhere, and I wrote a Sunday column.

I became eventually persuaded that that was a bad thing for political writers to do that because for me it was a temptation to say what I thought rather than what I knew. I wrote a column at one point saying that a Mickey Mouse would have a better chance to get elected than Carl Stokes. In the final debate between Carl Stokes and his opponent for mayor, he talked about that Mickey Mouse quote. And I was sitting right in the front row in this debate watching. And I am sure I was as red as I've ever been, red as a beet, and I just felt horrible.

Eshleman: How many years were you at the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*?

Naughton: I was at the Plain Dealer for eight years.

Eshleman: Talk a little bit about competition in those days. You had the *Cleveland Press*. You had the *Plain Dealer*. I suspect there were other local papers, as well.

Naughton: Yeah, there were mostly suburban local papers and a fair amount of really serious competition on radio. And during a four-month strike which happened shortly after I got to the *Plain Dealer*. Don Bean, this buddy at the police beat who had worked in radio also got me a job at a radio station during the strike. I actually got a pay raise. You know here we are on strike, and he said, "Well, how much did you get paid?" so I increased the amount and they said okay. So I bought a car during the strike. Anyway, there was very good competition, and especially when I got to be the politics writer and I was this snot-nosed kid, and the *Cleveland Press* had a guy who had been on that beat — had to have been three or more decades — and he knew everybody in America. And his name was Dick Maher. And he was heavily involved in Irish political associations which, you know, I came to realize might have been a little bad for a reporter, and so there came a day. It was my first election when I was at the Board of Elections on filing day. When the candidates all brought in their petitions, and the TV cameras took images of them, and we interviewed them and all. So I got to the Board of Elections and I am standing on the public side of the counter, and Dick Maher was on the official side of the counter. I later did that also but I didn't realize I was allowed back there. And so the politicians are coming in and so on, and at some point Dick, out of the kindness of his heart and champing down his own competitive instinct maybe, he looked at me and he said, "Would you like to have me sponsor you in the Knights of Columbus?" Well, my father had grown up saying all of his life fairly nasty things about any organization, especially one that put on costumes and wigs and swords in the air and professed to be

better than other Roman Catholics, and I guess the Knights of Columbus must have sold insurance as well which probably was a way they raised money to buy uniforms and swords and have secret handshakes and all. And my father had said a line that popped into my head at that moment. And so I said it not thinking its effect on Dick Maher. I said, "No thanks, I already have enough insurance." And Dick may have been offended or mortified that I was so disrespectful of an organization that in Cleveland had a lot of ethnic and Irish politicians. And might even have been a good thing to socialize in for political coverage reasons. But an odd thing happened. There were also a couple of people who were political operatives in the audience watching the filings, and they kind of took a liking to anybody who was cheeky enough to say something like that to Dick Maher, and they became my best sources about what was really going on in politics. So I've always regretted that I was insensitive but thankful that it had a positive effect. Anyway, it was a fun place to write about politics.

Eshleman: Tell me about going to the *New York Times*. How did that come about?

Naughton: I've never been entirely positive, but I believe it had to do a lot with Gene Roberts, who as you well know, became not only your mentor, my mentor and maybe the best boss anybody ever had. Gene Roberts was a reporter at the *New York Times*, and he was based in Atlanta, which made him the newspaper's principal reporter on civil rights issues. And in 1985, when that riot occurred in Cleveland – the first one that I was on night rewrite about – somehow Roberts got aimed at me to give him guidance about who was who and what was what in Cleveland, and so I, you know, I helped him out as a visiting fireman. And he was thankful.

Eshleman: That was 1965?

Naughton: Yeah, I am sorry, I think I misspoke. It was 1965 and he came to Cleveland again in 1967 when there was another riot, and earlier that year when there was a campaign visit to Cleveland by George Wallace. And I was then covering politics and was asked to be on a local version of "*Meet the Press*" and be one of the panelists interviewing George Wallace. Well, I had never been comfortable in front of an audience or in that speech setting, and I was terrified of being a panelist. So I was sitting there about to go on the air, and George Wallace asked each of us for our first name. And he was all set to be chummy with us. And to my horror the moderator called on me to ask the first question. And I happened to have noticed that in back of the room of the studio there were two Alabama State Troopers in uniform on a protective detail for the governor. And I asked the governor, "Well, do you know who is paying for that?" And that ended the chumminess and it created the illusion, and it was very much an illusion, that I was a tough, *Meet the Press*-kind of a hard-bitten questioner. AI didn't think that at the time, nor until about a year and a half ago did I discover that was the image that had been created because George Wallace had told the visiting press corps, which included Gene Roberts and included a guy named John Massick, who when I worked in Washington became a very good friend and he was there for *US News and World Report*, and a year and a half ago he said, "Yeah, Wallace told us how he was going to go in there and just bedazzle the local press, and right out of the box you put him on the defensive and that was the ball game." And he said, "We were all very impressed."

So Gene Roberts came to Cleveland for the mayoral primary and at that time it was a non-participant primary and two nominees would be selected. One of them turned out to be Carl Stokes, contrary to my prediction, and the other one was Seth Taft, who was the grandson of a president. And, you know, very much a patrician Republican as opposed to the black Democrat. So it was going to be a really interesting contest. And the *New York Times* magazine asked Roberts to stay in Cleveland and report and write a piece about the election. And Roberts, said, "Why don't you ask this kid Naughton to write it?" So I've been naive all my life, and I of course said yes I'll do it. So in my spare time, I reported the story for the *New York Times* magazine, and I stayed up throughout the night one night writing it. And I shipped it off to New York and they published it with almost no changes. So they ran my piece and then they asked me to write a piece about his first hundred days when he got elected mayor. I wrote that piece, and it ran almost untouched, and I wrote two more pieces for the *Times* while I was in Cleveland.

And again, ignorance is bliss. At some point I got a call from one of the editors on the magazine, and he said we'd like to have you come to New York and talk about writing for the magazine on the staff. And I said, "Well, I really want to write as a reporter in Washington" because I wanted to go to the pinnacle of American politics coverage. And I had been asking the *Plain Dealer* editors if they would send me to Washington when there was an opening. So I said, "No, I kind of like to go to work in Washington." Well, I didn't realize that sometimes you only get one chance with the *New York Times*, and if you say no, they basically write you off. So here I was writing them off. But good fortune nonetheless occurred: the 1968 election happened. I met with a few other *Times* reporters at one of the conventions. I wasn't pushing it, but at the end of the year, I wrote a letter and asked Tom Wicker, the then bureau chief, if there was any chance of being hired in the bureau. I was also asking the *Plain Dealer* to send me, and they did have an opening. And they turned me down. And to this day I don't know why. But I think I had fallen out of favor with Tom Vail somewhere along the way.

So I got hired by the *New York Times*. And as it happened, this occurred shortly after Gene Roberts became the national news editor of the *New York Times*, which at least theoretically was responsible for the Washington bureau. Now there were famous infamous battles between Washington and New York over who was really in control and I don't know whether Roberts had already resolved that or whether Max Frankel who was actually the bureau chief when I got hired was ignorant of any involvement with Gene Roberts, but I did get hired into a four-person team that was going to chronicle for the *Times* what the new Nixon Administration was going to just do to dismantle the great social programs that were helping cities. So this was an urban-focused team of four people that had been hired onto the bureau. And looking back it may merely have been a bureaucratic ploy by Max Frankel, who was a brilliant bureaucrat among other things, to hire three more people into the bureau. One of them was Jack Rosenthal, who was then at *Life* magazine and had been a PR guy for Bobby Kennedy and had written the Kerner Commission Report and is a brilliant guy and also, I guess, been at *Time* magazine. And then he hired Paul Delaney, an African-American who worked for the *Washington Star* and had worked for an African-American paper I believe in Atlanta, and he hired me, and the idea was that this four-person team led by

John Herbers, who knew the *New York Times* and knew its issues and focus. The four of us would be the chroniclers of urban issues. Well, it was not more than three or four months, and we did a series of stories for the paper, but one day they came in the bureau and they said, "We don't know whether we should ask, but we have an opening for the number two job on the White House beat, and Walter Rugaber really doesn't like covering the White House. And would you be willing to do it?" And they said – well, they were kind of apologetic because mostly it involved getting the direct work because Bob Semple would do all the big stories and take the big trips, and I would very much be the number two. The *Times* was quite hierarchical in a very serious way. And there was no encroaching by number two on number one's territory. Now I understood that so I would have to cover the vice president, and I might get to go on the trips to Key Biscayne, but I probably wouldn't get to San Clemente, which were the good trips, and I of course said, "Oh, yeah, let me at it, let me at it. Politics, the White House, of course." And so again, I am terrified because shortly after I started the assignment, it dawned on me that there were days when Semple was off doing some big story that he was reporting or researching and it was me covering the White House. Oh, my God. I am going to screw it up.

Eshleman: And you are thirty?

Naughton: I am this is like 1969, so I am 31-year-old, snot-nosed kid at the White House beat and I am terrified. And I remained terrified for the next seven years, but I covered the White House and national politics and Watergate hearings and the impeachment proceeding. I was terrified throughout of making a terrible mistake. But I think in part because of the self-imposed terror, I was the better for it. And I didn't make any at least monumental mistakes.

Eshleman: One thing the best reporters always seem to have is looking over their shoulder. I mean, in the sense of not afraid of competition but not wanting to screw up.

Naughton: You are, I learned, typical of the breed. And I, of course, thought I was the only one who was like that. And I realized in a very special way, which I wrote about in an essay when I was at a writing seminar at Poynter when I was still working in Philadelphia. And I had to write about something that was potentially embarrassing or life changing – and I forget the exact nature of the assignment – but I wrote that I was covering, either the McGovern or the Muskie campaign in 1972. And my boss was Max Frankel, this extremely talented reporter and writer whose work I had long admired. And I got a call from the bureau one day when I was out on the road and they said, "Hey, Max is going to join the campaign for a few days and travel with you and do some pieces." And I said, "Oh, great." And I immediately started worrying about it because, oh my God, he's going to see me at work. He's going to see me at my worst. He's going to notice all my flaws. I am going to have to write sitting in the plane in front of him or next to him. My career is ended. What am I going to do? So we get to the day where he joins the campaign, and he gets out of the plane, and as it happens, he's going to write a cue head, as they called it at the *Times*, which is a news analysis about the election. Well, again it hadn't dawned on me that I probably knew more about politics at that point than Max who was really a foreign affairs specialist.

As a reporter and as the bureau chief, you know did a little bit of everything but not a lot of politics. So Max was writing a piece about the campaign, and he got on the plane, and he had to write before I did. And he sat next to me on the plane, and he pulled out his typewriter, and he put it on his knees the same way I did. And he put paper in the typewriter the same way I did. And he rolled the paper up and he started typing the same way I did. And then he rolled it back down and he read what he had written the same way I did. And he looked at it and he nudged me and he said, "What do you think?" Oh, my God. I've got to appraise my boss's work. And I looked over at what he had written. And there was maybe one word in the lead that was close but not quite exact, and I said, "What if you said X instead of Y?" And he rolled down the platen on the typewriter and he went "XXXX" over his work, and he typed in my word, my word. And now I am just beside myself with what's going on here, but he did that two or three more times as he wrote the piece and he kept putting my words into his piece, and at the end of it, he sighed audibly. And I must have had a quizzical look because he turned to me having sighed, and he said something that at the moment I thought was an instant affirmation from Max Frankel and years later in reading one of my favorite writers I realized was actually something that had been said or written by — oh, God, her name has just blanked out of my head, the famous New Yorker writer who slept with her editor.

Eshleman: Ross?

Naughton: No, she slept with Ross, but she was a great writer. Wrote many funny lines. One of which was: "If all of the women who attended the Yale prom last night sleep end to end, I wouldn't be at all surprised. At all surprised." Anyway, she had had written or said, "I hate to write and I love having written." And it summed up my whole life as a writer, and for the first time I realized that if someone as talented as Max Frankel could feel as terrified about writing as I did and relieved about having accomplished it, it was okay. And so for the balance for my life in journalism, I had told that story. Dorothy Parker was the writer. And I told that story about Max Frankel and Dorothy Parker, and that discovery that created insecurity is actually a blessing up to a point. And the point I believe and has always lectured is when other people apply creative tension to people who don't need it, who are already doing it to themselves, and who need you to be supportive and abetting and occasionally corrective, but not overbearing and harsh and mean and demanding an old style idiotic way. So you are absolutely right. Absolutely, and it took me an awful long time to come to terms with that.

Eshleman: Do you still worry about your writing?

Naughton: Yes, of course. Oh, my God. Somebody is going to read this. They are going to pick at it and even more so today when everybody picks at everything online. I am tinkering. I started writing a piece on the way up here about what's happening to journalism, and I told you that story before we started this. And I may or may not offer it for publication, but if I do, you are darn right. I'll be scared to death. What will they say? And again that's okay. As long as they don't say, "You idiot." I've been rejected. I was rejected a number of times by the *New York Times* magazine after I went to work for the *New York Times*. And one day I went to Ned Kenworthy, who is an old hand, a wonderful guy. He had been an English teacher and got interested in journalism and

became a gifted writer in the Washington bureau. And I went to Ned and I said, "Ned, can you explain to me why they keep rejecting my stories." He said, "Yeah that's easy. You were writing about Cleveland. They don't know anything about Cleveland. They put it right straight in the magazine." He said, "Now you are writing about Washington." He said, "The trick is they don't know anything about Washington, either, but they think they do." One piece I wrote out of Washington they asked for at least three, it might have been four, rewrites. And it didn't get published. Now I did get some pieces published. Eventually. But it was a setback.

Eshleman: Talk to me about that first campaign trip, going on the campaign trail.

Naughton: Well, the first campaign was really what would have been 1970, the Congressional elections. Let me back up a little bit and say when they apologetically said to me that I would have to cover the vice president, it meant nothing to me. "Well, that's great." What happened was that about two weeks after that conversation before I had taken on this new beat but right after I had agreed to [it], Spiro Agnew made the speech in Des Moines decrying the media and broadcast media in particular as "nattering nabobs of negativism," and suddenly he was the best political story in America. And there I am having to walk into this beat where I have to cover the best political story in America. So once again, good fortune has smiled on me.

I spent much of that year traveling with Agnew all over the country, watching him give these fiery speeches in which he decried this and that and liberalism, and the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. My gosh, it had to have been a 21--day journey to Asia on behalf of the administration to assure allies – and remember the Vietnam War is going on – to assure allies that the election of Nixon is not in any way threatening to them. And I assumed that the *Times* would send on that trip one of the many very fine State Department reporters who knew all the issues and were involved. But instead they sent me because they had anticipated that Agnew would be as cartoonish a character abroad as he was at home. And so they wanted the domestic political coverage of the cartoonish Agnew. As it turned out, Agnew was not cartoonish abroad because he was so well handled by the State Department and so well-briefed. I mean at one point, I wrote a piece about the briefing books that he had and how many pages they were and how they went into great detail, and when I got back, I found out that some of my more liberal brethren in the commentary part of the media had been attacking me for being soft on Agnew. In any event, Agnew was really interesting to cover, and I had no idea that he was as corrupt as it turned out he was. But I did know that in private he would be very friendly; there were cocktail parties in his suite sometimes when we traveled with him. But on the trip across Asia, he had written a letter, which I eventually was given a copy of, to Abe Rosenthal saying what a fine reporter I was, and I didn't know whether to be offended or pleased.

So that was really my first taste of the national campaigning, but as a reporter responsible for coverage on an election or a candidate it was Muskie and then McGovern in '72, and that was just an incredibly raucous era in politics. And as persons I liked both Muskie and McGovern. I thought Muskie would have been a fabulously good president, but he was not a good candidate. He was uptight. Obviously, his anger did him in in New Hampshire, although David Broder and I have never seen that the

same way. And I think I was right, but I was never so sure of it that I would never say that in public. The day that everybody said Muskie cried in New Hampshire, there was this enormous snowstorm, and Muskie was standing on a flatbed trailer in front of the newspaper in Manchester, and we were all sopping wet and water running down our faces. There's no question he was angry. There's no question he was red-faced. But I had no idea whether he cried or not because we were all theoretically crying, and I was like the rest of the press corps standing directly beneath him with my notebook under the flatbed trailer trying to take notes that would stay dry. And I was never sure whether he cried. He said later that he had not, but [David] Broder wrote that he had, and he wrote it in his lead. I had put the incident in my sixth or seventh paragraph because I wasn't sure. I certainly featured that he was upset. But Broder's story was striped across the top of the *Miami Herald*, and I think that did Muskie in or certainly helped do it. But it was interesting that I tell the story in the memoir that I drafted but have not done anything with. That after the Florida primary and coming in after — excuse me, I'm having another senior moment. The governor of Alabama — not George Wallace — coming in after Wallace, there really was a moment when Muskie considered dropping out, and the only person who wrote that was Hunter Thompson, but he wrote it in the same piece in *Rolling Stone* in which he talked about Muskie being on Ibogaine, some drug, you know. He made that up entirely so everybody discounted it. And when the Muskie campaign did end after the Wisconsin primary, I wrote a piece for the *Times* about how it had gone and how it ended and all. And near the lead of that, I said he had almost dropped out after the loss in Florida, and colleagues started congratulating me on disclosing that. I could say the person who disclosed it was Hunter Thompson. And it was fascinating to me that Hunter was so capable and so misunderstood because he had this life that he also had created that what I thought was a put-on. But if it was a put-on, he began to live it and become it. And it eventually killed him. So, I mean, how can you have a life in which you get to follow somebody like Muskie or McGovern and write about them and watch somebody like Hunter Thompson and not want to be a journalist?

Eshleman: Exactly, well tell me about the McGovern campaign.

Naughton: The McGovern campaign was as earnest as earnest can be, and I think one of my favorite moments from it was when McGovern was under fire during the primaries over the proposal he had made for a demo grant. And the idea was that if he was elected, to achieve various social ends and economic ends, everybody in America — man, woman, and child — would get \$1,000 from the federal government. Well, you know, this was under attack as insane. Now today that would be chump change, and so he was going to defend it at a press conference in San Francisco against the attacks at that point from Hubert Humphrey, and so they had this room set up for the press room, and I went over early because I always went early. I've never gone to anything late in my entire life. It's the same. Either the nuns instilled it or was that fear of missing something. So I went over early to the room and I took one look at the room and in front of the folding chairs and in between the folding chairs there was wall-to-wall TV cameras. So if I had sat in one of the chairs and then wanted to ask a question I might have had to stand on the chair to look over the TV cameras. And I was really ticked about that. So I went to the back of the room, and I turned one of the chairs around, and I faced the back of the room, and gradually as other print people came into the room and

saw what was going on, they did the same thing. And so there were like twelve of us facing the back of the room when one of the McGovern people came in and took a look and did the sensible thing: went and got the lectern and brought it around and put it in the front of us. So to me that was an illustration that I've also tried to lecture on mostly without much success, I would say, that you don't have to be ordained a leader to lead. That I mean I didn't do it to lead. I did it because I was pissed off but it made, it had an effect. And so I think McGovern was in effect in a similar situation. He was trying to lead by doing something different with his demo grant and with his opposition to the war and with his accusations that Watergate was a crime and should be investigated. I remember writing that story when he made a big issue out of it toward the end of the campaign, and it got very little traction as an event.

Eshleman: I was interested in that. During that campaign and those last days, did the reporters debate whether Watergate was real or not? I mean, did you all have a feeling there was some truth to this or is this blown way out of proportion?

Naughton: I don't recall a debate about it. I don't recall even thinking a lot about it. Partly because there were so many other issues that were at the forefront and we weren't covering it. I will say, in all honesty, I suspect most of us who were in that campaign entourage would have preferred that the outcome was different and also were very conscious of our obligation not to act on that belief or feeling. And that too played a part. That was the first time in my career covering politics that I had to be away from home on election day. And I therefore was going to have to vote by absentee ballot, which meant I would have to make a decision in advance. And it wasn't hard to make the decision to vote for the McGovern ticket. It was hard to do it in advance and to not wait for the date when I could do it in the sanctity in the voting booth. And I really did worry about whether I should mail it in and what would it do subconsciously to me as a reporter. Well, the upshot was I was harder on McGovern for however many days intervened than I think I might have been had I not cast that ballot. Up to the extent that there was another press conference he had where he had done or said something about someone that was in my judgment bordering on unfairness. And at a press conference, I compared it to McCarthyism, which may have been an overstatement, but it was illustrative of how much I was leaning over backwards not to let this absentee ballot I had cast influence my conduct. But, and I do recall some journalists on the press plane in tears after he lost. And part of that was, you know, you can't be with any group for a period of time without in some way bonding with the people.

**[Tape 1, side 2 ended]**

People I had worked with in the Nixon White House, too, who were really nice and admirable and the Ford White House even more so. And while I probably would not ever have regarded myself as a conservative or registered as a Republican, it has been one of the great unfortunate aspects of life in this country, I think, that our politics have become not merely more partisan, but more mean spiritedly partisan.

Jerry Ford was beloved by Democrats in Congress. Jerry Ford was probably the nicest man who ever served in the White House. I'll tell you my favorite Jerry Ford story. Ford was, as you well know, in danger of losing the nomination to Reagan in the primaries,

and there came a day where I heard somewhere that one of the people who was a surrogate campaigner for the president was his son Jack. He was campaigning in Texas. So I flew to Texas, and I rode around Texas in a small plane that had the Jack Ford group in it for two or three days, and then I wrote a couple of stories for the *Times* about Jack on the road for his father. And the gist of what I wrote was, you know, this kid's a better campaigner than his old man. He was good at it. He was articulate; he was straight; he didn't pull any punches. He answered any questions. Good-looking kid. And so I wrote that piece, and it ran on the front page, and the next campaign trip I went on with Ford, Ron Nessen, the press secretary, came to me and he said, "The president would like to see you on the way home." And I thought, "Oh, God, here it comes. He really didn't like that." So we take off, and he calls me forward on Air Force One and into his private cabin. And we sit down at a desk, and he gives me a glass of Scotch, and I am thinking, "Oh, this is to dull the pain." And he looked at me and he said, "Betty and I want to thank you." And I said, "Excuse me?" He said, "Betty and I want to thank you. We thought Jack had turned the corner. Jack had drug issues and problems adjusting to life in the fish bowl in the White House." He said, "We thought he had turned the corner, and your stories demonstrated for us that it was the case. So we just want to say thank you." So I've forgotten everything else we may have talked about on that flight, but I remember that vividly because that was Jerry Ford. He was genuine. He was a real human being. And his politics did not betray that. And it is so discomfoting to think that if I were out on the campaign trail today, everybody would be like Spiro Agnew or worse. Far worse. And I would have almost no influence over that. And that's sad.

Eshleman: Hey, you bring up a good area of discussion. Twenty-four-hour news cycle, bloggers. Of course there were cameras back then as well. But do you think covering a campaign today you would be as influential as in your days as a *Times* reporter and as effective, I guess?

Naughton: I don't know about effective, but let me start with influential. I am not sure I was ever influential. A poll in Cleveland once said that people vote their basic prejudices. They don't so much vote "for" as "against," and they can be persuaded to vote "for" if there are reasons to vote "against," but just voting "for" is much more difficult to achieve. So the media attempting to persuade people of the rightness of an electoral outcome is, as I learned when I was writing columns and incorrectly predicting outcomes, is probably not the right approach. Whether we correctly describe what's happening, I think it is much more difficult today. It's harder to get at the behind-the-scenes part of campaigns. Yeah, there are still stories written about how it really happened. But mostly after the fact and getting access to people in a way that you really get to know them like Richard Ben Cramer in *What It Takes*, which again was after the fact. And which was much more revelatory and insightful. I think it is so much harder when the news cycle is instantaneous and when the assaults upon writers of what they perceive to be fair and factual accounts are so commonplace and instrumental in helping people vote "against". So I am long since persuaded that the role of the media is essential in a democracy and an open society. But I am forlorn about the level to which the ability to do it in a way that is at least persuasively transparent and fair is so difficult. I wish I had an answer for that.

Eshleman: Have campaigns changed in terms of the way the candidate react to the press? Rather than having Jim Naughton from the *New York Times* and the rest of the reporters and TV reporters now you have to deal or the press secretaries have to deal with, you know, the stereotypical person sitting on his couch in mom's basement. So I mean, I guess, it's changing the campaign.

Naughton: There's no question it has changed campaigns. Campaigns used to be a mix, I think, of heart-felt position enunciations and efforts to pull the wool over everybody's eyes. Now it's more pull the wool over everybody's eyes or create an image that sells, whether it's true or not, and the bloggers – a lot of them – get in the way of that, so they have to contend with that. And so it makes them even more apt to want to do something that in my era [there] was not even a word that described the process but spin. Now spin is everything. Maybe there will be a mechanism through which bloggers even will find getting access in ways that we haven't-heretofore done it. Or creating little cartels of bloggers in cities across the country who don't necessarily travel in a campaign but who spend enough time observing one that they get insights into it.

When Richard Ben Cramer was setting out to write to report his book, he asked me what advice I would give him about how to pursue it, and I said, "Well, I don't really know. I've never written a book. But I think the only thing I can honestly recommend is that you don't do what everybody else does. And get on the plane, get off the plane, write something. Get on, get off, write something. Schmooze. Observe. Spend time. Don't write anything." And Cramer was both gifted at that and given to that. And he gives me modest credit for having given him that counsel. But it was for him far more important that he just be able to insinuate himself as a kind of fly on the wall. And he was able to use that to get to know what was really happening. And we're not able today to do that or if we are, we are not showing that we are.

Eshleman: Let's talk about *The Boys on the Bus*. Give me your review of it, first of all. An accurate portrayal of campaign life at that time?

Naughton: As far as campaign life goes, I believe it was, yes. As far as campaign process went, I think Tim overdid it. Tim was a person who first either coined or popularized the phrase "pack journalism." And he did it in some respects by citing examples that I knew to have been unfair or unreasonable examples. The best one I can think of that there was a press conference somewhere on the West Coast that Tim wrote about. We all wrote about it. But Tim observed us covering it, and when it ended, a very fine reporter from the *Boston Globe*, who did not need any guidance on how to write a politic story, turned to Walter Mears and said, "What's the lead, Walter?" And Walter said something because Walter Mears was immensely gifted at writing leads right off the top of his head. I don't know whether the reporter for the *Globe* even wrote something similar. But what they were both effectively saying was what crappy. It was a debate. It was debate, and they were saying what a crappy debate, there is no lead. Basically make of it what you will, and that was my feeling as well. And Tim's turned that exchange into, "Oh, look. Walter Mears leading everybody into blah blah." So in that respect he overstated it. In another respect he was, I always thought, terribly unfair to Johnny Apple. Johnny became this bloated arrogant figure who was a very fine reporter and writer but not a nice person in Tim's book. I spent part of the time trying to persuade Tim he was wrong

about that and never did. Because I knew Johnny well and had seen Johnny in at least one instance when he was at one of those low points we all get to and knew that deep down the arrogance was his mask. You know my mask was jollity, playing pranks. I am not going to worry about getting fired today, because I am having this fun prank on our president wearing a chicken head. For Johnny, the mask was arrogance. I am better than you are and having a \$300 dinner on the expense account. But Johnny was underneath that no different than the rest of us. On the other hand, Tim was the first person who wrote about the press corps in a way that successfully, I think, captured the intimacy of the whole process and how you are going to go right out of your skull if you don't have some mechanism, you know; some people became gourmand. Some people became cheaters on their spouses. Some people played pranks. You had to have some outlet for letting the craziness out. And today it may be even worse than what it was when I did it.

Eshleman: Since you mentioned it, let's talk about the chicken head. Of course, I've seen this story written many, many times but take me back.

Naughton: Well, I have to step back a moment and say covering Jerry Ford was occasionally interesting but often not. Because as nice a guy as he was and as great a service as he gave this nation by being the anti-Nixon, he really was not a good campaigner. He was really not all that articulate. He fumbled occasionally on the campaign, and worse of all, once he had enunciated a handful of themes, that was it, and then he did them over and over and over. And if you worked for one of the networks or the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times* as I did, you had to write home about it every day. And every day might not be very different from every other day. So it began to be a very burdensome chore to try to find something new to write about. Well, we were on the final phase of the campaign and it was going to be this do-or-die trip all over the West Coast principally, and just going everywhere he could get to, and the campaign then turned into a bunch of events in between Jerry Ford's interview-buying time on local television stations to allow himself to be interviewed for thirty minutes by Joe Garagiola.

Now you may remember Joe Garagiola was a mediocre baseball player who was one of the *Today Show* hosts. And he became a buddy of Gerry Ford's so they would go from city to city and pay for time for Joe Garagiola to ask incipient questions. "Do you like living in the White House, Mr. President?" So we were all grousing about this campaign. We got to San Diego for a rally at night at a giant shopping mall, and there was a flatbed trailer with a bunch of stars on it, mostly local Republican officials, and there were also some stars from local areas. Zsa Zsa Gabor, Lance Allworth who played for San Diego and there was a poet, and the Serendipity Singers were there. And there was this chicken in a costume, chicken costume, life-size, dancing around on the stage as a representative of a San Diego radio station with the call letters KGB. And so every Republican spoke, and we're getting more and more bored and Ford's not even there yet. And all the stars appeared, and finally Ford got there, and then he was introduced and then he said thanks to all these people; again nothing going on here, folks. And Ford being Ford, he started messing up some of the identities, and the press corps was again in a little holding area right below him in the flatbed and we snickered. But we snickered at him a lot, and so he looked around and then he said, "and those super

singers Serendibity” for the Serendipity Singers. Well, now we broke out into laughs. And I think it did rattle him because he looked all around kind of wide eyed, and he spotted the chicken. Then he said, “And the chicken, I love it.” And the chicken got up from its folding chair and danced across the flatbed trailer and embraced the president of the United States.

And I stood there, I am sure slack-jawed, and I said to myself but aloud, “I’ve got to have that chicken head.” I had no idea it was the beginning of [the San Diego chicken having] a long career as one of the famous sports mascots in America. So it happened that Ron Nessen was standing near me and he said, “Come with me.” And he led me around to the opposite side of the platform and he summoned the Secret Service agent. And he said, “Bring me the chicken.” And the chicken came over with the Secret Service agent and Nessen said very ostentatiously, “I am Ron Nessen, the press secretary,” and he held out his hand and the chicken stuck out a wing and said, “I am the chicken.” Well, now I am in love with this chicken. And I said, “Oh, I’d really like to buy your chicken head,” and he said, “Well, I kind of need it for my job, but I have my old one at home.” He said, “I can sell you that one.” I said okay and we agreed on \$100. We went out to dinner; we had a fine dinner. I got back to the motel and it’s very late. I have to go to baggage call because in the campaign most nights you have to put your bag out the night before which leads to all kinds of mistakes. So I went to baggage call wearing the chicken head and everybody at baggage call thought, “Oh great, we’re going to see that again.” Because when I got back to the hotel, there it was in the middle of my bed. Somehow the San Diego chicken had talked his way in, and it was a note saying where I could send a check for \$100. So I am thinking, “Yeah, the president is going to see this again,” but I was really expecting that that would be either on Air Force One on Halloween or in a hotel somewhere. It would all be very private.

And what happened was the next day, we were all over the West Coast again and, you know, three states, and again no news here, folks. We got to Portland, Oregon, where there was going to be a regional gathering of radio television news directors, and we all mistakenly thought, “Well good, there will be some news.” Well, no. These were the news directors. These were not the journalists who got out on the street and asked meaningful questions and their questions were kind of Joe Garagiola, so now we’re in open revolt. And Nessen is no fool, so at the airport where we are about to board the plane to fly to Pittsburgh, Nessen declares that the president will have a press conference. Well, that ticked me off because I am not going to be able to file a story. We have to get on the plane right away. By the time we get to Pittsburgh, my newspaper has gone [to] bed. So the hell with it, I am going to get on the plane, make a martini and sulk. So I got on the plane, and I stowed my gear, and I looked up, and there was this chicken head. I still do not know what possessed me but I put on the chicken head and I walked down the tarmac and I heard this voice say, “Go ask him a question or you are a chicken.” It was the White House chief of staff, a guy named Dick Cheney, and suddenly flashbulbs are going off all around me, and colleagues are urging me forward. And it’s dawning on me that they don’t know anything in Portland, Oregon, about the San Diego chicken. And I had better get back on the plane. So I meant to get back on, but the next thing that happened was this giant pair of hands grabbed me from behind, and it was a local Secret Service agent who was not going to let the president be beeped on his watch, and he grabbed my shoulders, and he said, “What do you think you’re doing?”-and I

said, "I am with the *New York Times*, sir." I grabbed the credential around my neck on a chain, and I held it up so he could see it. And he said, "Oh, okay," and he let me go. Now I know I have to get on the plane. But before I could do it, two colleagues in the press corps, who were short but not that short, came up behind me and boosted me on their shoulders, and the next morning if you watched the *Today Show* or the *CBS Morning News*, you would've seen this august gathering of America's best journalists peppering the president with questions, and in their midst a giant chicken rising, identified as a representative of the *New York Times*.

Well again, I thought, "My career is over." But I have not been anything if not lucky, and it happened that Abe Rosenthal, who was not known for his humorous side, had been curious about the campaign, and it was at that very time spending a couple days traveling with the Jimmy Carter campaign and realizing, I suspect, how inane the whole process was and how, yeah, you might wear a chicken head on occasion. So he never said a word to me. But on the night of the election, I wrote a story about the Ford campaign and its end in New York, and then we were all together at Abe Rosenthal's penthouse on Park Avenue to have cocktails. And during the cocktail party, the publisher of the *New York Times*, Mr. Sulzberger the elder, came up to me and said how much he had enjoyed reading about the chicken episode and had I put it on my expense account as I had been quoted saying that I intended to. And I said, "No, I hadn't really filed the expense account yet." And he said, "Well when you do, send it directly to me, and I'll make sure it goes through." Well I didn't do that because, you know, it's kind of hard to send one to the publisher and the rest elsewhere. I included it— \$100 chicken for the president on my expense account— and a couple weeks went by and I got a note in the interoffice mail from the assistant managing editor in New York for saying no. And he said, "Well, ha, ha, maybe we should pay half." As it turned out, in that very same mail delivery was a letter from Ted Geanolis, the San Diego chicken, saying, "Oh, my God, you gave a wonderful boost for my career. Everyone in America heard about the San Diego chicken. Thank you, thank you, here's your money back." So I could write a note to the assistant managing editor say, "That's all right. I'll take care of the entire cost."

Eshleman: And the chicken has been following you around ever since.

Naughton: Well, I've had a number of chicken pranks played on me ever since.

Eshleman: Let's move on to the *Inquirer* years. What were the circumstances of your leaving the *New York Times* and joining the *Inquirer*?

Naughton: After Watergate a lot of us in the Washington press corps— in my judgment, I know I was like this— were in a funk because the chances were we had already covered the biggest story of our lives. And everything else was by comparison pretty tame, and I didn't like that feeling. I didn't like knowing that if it was true, and I did a couple of other things like cover the Ford White House and campaign. I was coming to terms slowly with the knowledge that it was time to leave Washington. And the *New York Times* is a very hierarchical and organized newspaper and was very methodical about things like becoming an editor. I had said early in my career that I would only become an editor if my legs or my brain gave out because I loved being a reporter. I didn't know

that I was ready to edit. I knew that I was ready for a change. So the *New York Times* was very good about it. They said, "Well, would you like to be the Boston bureau?" A one-person bureau, and so Diane [Naughton's wife] and I drove to Boston and we looked around where we might live. And I imagined what it would be like to cover a region as a reporter, and it really gnawed on me that I would be all alone. Because part of what I have always loved about journalism was newsrooms where I was in the company of like-minded people who enjoyed what they did and laughed a lot and collaborated in special ways. And I didn't know that I would be successful all alone in a bureau and who would I play pranks on. I would probably provoke a divorce. So I said no to that, and I was really at wits' end, and I, for whatever reason, I started getting job offers. The *Chicago Tribune* asked me if I would be their Washington bureau chief and I was tempted. It was potentially an opportunity to get into management in a significant way, but it was in Washington, and I really thought I should leave Washington. Then the *Miami Herald* had an opening for editor of the editorial page, and I really didn't want to be an anonymous opinion maker on an editorial page, but I thought I should talk to them. So I did. I probably sealed the deal when John McNeal, the editor of the paper, asked me if that's what I really wanted to do, and I said, "Well, I'd like to do it if it would lead to your job." I probably betrayed that I had always agreed with Bill Ringold, who was a columnist for Gannett and a fine guy. Bill always said that writing editorials for a living is like peeing in your blue serge suit. Nobody notices and you feel better. So I didn't become an editorial writer.

Enter, once again, Eugene L. Roberts Jr. Now it happens that one of the reporters at the *Philadelphia Inquirer* is a guy named Wendell Rawls, Sonny Rawls, and he's a crackerjack reporter, and he got hired to go to the Washington bureau of the *New York Times* about a year before I left. And he happened to live not too far from where I did in Virginia. So I would give Sonny rides home on occasion or to work. And I am sure that on some of those rides I let my hair down about the funk that I was in, and I am further sure, at least on reflection, that Sonny told Roberts because I got a call from Roberts and he invited me to come to Philadelphia and talk to him about a job. So I did, and he was then living out on the Main Line in that big old mansion of a house that looked like it should be in a Charles Adams cartoon. And I spent the night there and drank through much of it with Gene and only years later realized that at some point during the evening, he switched from rum to a very dark iced tea, and I did not switch.

So I am sure I told him every thought that entered my head. But for the most part, they were all consistent with his philosophy of running a newsroom, which I have always liked, very much respected: "Hire the best people that you can, and then get the system the hell out of their way." Gene's whole career reflected that essentially you can run any organization one of two ways: You can withhold trust from everyone until each individual earns it, or you can extend trust to everyone and only act when they disabuse you by not by having not been trustworthy. And Gene was very much in the second group and so was I. In my case, it was mostly from observation of places I had worked where the uptightness factor really to me didn't work. So I was taken with the idea of being a small cog in a newsroom where I could be part of that kind of structure and philosophy and process. Gene, I am sure, was motivated at least in part by my enunciating things he was very much in tune with. So we agreed, and I accepted the job not having actually reported out the serious dilemma of what was going on in

Philadelphia and the fact the paper could easily die. Neither the *Bulletin* nor the *Inquirer* and *Daily News* were making money. But it was an opportunity to work with Gene [and] that was for eighteen years probably the most fun I've had anywhere in my life.

Eshleman: This was your first time as an editor?

Naughton: I had been a reporter. I had occasionally done a week on the desk filling in. But I had never actually run anything. I had to some extent, I guess, shown some leadership in the newspaper guild, but I don't know there is any reason that is applied directly to running a report or part of a report, but, no, I had never edited before.

Eshleman: When did you start at the *Inquirer*?

Naughton: I got there in 1977 as national editor. I had a small desk mostly responsible for editing wire copy. There was one reporter in Washington in the Knight-Ridder bureau. There was one reporter in New York because Roberts had made the case that Philadelphia was so close it had to pay attention to New York. And there was one reporter on the national staff in Pittsburgh because Roberts had created the fiction that no self-respecting Philadelphia paper could ignore Pittsburgh when in fact the Pittsburgh bureau covered everything west of the Alleghenies.

I was blissfully ignorant of things like budgets, and as you may recall, there was a strike at the paper that year. I had therefore come to the very mistaken judgment that because there was a strike there had been money for the national staff that had not been spent, and so I could splurge at the end of the year on some big story that I wanted to cover. Which of course was exactly the opposite. The budget had all been spent but I didn't know that. So I set about thinking up an assignment for this guy in New York whom I didn't know very well, but who had been very impressive, Richard Ben Cramer. And my first idea was to send him to South Africa to write about the humanity of South Africa in Christmas week and Apartheid. And it turned out that South Africa would not give a visa to anyone from the *Inquirer* because they resented the editorials the paper had written about Apartheid. And the Washington bureau asked for help from papers in Knight-Ridder because Jim McCartney had been covering the peace process between Begin and Sadat and had gone to Israel for part one, but part two was going to be Christmas week in Egypt. McCartney's family was on his case about it and didn't want him to go. So they were trying to borrow somebody and I volunteered Cramer. And so my advice to Cramer which was very *New York Times* like was, "I want you to go to Egypt and cover the talks and then spend a week or so writing about what it all means."

Well, in my head I am thinking, "He is going to cover the talks. Then he's going to tell us in a very learned *New York Times*-ish way what the government of Israel is doing and the government of Egypt is doing, and our readers will be well served by this high-level reportage." So Cramer goes, and he covers the talks, and he did a fine job, you know. But it was not extraordinarily different from anybody else, and then he disappeared, and we really had very little opportunity to be in touch with him because we were on such a short budget, and we didn't want him to call. So he would cable every once in a while and very rarely get on the phone, and basically we would just wait for the story. And days went by, and I began to worry because we had not heard and here he is a Jew in

Cairo, and, yes, they've begun working on peace, but still maybe he's in deep trouble. And on the last day of the year, the story came from Cairo, and it was just a fabulous piece of work in which Cramer had captured the feelings of average everyday Cairo poor people who lived in a giant cemetery in the shadow of these beautiful mausoleums because they had no homes and whose expectations for how peace might change their lives were manifestly both unreal but powerful. And he reported what they were saying: "When there's peace in Sela? I shall have a home." "When there is peace in Sela I shall have a car." And on and on, and it was exactly the right move. Contrary to what I had anticipated, and Cramer was right to focus not on the governments but on the people who would be influenced by the conduct of the governments in the future and who as a result might be influencing the government then. And it was the best illustration of why it might be time and appropriate for the Egyptian government to spend less on armament and more on helping its own people. Roberts being Roberts – I mean this is a guy who once hired an editor from a fund for maintenance of equipment – Roberts somehow figured out how to scrounge up the money to keep Cramer over there for a year. And, as you know, he won the Pulitzer Prize.

So that became for me an object lesson in several things. First of all, it reinforced the notion I had as a reporter that the reporter knows what the story is better than the editor. And that Gene Roberts was absolutely right to want to put as many reporters in the field as he could in as many places. Let them tell the editors what the story was. And then also that Cramer was not unique but certainly abnormal at a major metropolitan paper in that era for having the good sense to write about real people, in a way that historically Ernie Pyle might have done and to tell the story through their lives and hopes. And finally, that once again, you don't have to be designated a leader to lead because what Cramer did was to set an example for all of Knight-Ridder. Roberts got together with the editors of the other three biggest Knight-Ridder papers in Miami, San Jose, and Detroit, and they cooked up a scheme to get the corporation to fund two foreign correspondents at each of those papers so that there would be a total of eight who would cover the world up to a certain level, and they would do it in the Cramer style, and we would all get the benefit of it. And of course, Cramer was one of the two at the *Inquirer*. So Cramer did that. If you had ever asked me as a neophyte editor how to go about getting two foreign correspondents, I wouldn't have had the slightest idea, but Gene Roberts saw the opportunity to build on a strength and made it into a great success and those eight correspondents existed as a foreign staff for three decades.

Eshleman: Tell me about the culture of the *Inquirer* when you arrived and as it changed through those years.

Naughton: I think it had already begun under Roberts to change for the better. It had been a literally corrupt paper, and not apparently a pleasant place to work. John McMullan had been sent by Knights to try to fix it, and he had done some very good things. He had hired some good people, but he had also created a reign of terror, and he had forced out a lot of people who probably should have been forced out, but in a way that was not conducive to creating a collaborative environment. Roberts got there in his good ole boy slowing-talking way and started just schmoozing with everybody. I am sure that had something of a positive effect. So it had likely already taken root. I don't know what exactly provoked the first substantial prank, but I had always been given to

pranks and something moved us to start thinking about doing something fun to Roberts. And so we hit upon putting the frogs in his office, or more truthfully in the bathroom of his office, on his 46<sup>th</sup> birthday. We hired the frogs from a frog farmer in New Jersey and put the frogs in his office, and Gene did exactly the right thing. He didn't go crazy. He didn't demand the head of whoever was responsible, although he had a pretty good idea who was involved. And he laughed. It began helping to set a tone for a place that not only could you do the kind of journalism you aspired to do, you could do it in a way that was fun and laugh. And make you want to come to work the next day. That has always been of great value to have a workplace where people wanted to come, in part just to be in it. So we consciously set about trying to embed that kind of culture in the place, and it was not easy. You know, one of the hardest things for any manager to do is nothing. And I learned along the way, in part by making several mistakes, that when an issue arose it was often not the best course of conduct to immediately resolve it. Sometimes if you slept on it, [it] resolved itself.

## **[Second side of part 2]**

And so doing nothing as a manager was often the best course, and as a general rule thinking not just once but a bunch of times before you acted was always useful. The place was hiring a lot of young people, young talented journalists as it became more widely known you could do good work. More and more attractive job applicants applied. When the *Bulletin* died, one of the things that happened was, as you will recall, the boat people then came as they called themselves. After the folks joined the staff and were then in the camp of their former enemy, they were really not sure how that was going to work. And fortunately, the year that most of them joined was also the year of Gene Roberts's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. In the wing ding that the staff threw for Gene Roberts's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in which we wound up getting the Goodyear Blimp to hover over his house in Center City with a sign saying, "The frog is 50" turned out to be the kind of thing that helped pull people together. Having on the staff folks like Carol Horner who loved a good time and who loved to be at the center of a good time and who loved to be asked to create a good time for a special occasion. And having her buy us an artifact like the Duke, this incredibly ugly portrait of John Wayne on velvet that became a totem of successful achievements at the paper that would be given to people when they did something noteworthy and travel around the country and across the globe and become this square object in brown wrapping paper that when it appeared at a Pulitzer party, it would provoke a chant: "Duke, Duke, Duke." Well, Horner worked at a place where that was not only encouraged, but funded. And it became an essential part of, I would like to think, the success of the journalism of the organization that it attracted the kind of people who it did.

Eshleman: Is that possible today, do you think?

Naughton: I think it is. I think it, like everything today, it's more difficult because there's so many tensions in news organizations just about survival let alone the thrill of spending money on a prank. Now let me add Gene Roberts and I spent small fortunes playing pranks on each other, but we did not charge Knight-Ridder. Knight-Ridder sometimes thought we did but we didn't. We did convince Knight-Ridder to release Carol Horner from other duties for a period of time when Gene was going to retire to

plan his retirement party. But, yes, I think that a Gene Roberts today running an organization with the level of trust that Gene had for his associates could succeed in creating the same kind of environment and that it would be not necessarily easier but it would be more lasting and more successful if the culture of the place was one where you could laugh. You know the best thing about being in the *Inquirer* newsroom many times was people looking over one another's shoulders and saying, "Wow, that's really nice." Rather than, "Damn, he did that, and now he's going to be on Page 1 instead of me." It was a more collaborative environment than any I ever worked in, one of my proudest days at the paper. The strike in 1985 was a terrible strike and went on too long, and we did our best to try not to do things that were crazy and that would make it hard to come back. But we had prepared for the end of the strike and we had set up all sorts of telephone trees that we would put into play when it ended, and so and so would call this many people to tell them when to come back and what to do. And the strike actually ended officially late in the day like 5:00 p.m., and we were going to try to put out a paper the next morning, and we never used the telephone tree because the entire staff did not have to be called. They wanted to come back to such an extent that they streamed in the paper and it turned out without anybody assigning it or asking it they had gathered the news. We had an investigative piece in the paper the next day. We didn't assign it, but it was reported and written [for] the paper the next day. It may not have been the best one we ever published, but it was damn fine. And that was a tribute to that culture and to that philosophy of Gene Roberts.

Eshleman: During your career at the *Inquirer* there were many good stories, Pulitzer Prize-winning stories. What stories stand out in your mind as the best stories while you were at the *Inquirer*?

Naughton: I don't think I would say what the best story was because there were so many good ones, and I'd be apt to leave out one that really deserved to be mentioned. But I will tell you the one that I have often cited as superlative in a variety of ways. First of all, it was conceived by a reporter and by a reporter who never won a Pulitzer, although in my judgment he should have won multiple Pulitzers – Don Drake. And the story was the idea that Don came up with "A Day in the Life [of] AIDS."

Eshleman: I remember that.

Naughton: Okay, now Don Drake had this idea. And he went to his editor, and he said, "You know AIDS is potentially going to be the worst scourge in the history of human kind, and what I would like to do is to capture what AIDS is all about in every conceivable way: science, medicine, sociology, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, etc. And write about a single day in the life of AIDS. He said, "I would need the help of ten or twelve reporters who would be sent various places and a couple photographers and they would go out and gather the material and bring it back, and then I would take it and polish it into [a] day in the life of AIDS. His editor said, "Great idea." Now many people do not and never will know that while others have gotten credit in San Francisco particularly for being ground-breaking reporters about AIDS, the truth is that Don was there ahead of almost everybody to an extent that many of his earliest stories were distributed by the Centers for Disease Control at the first conference they held on AIDS. So Don was really on the right track on what AIDS was all about, and so he and his

editor then went to whoever was next up the line – probably Steve Seplow – and they came to me and I said great idea, and we went with Gene Foreman to Gene Roberts. And Drake again outlined his idea and Roberts sat there as he did and he listened and he said, “I’ve got two conditions.” And Drake said, “Okay, what are they?” And Roberts said, “First of all, you can only have four open pages of the paper.” Well, you know for most American journalists that was not a serious limitation and Drake knew enough to think that in the end that wouldn’t be the limit even though Roberts said half a space had to go for display type and photos. And so Drake said yeah, he could live with that. Then Roberts said, “And it has to be in the paper the next day.” I thought Drake was going to have what at that point would have been his third heart attack. I mean he visibly paled at the audacity of trying to pull all that together as he conceived it in one day and put it in the next day’s paper.

He argued against it rather fiercely and that was something you could do with Roberts. You could argue against something with Roberts, and not always win, maybe not even mostly win, but he would listen and gradually he wore Drake down because he persuaded Drake that what Drake was trying to achieve was to document the immediacy of AIDS everywhere in the world. And there was no better way to say immediacy than for every single segment of the story to have the word yesterday in it. With some reluctance, Drake said okay. So we setup this little AIDS task force. Don Drake and Loretta Tofani whom we had hired from the *Washington Post* to be an AIDS beat reporter but she had only really begun, and Charlie Layton as their editor because Charlie was quick and not daunted by long-assigned projects. And so they spent some time polishing the concept, and as it wound up we sent something like 24 reporters and 13 photographers to every conceivable site in the world and the region and the city that would illustrate the various facets in “One Day in the Life of AIDS.” And they all got in position the very week that Black Monday occurred and the stock market teetered and we thought, “Oh, my God, we spent all this money and got everybody in position and it’s wasted.” But we stepped back and said, “Let’s wait a day and see what happens.” And we did. And things calmed a bit on the market so we said, “Let’s go ahead.” That Wednesday everybody reported for the Thursday paper. One of the ideas we had as managers of the project was that however many segments of the story – there were twenty-some – they wouldn’t all work out on that day. So it would help ease the difficulty of squeezing into the allotted space if some did not. As luck would have it, every single part worked out. And so the stuff started tumbling in initially from the farthest reaches of daylight because we started at dawn in Africa and that was the best one of the best pieces which was from David Zucchini and became the lead of the story, finding the victim of the disease in this little place in Africa, and it became more and more apparent as the day went on that Charlie and Loretta and Don Drake were not up to managing this enormous inflow of material.

So we started grabbing people from all over the paper to help. And they did so very willingly, and here’s the key thing. Toward the end of this process as people finished their day’s work, they came and volunteered to help. I am talking about columnists, Pulitzer Prize-winners. Great photographers, desk people doing mundane chores to try to make sure that this project happened. It was finished literally with no more than seconds before the first deadline. And I remember and will always remember two things that happened right after we made the deadline with this great story. One of them is that

I sat down and before they went out of my head wrote down the names of everybody who took part and it was I am sure – I no longer have the list or the identities all – but it was 120-some people on one story on one day. The second thing I remember is going to Loretta Tofani; I said, “Loretta, what would’ve happened at the *Washington Post* if at some point during the day it became apparent that this project wasn’t working?” She said, “I am afraid that people would have stood around watching us fail.” And they didn’t do that at the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. They didn’t want it to fail. And I can think of no better example than that.

Eshleman: That’s a good story. I talked with Gene [Foreman] and one of the things he suggested is that you were a terrific manager in terms of putting people in place to cover big stories. He mentioned specifically the Pope’s visit to the United States.

Naughton: Here’s the truth. I reported to Gene Foreman. I knew that Gene Foreman was methodical, careful, thorough, and that if I didn’t cover that story in a way that reflected his values, I would disappoint him. So I set about concocting a game plan that was probably the most elaborate one I ever concocted for who would be stationed where to cover every eventuality of the Pope’s visit, and I gave Gene a copy, and he’s always been impressed by that. The truth of the matter is I didn’t want to disappoint Gene Foreman.

Eshleman: That’s a good way to operate. How about some of the colorful characters that you’ve covered in your career, and I am thinking not only as a reporter, Frank Rizzo for instance? Did you have dealings with Rizzo?

Naughton: I didn’t personally have dealings with Rizzo, no.

Eshleman: Didn’t he come into the newsroom and say, “Get me Naughton”?

Naughton: No. He did come into the newsroom in a very meaningful way. Frank Rizzo was not was not a fan of the *Inquirer*, as you know. Frank Rizzo did not like the *Inquirer*. He, however, loved Carol Horner. Carol had covered his last and failed campaign, and it was impossible not to like Carol Horner, and she created a bond with Frank, through his wife principally loved Carol. And so there was a day that we decided to have some fun with Fran Duff, one of the senior editors at the paper. And it was her birthday, and she had made the mistake sometime not too long before that confiding that on her way to work one day, the waistband on her half slip had given way and fell to the ground, and she had ever so nonchalantly stepped out of it and kept going. So Carol Horner somehow persuaded Frank Rizzo to come to the *Inquirer* newsroom on the day we had a celebration of Fran Duff’s birthday and pretend that a very large quite crinoline undergarment that we had found somewhere at a secondhand shop. He had found on the street and had picked up and had, through his many contacts in the police department, learned it belonged to this woman at the *Inquirer*. And he had come to give it back to her. So he actually did that. So even the most anti-*Inquirer* person can be brought along for a good purpose.

Eshleman: Right. Good point.

Naughton: But certainly Hunter Thompson had to be one of the biggest characters. Also his partner in crime in 1972 Russel Crouse's son, Tim. I've often wondered how Tim was doing. He was younger even than those of us who were young in that campaign, and at first we thought he was just this nice kid from some college who was asking a lot of questions. And it took a while for us to realize that the backpack he had on did not hold all his belongings. It actually had a tape recorder, and he was tape-recording everything we said. So then we started having very lofty and elegant conversations every time he was in earshot. There was a Paul in Cleveland who had been elected to a couple of offices but was more often behind the scenes who played some campaign pranks that were successful and probably illegal and learning about them was interesting. There was also a guy early in my days at City Hall. I fell in love with the law director of the Loker administration. Now Ralph Loker was in a city with a lot of East Europeans, and he got elected on that basis. But he also had one of the shrewdest, wiliest, campaign managers, a guy named Granus J. Klemintovich. Who used to smoke cigarettes in a cigarette holder like he was out of some 1930s movie. He would say, "I am just a poor little alter boy from St. Stanislaus Parish" to try to persuade us that he was not this evil genius behind the scenes. But we knew better. There were an awful lot of interesting people.

Eshleman: Yeah, yeah.

Naughton: One of the most interesting in a different was Diane Sawyer. She was a young assistant in the Nixon press office. Bob Semple of the *Times* among others was, from a distance, of course, madly in love with her because she was gorgeous and smart as could be. And nobody held it against her that she worked for Richard Nixon. Yeah, there have just been too many.

Eshleman: Nixon the most tragic?

Naughton: He certainly was a tragic figure because he accomplished many good things, particularly environmental things. I mean it's among other tragedies that the Republican Party today is so different from the one that he belonged to that cared about the environment in a very meaningful way. And he was tragic. But there have been a lot of tragic figures, the Kennedy family. I didn't know them well. The day Martin Luther King was assassinated was the day before Bobby Kennedy was due to make a speech in Cleveland. And I spent almost the entire night at Bobby's headquarters in a hotel waiting to find out if he was still going to come and what he might say. And it was, as it turned out, exactly the right thing to do both to speak and to speak as eloquently as he did to the nation about the meaning of Martin Luther King. That's the kind of moment you just can't imagine ever-having had. I mean I had nothing to do with Bobby or the speech, but I felt like I was a witness to history in the making.

Eshleman: Are you optimistic about the future of journalism? All these wonderful experiences you described and the friends you've made and the camaraderie you've gone through. Is that kind of thing ahead of us?

Naughton: I am optimistic, and I am optimistic because of the people who are journalists. Not the companies who do it, but people who, given the opportunity, know how to do it and want to do it the right way. And if the companies don't develop the

right business plans to facilitate that, it will never happen. But I think even if they don't do it, there are examples around the country already of little consortiums cropping up mostly on a shoestring or under the auspices of one foundation or another that are trying to accomplish it in ways that keep alive the spirit of the journalism you and I know at its best. It will not be easy; it's very hard. And it's hard to imagine it being done without the underlying financial support of whatever organization is enabled to do it. There's a second aspect of it that gives me hope. Once again, it's through Gene Roberts.

Last year, my wife and I paid a visit to Gene at his house in Bath about a week after he had received his Kindle. Now this is a guy who has never been very good with equipment. The first piece of computer hardware that was installed in his office at the *Inquirer*, I remember when it was installed, and he called Carol Damiano, his assistant, into his office, and he pointed in front of his desk at an outlet on the wall where there was a thick orange cord and he said, "What's that?" Carol said, "Look, Gene," and she pointed as the cord snaked around his desk and to the back of the room onto a low table where sat a computer. You know, an early version of our computer system. And he said, "Oh." He actually never used it much. People would occasionally go in and call up a story, and then he would stick his nose right up against it and read it. But we learned that he wanted us to print it out and hand it to him on paper. So I spent years twitting him about the fact that he had never sent me an email. Even when he taught at the University of Maryland and that was their norm. He didn't have the ability to do this. So here's this guy who got a Kindle and I was astonished. So I said, "Well, Gene, how do you like your Kindle?" And he said, "I haven't opened it yet."

Well, I am a techno junkie. I mean, I had had it opened the minute it arrived. And as it happened, Gene was dismayed to learn that he could not get the *New York Times* delivered in Bath, North Carolina, so he now gets it on Kindle. He now does email. He now is electronic. And I am thinking, "Oh, my God, if he can read the news on the Kindle, there's hope for everyone." So I said that and written that a couple times, and I am going to see him next week. I am going to try to persuade him it's time to get an iPad, which I have. And which does that and much more and will entertain his grandchildren, among other things. And I seriously believe that if news organizations do figure out how to create apps, not just for the iPad but for the Kindle and other electronic readers and mechanisms and whatever comes along in the future, that do not gouge the audience, which they are currently doing. Or are not simplistic, which too many of them are, and are more like *Wired* magazine, which is astonishingly good, and interactive. And make you want to look at even the ads, which is the key, because if the ads are attractive and the news organization can get at minimum a click-through fee to take the reader to the ad and, better yet, an advertising fee for presenting an interactive commercial that shows the car wheeling around a mountain curve which the wire app does. They will have a shot at it. And if they have a shot at it and eventually wean people from the paper product and save the sixty percent or more of overhead that it takes to print and distribute an aging artifact product, which I hate to say, but it is. Then we will have a shot, and we will have the underpinnings of financial resources to do it right. So that's my hope.

Eshleman: That's a wonderful way to end, but I want to ask you if there's anything else you'd like to throw into our discussion here. I think we covered a lot of different things.

Naughton: Lord knows if there is, I don't know what it is.

Eshleman: Thank you.

Naughton: And I've probably run totally out of voice to say it anyway.

Eshleman: That's great.

Naughton: You asked good questions, thank you.

Eshleman: Thank you.

**[End of interview]**