

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

Conversations with Bill Kristol

Guest: Brit Hume, Senior Political Analyst, Fox News

Taped October 6, 2014

Table of Contents

I: Fox News the Start-Up 0:15 – 20:19

II: Inside *Special Report* 20:19 – 27:52

III: Newspaperman Beginnings 27:52 – 38:36

IV: Reporting from Washington 38:36 – 59:04

V: Our Media Today 59:04 – 1:19:52

I: Fox News the Start-Up (0:15 – 20:19)

KRISTOL: Welcome back to CONVERSATIONS. I'm Bill Kristol, and I'm very pleased to be joined today by my friend, Brit Hume, a distinguished career in television broadcasting, also print, which fewer people know about, but we can talk about that.

The face of Fox News for many people who are – well, for many, many people, but only the face of Fox, the face of only Fox News for people who are 25 or 30 years old, but for people of my generation, you were the face of ABC News, so.

HUME: It was a good time.

KRISTOL: How did that happen? You went from one of the leading network news programs – network news organization to a fledgling startup. That's –

HUME: Well, I was their White House correspondent. This would have been 1996. I was at the end of a contract and looking for – I wanted to come out of the White House and I had always thought and I never thought it would happen that if someone ever created a network that was determined to do a more balanced approach to the news, particularly political news and Washington news, that there would be a market for that and it would go.

And ABC News had decided that it was going to start a cable channel and I thought well that would be an interesting outlet for a guy who's finished his White House career and looking for somewhere to go. And then of course, Microsoft and NBC were teaming up to create what is now MSNBC and that looked like it was going to be a hard news channel. And then all –

KRISTOL: CNN already existed, I guess.

HUME: CNN News was already there and dominant. There was great skepticism in the media world as to whether there was room for a second, let alone a third cable news channel. And then Rupert Murdoch, whom I knew slightly, announced that he was going to weigh in. And the howls of ridicule of him for thinking that he of all people was going to be able to compete in this arena were pretty deafening.

But I knew Murdoch and I'm like a lot of people, I didn't think he was the antichrist, I liked him, I had met him in Washington and I found him to be amazingly unassuming and genial and extraordinarily candid

and an interesting man, and a very nice man. And so I thought, “Well, if he’s going to do that, that’s interesting, I might be interesting in that.”

And then I heard that he’d hired Roger Ailes, whom Roger, of course, was a former man of, done many things in his career. He had been, of course, a noted political media consultant, and then he’d been the guy that had run CNBC for GE and turned that, what had been a moribund franchise into something that was very successful, and I knew him as a straight-shooter and a ferocious competitor. And I thought, you know, I was under contract with ABC. I couldn’t really monkey around with that and, but I thought, “I hope I hear from those people.” And one day I did.

KRISTOL: Is that right? That’s amazing.

HUME: Yeah, I got a call from Roger Ailes.

KRISTOL: So this is ’96?

HUME: It was ’96, this was about March or –

KRISTOL: And Fox doesn’t yet exist, it’s not yet –

HUME: Fox, not only does Fox not exist, Fox doesn’t have a studio, doesn’t have one studio. It had a little bureau here in Washington, which was serving the affiliated stations. The line-up of Fox affiliated stations in terms of news was pitiful. I mean, it was a full blown network, but the overwhelming majority of Fox News stations around the country, Fox stations around the country didn’t do any news, none.

KRISTOL: Because they were newer, I guess, so –

HUME: Well, they were like, you know, they were like – there was a handful of large ones and they did news but most of them, nearly all of them, nearly all of them I think didn’t do news. So unlike ABC or NBC, they didn’t have the infrastructure around the country of stations that could help them to bring in news content. And not only that, they didn’t have any kind of a national studio or anything.

And I met with Roger Ailes in March of 1996, and he said he was going on the air in October. And I thought, “No, you’re not, and if you do, you won’t like what happens.” Now, I thought he’d make it eventually but I didn’t think he’d ever make October. And the time went by and that summer, he actually he was looking for a Washington, somebody to run a Washington operation, set it up for them because they were on this crash schedule in New York to get the studios they were building – all this stuff put together to go on the air. And they had some people down here. And they had leased some space in Washington but they didn’t really have a bureau. And it was summertime, to go on the air in October they said.

Well, they hired Kim Hume, my wife, who was leaving ABC. She had been there for not as long as I had but for a long time and asked her to get the thing started, to get the Washington bureau started. And she had from August until October to do that and not only that, to get it equipped so that it could participate in the White House pool, which is an operation where each network takes a turn day by day furnishing material to all the networks because you can’t have network in every event. And we needed a certain critical mass in order to be able to do that.

Well, she got that done and they went on the air in October, and it was way better than I ever thought it would be. I couldn’t believe they made the deadline, and I was still talking to ABC about what they might have to offer and they had nothing comparable to what Roger and Rupert were talking about, as far as I was concerned. So I left and went to work January of 1997 at Fox News.

KRISTOL: Which at that point had not much camerage, I think that’s the term they use or it wasn’t –

HUME: Wasn’t on in New York, wasn’t even on in its home city of New York. I mean it was on here.

KRISTOL: I guess that's right. I remember watching it.

HUME: But I mean you talk about no viewers, I mean it was a – it was a wasteland. We didn't have any viewers, and nobody had heard of Fox News. They thought of Fox, they thought of the local station.

KRISTOL: I remember the astonishment in sort of media circles when you made the job. That was a huge patch for Fox News, gave it instant credibility here in Washington, certainly, and I think around the country to some degree. And so okay, so you sign up. So it's January of '97.

HUME: People said, "Why did you do that? Why would you leave ABC?," which was like the Yankees of network news at the time, you know, to go to an expansion team. And I thought, "Well, this is no ordinary expansion team" because I did – Murdoch is relentless when he pursues something and I knew Roger, and with Roger, failure is never an option.

And I thought this is – people said, "How did you just? What? Did it take a lot of" – it was the easiest decision I ever made. It was a good decision. I like the opportunity. I liked the concept and so I just signed up.

KRISTOL: And we all think of you obviously for the more than a decade that you anchored *Special Report* and made it the best news show I think on television. But you didn't – that's not how you started.

HUME: No. It was unclear what I was going – I wanted to do analytical commentary of the kind that I kind of do now. And you know I always had this management responsibility. My title was Washington Managing Editor and I think I was chief correspondent and managing editor, something like that, an elaborate title, which was kind of silly I guess. But –

KRISTOL: Well, but you had a lot of very young people working with you. They needed manage – real editing in terms of what's – what's good news judgment.

HUME: Kim, my wife, really ran the place but I had – I kind of tended to the correspondents because I was one and I kind of and tried to take their temperature and I also weighed in in meetings twice a day with the people in New York, including Roger on what we were going to do editorially. And so I had – I was busy.

And about November or so of that year, Roger and his team had focused all their efforts on getting some clearances to be broadcast in New York and many other places. And he had – he finally turned his attention to try to do something with the program, and which some of it was working and a lot of which was not, which is what you'd expect with a new startup. And he said, he asked me to talk to him a little bit and he said, "I want to start a new show with you as anchor, we're going to put it on 6 o'clock."

Bill O'Reilly was at 6 o'clock then, he was going to move him to 8 o'clock, change the name of his show from *The O'Reilly Report* – everything was the somebody report and so he was the O'Reilly; it was going to be called *The O'Reilly Factor*, and he wanted me to do a show at 6 o'clock sort of politics, Washington and so forth. And I said, "Well, I don't, I'm really not equipped to do a talk show, all I know how to do is do a news show." And he said, "Fine, that's fine, that's just fine with me."

And so – so that was about November and so we hired a guy, a terrific veteran producer from ABC News who I had worked with named Jim Eldridge and he came. And so we're – it's around January or so and we're bumbling along, looking toward a March start date, right. And the Lewinsky scandal broke.

KRISTOL: Not to interrupt. Explain one thing to our viewers, which is doing a news show, and I've just seen this obviously as an occasional panel participant, it's much harder than doing a talk show. A panel show, you have a couple of guests, they sit here like us, they talk 8 minutes, the next guest. You're talking about 60 minutes of news, the production –

HUME: Right. Multiple different sources that have to come in, tape, the reports have to be – have to be reported, shot, written, produced, edited, and brought to air. And you need studios and many directors and you need an awful lot, an awful lot goes into an hour.

KRISTOL: And the competition is harder because people don't, you know, if you have a talk, an interview show and your guests this day are talking about ISIS and Ebola and the guests the next – it's not like you're going to be criticized much for not talk – you can talk about a wide variety of topics. Whereas a news show, you've got to be covering the news. If you don't have the main story of the day because you happened not to have a cameraman in the right place, you look, you know you look bad.

HUME: So the Lewinsky scandal breaks, and it's the biggest thing in town. I mean, and you know, it's everywhere and everybody is all over it, and we're all over it at Fox and we have no idea how this is going to turn out.

And I'm sort of sitting there watching and thinking sometime in March we'll be able to get on the story when we finally get all of the things we need together and we have directors and we have a studio and we have all the things you need. And Kim comes to me and says, "Brit, you know that the time to start your show would be now." I said, "Yeah, I know but we're doing it in March." She said, "Remember *Nightline*." Now, *Nightline* at ABC News, which was a tremendous success and remains so, grew out of a series of specials that was done on a nightly basis during the Iran hostage crisis – remember that?

KRISTOL: Yeah. I had forgotten that that's how it started.

HUME: And they did it and they would, they would start it at 11:30 and unlike CBC and NBC, ABC didn't have a late night talk show to command rating so the stations really had that time. So we had to get the stations to agree to yield the time to get that – those – but it was such an urgent story that the stations could not say no.

And then, of course, once the network had the time, ABC News wanted to keep it, and out of that grew *Nightline*, and *Nightline* became this tremendously prestigious and very successful and very high quality program. But it was born out of a big news story.

KRISTOL: The Iran hostage crisis.

HUME: And Kim said, "You know, you should start this now, this is the ideal time to do it." And I said, "Well, we can't." She said, "Well, I'm just saying." And I thought, you know, I probably ought to take this to Roger but we're nowhere near ready.

KRISTOL: Did any other show at that time come from Washington even because –

HUME: Well, *Fox News Sunday* did.

KRISTOL: That's right but there was a big infrastructure in New York, which was Bill O'Reilly. But in Washington, there was no expectation of having a daily –

HUME: There was no – no, there was no, nothing – nothing there to do that. There was a studio that could be used but it wasn't set up for anything but *Fox News Sunday*. So I called Roger and I said, "You know, Kim brought this to me and I feel sort of obliged to run it by you. I think it's not possible, I don't think we're ready." He said, "We should do it tonight."

KRISTOL: Is that right?

HUME: I said, "Tonight?" He said, "Yeah, start it tonight. I'll tell everybody what to do. We'll clear the decks. We'll move O'Reilly. We'll do everything. We're going to do it right now. She's right. This is the right thing to do." And I thought at no company where I have ever worked would a decision like that be made that way.

You know, it was said to me as I was talking to them about going over to Fox that this is a company that operates differently, it's – there's a lot of independence among the units in a sense of willingness to take chances and to do things and do them in a different way. But I'd never seen anything like this. And I was terrified.

So we cobbled together as best we could some kind of a show. We borrowed the *Fox News Sunday* studio and we sort of – we sort of figured our way through the first 35 or 40 minutes of what we could get on the air. And I would do an interview; that would take one segment. We'd do news packages as we could put together with the staff we had and then I thought, "Well, maybe we should do a panel." I always liked panels. I like watching them. So I like.

So we asked Fred [Barnes], Mara Liasson – and then Mort Kondracke – to come down to the studio and watch, who was covering the White House, then for NPR. So she would stand up on the White House lawn where we did have a camera and take part in this panel that we did on the first few shows. I mean, it was just a way to fill the time. I was just trying to get to the end of the hour with something on the air because we were desperate. And I found the panel, I liked doing it, I liked moderating the panel. And the reason was is I was interested in what those people had to say.

KRISTOL: And they were all reporting, just –

HUME: Yeah, they were all reporting, that's right, that's right. And – and Mara from the White House lawn seemed to have no trouble cutting in and having something to say as if she were there in the studio but having her presence there gave you kind of a touchstone from which to proceed. It just worked.

And you know as many people now know, it's wildly popular and has become sort of the signature feature of the program. And now, it wasn't the first panel that was ever done but now they're everywhere. But so that was – and the show –

KRISTOL: And did you know right away it was going to succeed or that there would be a second day so to speak, when you got off the air at 7 pm?

HUME: Well, we wondered, we thought we could do a panel two or three times a week. And then you know they were short enough that everybody on it hadn't exhausted everything they had to say by the end of the second or third night, so we just kept doing it. And then – and over time of course, our ability to produce news from around the world and from Washington and so forth to fill up the rest of the show developed. And it became a much fuller newscast than it had been originally and I was able to get out of doing that interview segment I used to do every night, which I've always thought of myself as a very average interviewer at best. And I was glad to be relieved of that and the show went on.

What happened really was, Bill, we did – we made some progress and developed some audience and the Lewinsky scandal brought a lot of interest and the 2000 election brought a lot of interest, but what really did it was the Florida recount – that was tremendous for us because the people who were worried about how that would come out wanted some place where they could trust the coverage, people who were conservatives or Republicans or neither but worried. And we really made an effort to cover that story well. And that built our audience.

And then 9/11 came and in the aftermath of 9/11 where much of the media was consumed with this handwringing about "Why do they hate us and what have we done wrong and why has American foreign policy led us to this pass where we're under a terrorist attack and so forth," we didn't look at it that way.

And I remember thinking at the time, you know the rest of the media are really leaving an opening here, and we started putting a little American flag, I put a little American flag in my lapel every night and some people were critical of that. And I said well, you know, Fox News isn't located in Switzerland and we're not, you know, we kind of –

KRISTOL: A citizen of the world.

HUME: Yeah, we're not citizens of the world, we're American journalists. And it was like picking up money off the street. I mean much of the coverage was so noxious to so many people that we really picked audience. And when the dust settled after 9/11, Fox News Channel was number one in the ratings and it has been there every since. I thought it would take 10 years to be competitive. If someone had told me – I mean I was down with that, I was ready to – I just thought if we could get close to them, we'd be fine, we'd have a life and the network would go on and so on. If someone said in five years or less than five years, you're going to be first and you're going to – you know I was – it was success beyond our – at least my immediate dreams.

KRISTOL: Well, you guys deserve a huge amount of credit. I remember, I guess my contract with ABC ran out at the end of '99 and I did some sort of freelancing, ad hoc stuff on Fox.

HUME: I wanted you, I wanted you on Fox.

KRISTOL: That's nice of you.

HUME: Remember I called you up in a hotel room one time and got in your face about being on somewhere because I wanted you on with us?

KRISTOL: Is that right? I've blocked that out, unfortunately. But I remember election night 2000 where we sat there till 4 am in the New York studio. But I agree.

9/11 was, I guess – I think I was on *Fox News Sunday* sort of by accident a week or two after 9/11 but then actually it just without anyone really saying anything it became a regular, mostly regular. Then I was, of course, a regular for about 10 years and were – we were on the panel together there. And Tony Snow I think –

HUME: And you were on all the election night panels.

KRISTOL: Yes, so those were really fun. And I guess – wasn't it '04 when we did? The Republican convention was in New York, as I recall, that on one of those nights, maybe the first night, we beat one of the networks or all the networks, one of the network –

HUME: Well, I think at one convention, we beat – the first time we did, I don't remember how many times it happened but it happened on the first night, we beat one of them and a couple nights, we beat everybody.

KRISTOL: I think that's right. It was the first time that cable, I think certainly for us maybe any cable news show had actually gotten more viewers than network news, which obviously has a huge advantage since, what, only two-thirds of the homes have cable or something like that. So you're – yeah. That was fun. You're right, how many, so that was only what 6, 7 years since it started. That's really amazing.

HUME: It was amazing. And at the time, it seemed like it did well, but looking back on it, wow.

KRISTOL: And it seems like it's been pretty steady. I'd say my experience from the decade was once it got going though I mean what's interesting I think about Roger, Rupert, and you and Kim and the people running Fox is you were willing to make quick decisions decisively but then let things go if they were going well. I mean, a lot of these shows have been on for a long time.

HUME: When you think of the number of anchors and shows that the other cable channels had gone through during this whole period, it just goes – the list goes on and on and on. And Roger was willing to put something in place and then let it find itself. And after a while, if it didn't, he would try and efforts would be made and if just couldn't, then it would go.

But, you know, he was more – a lot of people think of him as some sort of hands-on show doctor but he would let things go and give people autonomy as long as he could see that what they were trying to do made some sense. The other thing about Roger was he's a rare combination.

When I was at ABC News, of course, we worked for the great (INAUDIBLE) who was an impresario and an extraordinarily talented guy and he knew all about sets and lighting and all of that. He has a great judge of talent. He understood all of the techniques of television. He pioneered instant replay when he was a sports leader at ABC. But he wasn't a manager, and the combination of qualities that he had was very rare.

To find that combination of qualities, somebody who knew television, who got news, could create programming, and do those creative things, and manage was unheard of. That's Roger. It's a combination I've never seen in one person anywhere.

KRISTOL: Yeah, it's amazing.

II: Inside *Special Report* (20:19 – 27:52)

KRISTOL: I think people would be interested. I get asked this question a lot. You must get asked even more. How does it work behind the scenes, how does a show like *Special Report* get done? I mean, give us a day in the life of *Special Report*.

HUME: Well, a lot of the decisions are made – *Special Report* is largely a product of the Washington Bureau and the Washington news but things are taken in from elsewhere. But just looking at it as a Washington product, decisions about what stories are going to be covered the next day are largely made the night before in a late afternoon meeting and they deploy everybody and look at the schedule of events the days ahead and anticipate –

KRISTOL: So there's a meeting which you as anchor –

HUME: I didn't go. We were represented in the meeting but I was fortunate that I had my wife who shares a set of news values with me running the place and driving that whole process. And she would ask me about something if she thought I would have a question about it but it didn't happen very often. So you come in in the morning and there's an array of events that are going to be covered, kind of a menu of things. And we had a meeting every day I guess it was 10:30 in which you would kind of map out what would be done.

KRISTOL: At that meeting, you as I recall did – not that I was usually in it but occasionally once or twice.

HUME: Yeah, I ran that meeting. I ran that meeting and I used to do something I had never seen done in any other networks which correspondents who were on beats who were available in the bureau, I would have them in the meetings because they were on beats and their crews were in place and everything was – you know I would ask them what they wanted to do, what they thought was the story.

KRISTOL: So the Pentagon – you'd say what's the news today from –

HUME: And what do you guys think at the White House, what on the Hill and so forth? We'd kind of pull all that together and then we would pick panel topics and they'd map it out and the producer and the process would go forward and everybody would go about their business during the course of the day and some time in mid-afternoon if nothing had broken or whatever, we might have to juggle the rundown of the order in which we were going to do things.

And I would send out a memo every day to the panelists, often asking them initially what they wanted to talk about. I would provide several subjects with some research and ask them to vote on it because you don't want people on your program talking about things that they're not really interested in. You kind of want them talking about things that they're fired up about and that they care about and know about.

So that's how we did it in those days. And we also did this thing, we did this thing at the end. They had a peculiar situation that they didn't want shows to run up to the last commercial, go to commercial and the next show have to rise out of a commercial break at the end of an hour at the top of the next hour. They wanted you to run, to hold your audience in place right up to the hour and give that next show a chance to grab that audience.

Well, our structure of our panels was such that that was awkward to do because we didn't want to break it up into three parts, we wanted to do it in two. And so we had to figure something out to hold the audience, and I thought what we'll do is a light piece of some kind, that we would scavenge the world for a video or something to do. And every day, I would go back and what they found and I would always write into it. And I don't know if that practice is still being followed. But I was very, I thought that little piece was very important.

KRISTOL: It would often be something from the *Tonight Show* or from Comedy Central or –

HUME: We – I never used –

KRISTOL: Is that right? Well, then maybe since your time, they've descended to that –

HUME: Jon Stewart did not appear because I wanted – people used to come to me and say where do you find those things? Now, if we took something that was like one of those segments in the *Tonight Show*, a videotaped segment, and sometimes they'll touch on politics and it made it relevant to us, we would label it on the –

KRISTOL: Well, sure, you gave credit.

HUME: The *Tonight Show*, right. People would still come and say, "Where'd you find that?" It was amazing.

KRISTOL: I guess you found stuff online. This is where the Internet –

HUME: Online and sometimes I'd go back and look at what they had and I'd say, "We don't have anything." And then there would be this frantic scrounging for something. But we usually came up with something.

KRISTOL: I didn't realize that that last segment began out of a kind of necessity. So, yeah, but Fox does that. I guess, maybe all the cables do now. But of course, regular network television does not do that, which is to have a hand off at 7 o'clock sharp from you or from Bret Baier now to whoever –

HUME: That was something we were told to do.

KRISTOL: But that was a smart move by Roger, I guess, right, because presumably if you're watching your show, enjoy your show –

HUME: You can inherit the audience.

KRISTOL: Interesting. A lot goes into it. I'd say when people ask me about the panels and I was obviously on Fox News Sunday all the time and occasionally –

HUME: You were often on –

KRISTOL: – to be on *Special Report*, which I very much enjoyed. Yeah, people kind of expected them to be more prepared than they really were, in the sense that, I mean, more scripted. And I would tell people that we agree on the topics. Obviously, you're not going to get blindsided except once in a blue moon if there's some breaking news at 6:02 pm or something. But there's no discussion really ahead of time of

what you're going to say or the order in which Brit's going to call on you or anything like that. And people were always surprised with it. They think it's TV. They've seen like some movie about TV and they think it's all – totally teleprompter.

HUME: Teleprompter. No, I would often read the introductions to the panel, right, I would read that off a prompter or we'd play a sound bite and I'd say you know— I mean I guess I did. I'm thinking back now, it's been 6 years and my memory's – But that was almost entirely a spontaneous segment.

KRISTOL: Yeah, very much so.

HUME: And frequently and I didn't like to interject myself too much in those mostly because I was really eager to hear what these people who are friends of mine and people I admired and liked and I wanted to know what they thought. I mean I for my own personal interest wanted to know. So I would often just one person would say something and I'd just nod to the next person.

KRISTOL: And you let the panelists argue with each other a little more than some moderators who like to ask a question of each individual panelist. Yeah, no, I thought it was a great job. But I'd say on the other hand, so people I think overestimate how – well, not overestimated, mistook the fact that the panels weren't scripted and they thought they were. But on the show itself, I found people didn't have a sense. They would be amazed if you told them how much went into a well done, not just a three minute segment from, you know with a reporter from the Pentagon and footage of what's happening in Iraq and a general interviewed on tape and you know two – I mean that's a very –

HUME: A lot goes into that. A lot that goes into that.

KRISTOL: And compressing the news into that, that's a real –

HUME: And I believed and believe to this day that these taped reports remain an extremely effective and efficient way to communicate the news because you can tell people what happened, you can show them a little bit of it, you can show some reaction to it and you stitch all of this together and if you're good as a journalist and with some sort of a little bit of perspective or an analytical observation at the end, that delivers a significant chunk of information in a very short period of time in a way that's fast paced and interesting. And I believe in the forum. Now we're kind of in a live shot world now and there's a certain premium in TV news today on being live so that you go to a correspondent and he's standing there at the scene of whatever it is and he opines for or states some news for a little bit and then there may be some video or sort of rolled in. But when I was doing that program, we tried very hard to do these taped pieces in the way that we'd done them back in the network news heyday when I was working at ABC News. And I think for the most part, we did a pretty good job of it.

KRISTOL: No, I think you sure did.

III: Newspaperman Beginnings (27:52 – 38:36)

KRISTOL: So, before Fox News, there was ABC News. You were a senior correspondent there at the Hill and then the White House and some things before the Hill, I suppose. That's when I first encountered you I think.

HUME: Twenty-three years I was there and I was a general assignment – I had been a consultant to their documentary unit for a few years and they asked me if I wanted to try it as a correspondent. This was 1979. No, I'm sorry, 1976. And I at first said no and I had this, had had this image of television correspondents as these slightly comical characters with spray, hairspray and makeup and speaking to this inanimate object, camera. And I thought of myself as a reporter with a notebook in his hip pocket and –

KRISTOL: But you were. Well, give us a quick account of that, yeah.

HUME: I got out of college in 1965 with absolutely no idea of what I wanted to do with my life, no idea. Nor did I – I had no particular ambitions. I was sort of sorry to be getting out of college.

KRISTOL: You had majored in?

HUME: I had majored in English, which for journalism purposes was an almost total waste of time. If I had it to do over, I'd major in history. I was at the University of Virginia, which had no journalism program and if they'd had one, I don't think I would have been in it. And I spent the summer of that year looking for work and I was trying to find a job as a teacher, I tried to find a job as various other things. And finally through an employment agency I got an interview with the old Hartford *Connecticut Times*.

I was living up there because my then wife was from there and her mother had room in her house to accommodate the newlyweds. And so we were up there and I decided to take this job as a cover reporter for the old *Hartford Times*. Now, the newsroom, Bill, of 1965, as you may be aware, was not very different from the newsroom in 1935. And if you've seen that, you know the front page of the newspaper movies of that era, you know what it was like. It was noisy and the typewriters are clattering and the news editor is yelling copy at the top of his voice across the news room. And that's what this place was like.

And I was in there the first day and I remember looking around and I thought this is the coolest place I've ever been. Now, there was things are changing all the time and there was this sort of irreverent spirit about the atmosphere of the place. And the *Hartford Times* was a Gannett paper but it had been an independent paper for many years was a pretty good paper, they had pretty high standards. And it was a real blessing to find that job because I loved it on the first day. And for someone with no ambition and no plans and not great prospects who had been a lousy student in college, what an unbelievable blessing. And I've been a news man and really a reporter ever since.

KRISTOL: What did they send you out to cover to begin?

HUME: Oh, they sent me out to cover the suburban town of Glastonbury, and I remember the big issue in that town, which was making the transition from being kind of a farm town into a bedroom town for Hartford and for the United Aircraft Pratt Whitney at East Hartford, there was a big issue, which was the location of the new town dump – or sanitary landfill as the town fathers insisted on calling it but everybody called it the dump. And the old one was full.

And that was a story that was out there to be gotten but nobody knew what the plans were. And there was some local regional planning commission with whom advanced plans had to be filed and I got a tip that had found a location and this is where they were planning to put it and everything and this was a huge story in that little town. And I got the story and I called the chairman of the town council to get his comment on the story and he said to me, "You can't publish that story. You can't do that." And I said, "Well, I think we're going to go ahead." And he said, "I'm sorry." He said, "Let me speak to Nat Cistero."

Nat Cistero was the assistant managing editor of the paper, he lived in that town and Nat Cistero was a newspaper man who had worked his way up from the loading dock to become the assistant managing editor of the paper. He was a newspaper man to his core. And he came down to my desk and picked up a headset. We used to have those headsets that you wore in the newsroom. And sat there at my desk listening to this guy whom he knew personally telling him about how he couldn't.

And I was standing there with the finished copy in my hand and at one point, he looked around me and he could see that I was still – and he looked at me like, "What are you still doing here?" And he goes – which meant, that goes up to the composing room. And I thought, "You mean there's no chance we're not – we're just going to go ahead and run this story anyway." And I was new at this business. I thought this is really cool.

KRISTOL: That's great. That's fantastic.

HUME: Anyway, it's a story that it really stuck with me and I thought this is a great business to be in. And I worked there for a number of years and I kind of drifted into television.

KRISTOL: How did you get to Washington?

HUME: Well, I'm from here.

KRISTOL: That's right, you were from here.

HUME: I grew up here and I have to say that although I was inattentive to the scene here in Washington as a kid, I mean it was all around me, and I had schoolmates whose parents were in the government and so on. And I – so I was aware of it.

And it made the news in a place like Hartford seem a little pallid. And so I was kind of eager to get back here. Also because I wanted to be near the Redskins, which were a passion of mine and to this day still are – more of an affliction, I guess, than a passion.

KRISTOL: Vince Lombardi more of a passion.

HUME: Well, my allegiance dates from back well before that. Anyway, I ended up after working in Connecticut for a while, I worked for Hartford for UPI, which was great training. And then I lived here.

We moved back here and I commuted to work for the *Evening Sun* in Baltimore. All three of those institutions are either defunct or not what they once were. I hope I wasn't the cause. And then I worked for Jack Anderson, the syndicated columnist, the muckraking syndicated columnist –

KRISTOL: He was a huge deal back then.

HUME: He was. He was the most – he had inherited from Drew Pierson who had been his boss the most widely syndicated column in the country. It was called "The Washington Merry-Go-Round."

KRISTOL: And it appeared what like four days a week or five?

HUME: Well, it was five days a week. And –

KRISTOL: So "The Washington Merry-Go-Round." A good title.

HUME: And it was very successful and –

KRISTOL: So inside gossip –

HUME: Also muckraking, investigative reporting. And investigative reporting did not enjoy the cachet that it now has back then. It was considered sort of the dirty work of journalism and there weren't a lot of people clamoring to do that kind of work. And I wanted to do it.

Somewhere along the way, I had caught the idea that that was really important to do and interesting. And so I went to work for him and that was – that was a great experience. I worked there for about nearly 3 years and it was fun. And talk about an irreverent spirit. I mean, there was no place like it. And Jack Anderson had this fire and brimstone public persona. He was a devout Mormon and the private Jack Anderson was the sweetest, gentlest guy in the world. He was really a peach of a boss.

KRISTOL: And you broke a lot of news, as I recall.

HUME: Well, during that period, he won the Pulitzer Prize for what were called the Indian-Pakistan Papers, which was an unbelievable cache of classified documents which established to anyone's satisfaction that the Nixon Administration during the India-Pakistan conflict had tilted toward Pakistan

while declaring itself completely neutral to the whole thing. And the Administration had just prevaricated all over the place about it. And, of course, the story being against the Nixon Administration in a way had been much appreciated by some in Washington, for reasons that you and I both well now understand.

KRISTOL: Kissinger was a little upset about it destroying American statecraft and all this.

HUME: That was a big deal. And then there was a story about ITT, the big conglomerate, which had a set of antitrust cases pending before the courts and that the Justice Department was pursuing and it was a novel issue whether antitrust law applied to conglomerate mergers. And the problem for ITT was that the Justice Department had never lost an antitrust case in the Supreme Court and they were – ITT was very eager to get rid of these cases and allow its ownership of a bunch of disparate companies to stand.

And they put up a bunch of money to support the Republican Convention. which was going to be in San Diego near the president's – President Nixon's – this was, I guess, in '72 – was going to be, originally was going to be in San Diego. And they put up a bunch of money, and a lobbyist for ITT wrote a very indiscreet memo to her boss that got, that came to Jack Anderson's office through the mail. It was the original ribbon copy. And this lobbyist, a very colorful sort of tugboat Annie character named Dita Beard had written this memo. And I remember the last line of it to, sardonically, to her boss was, "Please destroy this." And then it had a little penciled initial, at the top; I guess it was a penciled initial D.

KRISTOL: Someone who was unhappy with this just mailed it to Jack Anderson?

HUME: Yes, we never have known. But I had done a story about ITT's concessions for – some kind of a concession an ITT subsidiary had the Kennedy Center, which was then being put together. And so I got handed this thing to check out. I remember looking at it and saying, "Oh my God," because the whole thing carried the implication that the money that ITT, which had properties in San Diego, was putting up to support the convention was going to buy them a settlement in the antitrust cases on favorable terms. I mean, that was the thing.

I can't remember the exact wording but it was just eye-popping, suggestive of that. And of course what needed to happen was the document needed to be confirmed. So I ended up taking it over to the ITT office in Washington and sitting down in a room full of ITT people with this memo. And Dita Beard looked at it and she said, "Well, that's my own little D."

KRISTOL: Is that right?

HUME: And so we broke the story and it was later totally overshadowed of course by Watergate.

KRISTOL: Yeah, but it was a big story. I remember –

HUME: It was a big story and the cover-up that they engaged in led by John Dean was the model for what was later tried in Watergate. And the whole ITT cover-up never really unraveled until Watergate unraveled.

KRISTOL: Is that why the convention got moved actually?

HUME: Well, it was because the publicity was so bad. They did it in Miami. I think both parties did Miami in '72, yeah. So that was – but for me as a young, wide-eyed kid back in Washington doing that stuff, that was really fun.

IV: Reporting from Washington (38:36 – 59:04)

KRISTOL: So you're chugging along being a successful investigative reporter in print?

HUME: And ABC News, which was perennially the cellar dweller among the three networks was starting a documentary series, and the first one they were doing was about West Virginia and the coal miners out

there and the plight of the miners and so on. And I had written a book about the miners called *Death in the Mines*. And they called on me to be a consultant and they paid an amount of money which to me was just stunning. This was the difference between in the networks and working in print.

So I went to work as a consultant for them and I did that for several years. And then they asked me if I'd like to try it as a correspondent. And at first, I said no. And then I realized really that the reason I was saying no was that I was afraid I'd fail. I wasn't motivated by a fear of failure. And so I thought about and I said, "No, I better try this." And I did.

KRISTOL: So you hadn't really been on air much before?

HUME: No. I'd been on the air in interviews and so on and doing interviews. But, boy, was I bad. I was so bad in the beginning –

KRISTOL: I doubt that.

HUME: Oh, no, trust me. The first time I ever shot was stand up right for the cause of a piece, I had my head tilted so far to the side that they couldn't use it.

KRISTOL: Oh, is that right?

HUME: Yeah, I mean and I remember – I mean I had to struggle with it, just struggle with it. And a guy at ABC, Carl Rochelle, who later became a well-known on air correspondent for CNN, said to me, he was doing stuff, kind of an affiliated service for ABC, and he said, "Look," he said, "the thing you've got to remember when you're doing this narration," is he said, "when you begin to sound to yourself like a radio disc jockey," he said, "that's probably about when you're beginning to get it right."

Because when you first hear yourself recorded, you're so self-conscious about it, the tendency is to flatten everything. Well, you can't do that in broadcasting, you have to develop. And so but it took me a while to develop a broadcast delivery.

But I was – it happened to me a number of times. I got in the right boat when the tide went up. And the tide at ABC News was going up. ABC was flush with money and went up, created a news division. Roone Arledge was appointed to run it. And I was, had been there long enough and gotten enough better that he didn't fire me right away, which I'm sure he would have done. And then ABC News went on to become number one and I was along for the ride.

KRISTOL: And then you went to Capitol Hill, as I recall.

HUME: Yeah I was – I covered the House and the Senate for 11 years, those two places and then – and then the White House for 8 years. It was from the White House –

KRISTOL: I think you were a White House correspondent when I was Vice President Quayle's Chief of Staff, I think.

HUME: I covered the Bush White House and then I covered the first term.

KRISTOL: And so what is that – I mean I think people would be very – what is that like being a sort of say Hill or White House correspondent? I mean people just see the 22 minutes of news on ABC Tonight.

HUME: They're on all the time, right, if you're the White House correspondent, you're on – you're on most nights and you're invariably the most visible street correspondent in your – at your network.

Now, I couldn't ever match the level of fame and recognition that Sam Donaldson, who was there 12 years, (INAUDIBLE) White House correspondent before I had got there. I mean, he was such a prominent figure and such a colorful character and actually such a very good correspondent. And he was

a terrific craftsman. And I sort of – so I had to follow that. That was tough but I did okay and I had been there –

KRISTOL: And how does it work? So I mean you're the White House correspondent but there's of course this huge network news apparatus in New York in this case. And do you call in and say, "Hey, I think we have a good story today on President Bush who's going to do this" or do they say, "The news today is –"

HUME: Well, the schedule at the White House is pretty well known a day ahead. And so you, you know if the president is going to make a speech or he's going to have a foreign visitor or he's going to an event of some kind, you always know about it. And so everybody kind of knows what the president is going to be doing and on what subject. Or there will be some outside news which requires a response from the White House. And whether they actually say anything or not, you're going to be on the air that night.

And I can remember getting a call. And, of course, one thing about that was there were some nights you know when there really wasn't that much major news in the world but somebody had to come on at the top of the show and say, "Good evening" and then say something about news that was supposed to be important. Well, if it was happening at the White House and you were going to the White House, it always had a certain aura about it that meant that you were often the lead. And I can remember they would call up sometimes and say, "What do you got?" and I'd say, "I've got basically nothing." They'd say, "Well, you're the lead" because you had to be and –

KRISTOL: You have to get a reaction to –

HUME: Well, you had a response to something or and you got to the point where you could do it. And of course there was a daily briefing everyday which you know gave you some sound to work with. When you think how famous the president's press secretaries have been become, one of the most recognizable figures in the nation, any one of them.

KRISTOL: But they weren't televised –

HUME: They weren't all televised but they usually were televised in part. And, you know, the first 10 minutes or whatever so there was usually something, and it would give you something to work with.

But that was, the White House was interesting. It's not a reporting beat. The number of scoops that come out of the White House are pretty few in number. It's kind of a political beat. In other words, if you had to have one discipline, you know, it wouldn't be national security, it wouldn't be military, or you don't want to come from the State Department necessarily.

The best place to come from is the Hill because the White House, like the Hill, is a place where politics has a big intersection. And if you're trying to learn how to assess what's happening from what they're showing you, that was the most useful thing. And usually you know if you've been around a while, you can kind of figure out what the White House is trying to do or the President's trying to do on a given day, what image they're trying to present to the world, what message they're trying to present and why they're doing, saying what they're saying and doing what they're doing.

That's sort of what you do. You kind of interpret that for the audience. It wasn't a hard duty. It's interesting. It's important. You're kind of closed up in a little tiny place there and that gets claustrophobic after a while.

But after a while, it gets tiresome. The only thing, about the only thing was the travel as a White House correspondent is absolutely grueling, just terrible, particularly on foreign trips because you're jet-lagged and sleep deprived for you know days on end and you're working very hard and –

KRISTOL: Time differences require you to report in the middle of the night, and the press plane is not as nice as Air Force One, I don't think.

HUME: Actually, it used to be the press plane was better. Yeah, back in the early, back in the day, PanAm used to do the press plane charter. It was sumptuous.

And but after – I remember when the Clinton people fired all the travel office people, they're the people who had gotten all those charters and everything and they blew the whole thing up. That's why we were all so mad because we were all used to getting our rest and our best food while we were riding on the press plane on foreign trips.

KRISTOL: I remember when I was in the White House on the staff side. It is a weird combination of sort of luxury, of course, which you're part of the White House even as a reporter, part of the White House package sort of so you're transported, you're transported to the hotel, you don't have to hail a cab on the street of – in Manila in the Philippines.

HUME: Don't have to go through customs, you don't have to do.

KRISTOL: Right. So all of that's very nice and you're pre-checked in or whatever and there you are and but on the other hand – exhausting because you know it's right. And I remember the time differences was the thing that this is pre-email too and so you have to actually talk to people back in Washington, which means you have to be awake at 3 am because that's the only. The Hill must have been pretty different, though. There you have to compete more to get on the air or have a sort of –

HUME: Well, the Hill – you've got a wide-open place and you know you – the atmosphere on the Hill in those days was more convivial and congenial between the members in the press than perhaps it is now.

And the first thing I noticed was the effect that Watergate had had on the – on the atmosphere in the White House press room when I came from the Hill to the White House. You know, you're on the Hill, these members would come in and they would comment and you know you might throw them a couple of questions and so forth but that was just. The Hill was – the Hill was – if you weren't covering an event that happened on the Hill, a hearing or action on legislation, what you used the Hill for was kind of a Greek chorus to react to what the administration was doing. And you kind of just wanted to get them to come in and say whatever they had to say and you could use that. And you know it wasn't as if you took any individual members that seriously as if they were responsible for really governing. You knew there were grownups for that role downtown at the White House.

When I got down to the White House, the White House press corps had been so seared by the what was the reputation that they had after Watergate as being a bunch of softies that didn't get it, that it took two young reporters from the *Washington Post* to blow the lid on the Nixon Administration and all that romance that grew up around that, that the atmosphere was extremely adversarial in the White House briefing room. I'm not sure that fully persisted but with Bush as president, a Republican, following Reagan and Reagan had driven them all crazy by being supposedly the Teflon president, it was really an amazing contrast. And I'm not sure that's the same as it was but it was the first thing that struck me when I went down there.

KRISTOL: We felt that in the Bush – in the Bush White House there from '89 to '92. It was a pretty tough press corps on us, even though we were doing a pretty adequate job, I think, of governing. But it didn't work out so well politically.

I mean, it does seem to me in those days compared to now, though, that there's still much more access to people in the White House. I remember talking to you occasionally and I didn't really think much of it that I was the Chief of Staff, not the Press Secretary, but that you as – I mean, one thing, frankly, if someone I'd never heard of would call from a regional paper, they'd go through the Press Secretary. They'd try to get to the Vice President, obviously, the secondary man, would get to someone like me. But senior correspondents would call directly to – you know, the Counsel or the Chief of Staff, the Vice President, or the Domestic Policy Advisor.

HUME: And the other thing was that the Press Secretary that you saw in the briefing room was not the Press Secretary you saw when you were one-on-one with the Press Secretary. I mean, I remember – I remember Marlin Fitzwater was the Press Secretary for Bush, and he was the best I've ever seen, he was a straight-shooter and he knew the government and he had been around a long time and he could see around corners and he – and he also had his own network of people that he'd use as sources.

And I remember there was some – during the first Gulf war, these amazing rumors would bubble to the surface and you had to check them out. You know, and I was running a rumor down once and I went to see Marlin and I said, "You know," – I think I'd asked him on the phone and went back to see him. And I said, "What do you know about this, what can you tell me?" He said, and he mentioned the name of a particular senior official that had spoken to and he said, "And I think I believe him," he said. You know and then he told me what else he had kind of found out and gave me kind of a layout which was a lot more than he – and I was very careful of how I used the information. But you know it was a different atmosphere than it may be today. From what I hear, it's very closed.

KRISTOL: That's my sense. It's much more buttoned down, the White House correspondent for the *Post* doesn't just call up. I mean in my day, it seemed to be the good correspondents – and you were one of them – would call 10 different White House offices – Domestic Policy, or White House Counsel, Vice President's Chief of Staff, some other people – and you would get people and then you would, of course, compare notes and often the stories that would come out, especially the ones that were within a, in the administration, internal debate, Dick Durbin arguing with John Sununu or something. You'd get people to say on background often, well, yes, actually because people wanted to make their own case of course, prominent reporters. Yeah, there was an argument about the budget deal or something like that. One has much less sense of that today.

HUME: Well, those kinds of stories, those internal process stories were of very much more interest to the newspapers like the *Washington Post* than they were to network news. I remember Ann Devaro, she was a very aggressive –

KRISTOL: Star at that –

HUME: She was a very good reporter. Most of this, I don't remember ever getting a call from the people at ABC News saying, "You know, you got to match this story that Ann Devaro has," internal backbiting because their view was you know we've got this big national audience out there, most of whom don't know Dick Durbin from a lamp post and they don't really care about the internal in-fighting in the White House.

And you might be able to make an oblique reference to it in some way if you're talking about how you know a number of White House officials known to believe X and the president is said to disagree or whatever. But that's about as close as you ever get. You didn't those stories as much as the print reporters did.

KRISTOL: Did you enjoy the Hill or the White House more?

HUME: Well, the Hill was – well, the White House was more – was more prominent and you therefore were on more and you're busier day by day. The Hill was more a pleasant atmosphere because you know. And the other thing was look I've always worked hard if I had to but if I didn't have to, I mean I'm never – most days when I get up, I'd just assume be off, right. It's just the way I've always been. Well, you can get news jobs on the Hill that would persist for weeks on end. That, that was great.

KRISTOL: But some of these people really are obsessed with getting on as much as possible and lobbying to get on some of those –

HUME: Well, you can get to feeling as if you've died and been buried after you're not on the air a while. It's sort of like oxygen to a broadcaster. I didn't worry about it too much and you never have to worry about it at the White House. I do remember once.

There was a famous story about my colleague, Sam Donaldson, when he was covering the Senate. And you know, Sam loved this business like no one I've ever known. He just he was a creature of it and he was good at it and he loved it. And he was covering the Senate and the Senate was tied up. Do you remember when there was a disputed election in New Hampshire somewhere between Wyman and Durkin and the Senate had to make a decision about which of these guys, which to seat? And the thing went on for months and nobody was – there was no news out of the Senate and he was covering the Senate.

And the guy who was covering the House for ABC News said that one day he showed up, Donaldson showed up over on the House side and the Speaker's little, the Speaker used to have, maybe he still does, used to have a little meeting with the press, pencil and pad. No cameras right before the session each day. And you might be able to get a little news out of it, not much. So there was Sam, turns up in the Speaker's little news conference to everybody's surprise. And the reporter later told me that he went back to the – he was covering the House, he went and called in to radio to see if radio had anything, said no, Donaldson had already called up and filed two spots on the thing. He was so bored and desperate that he'd gone over to the lower chamber to. That was the way it was for some people.

KRISTOL: And the relationship with the anchors and with New York, was that –

HUME: It was – it was – well, when Frank Reynolds was the anchor, he was here in Washington.

KRISTOL: Oh, I forgot that, yeah.

HUME: And he was from a correspondent's point-of-view, the greatest guy because, you know, he had been one of us, he kind of thought as we did and he – and you know he had a real taste for sort of the flavor of Washington stories and sort of a zest for it all and he was great to work with.

Peter Jennings was the best broadcast – natural broadcaster perhaps I had ever seen. And I worked with him and we usually got along pretty well, but occasionally have a disagreement, particularly about things involving the Middle East. Peter had spent a lot of time in the Middle East, he was an expert to a considerable extent on the subjects over there, cared a lot about it, was very passionate about it. And we would have, we had some vigorous discussions about –

KRISTOL: And he was more, I – from the time tiny, tiny bit when I came to ABC and he was more assertive, too, it seems to me as an anchor in terms of what might be discussed or what he wanted you to talk about.

HUME: Well, particularly on those issues. It was, he was very pro-Palestinian, right and political Washington is not very pro-Palestinian, never has been. And so he would sometimes want me to be the guy that said that the administration was off the deep end on this or that and I would resist that.

And I will say this. When I worked for network news, by that time, I had my own political views had shifted. I had been a conventional liberal like just about every reporter you'd ever know and just over time in covering Washington and personal experiences and so forth, my views had changed. So by the time I arrived to cover the White House, I was pretty conservative. And there was always a tendency in New York to let *The New York Times* front page be the thing that tells you sort of what the news was.

Now, television news is a lot about converting the news into television form. It's sort of natural and understandable that people would arrive in the office at the television news operation in New York every day wanting someone to tell them what the news was so they could go to work converting it into TV. And the result was you'd get this sort of time centric view of the world.

Well, that conflicted often with how I saw the world. I'm not talking about you know in value judgment terms right or wrong but just in really what the real news was. And whenever I would have a valid

alternative as to the way to cover the story at the White House, it almost always – it almost always went. They would allow me to do it the way I said.

Now, I had to start from scratch nearly every day but I wasn't directed to cover the news. Peter would push me sometimes and I would resist and usually I got to do it in a way that was satisfactory to both of us, we'd work it out. You know, but I mean I – the bias didn't manifest itself in the way where the word came down from on high, it just if you didn't – if you had a different way of looking at it and you could present it, you could do it.

KRISTOL: I think that's a point you often made at Fox when I was there, when we were there together, that it wasn't that Fox was particularly taking a different point-of-view on a lot of stories but the stories that Fox thought were newsworthy were often different from the stories the mainstream media –

HUME: And sometimes there would be a story that would leap out at us as being fishy or good. The Duke Lacrosse rape, alleged rape case was a wonderful example. I smelled a rat on that one from the get-go and some of the rest of us there did. And I remember and Megyn Kelly whose star is still ascending and will continue to for some time, was covering legal issues for us here in Washington, and we got her on that story early and she picked up the scent of it right away that there was something wrong here. It took – I mean eventually a lot of other journalists got around to that, too, but it took them a lot longer. They just didn't – their outlook prevented them, I think, from seeing it, seeing the flaws in that prosecution early.

KRISTOL: I always thought you had a real insight there, that the genius of Fox was not so much – it was a little bit of providing a different point-of-view at times, obviously on the panel and what not, but a lot of it was looking into stories that were different from the stories that mainstream media was interested in investigating or looking into them in different ways as you say with more skepticism about some stories and less cynicism that the media just couldn't take seriously or whatever the mainstream media –

HUME: I think that's right you know that we would – that there were stories that we liked that others didn't and I used to have a list of them in my head. They've sort of deserted me now. But it was fairly long.

KRISTOL: I think if you looked at *Special Report*, the actual stories that were on the show, some of them, of course, overlapped, if there's big news, it's big news. But some didn't actually with what was on ABC –

HUME: We were always on the lookout for two things. We were looking at stories that were legitimate, no-kidding news stories that the others weren't pursuing and for stories that everyone was pursuing that had an equally legitimate but different angle because we knew that if people wanted to see the same news presented the same way, there was no reason to change to us from whatever their viewing habits were.

So we as sort of a necessity had to be different. But my view was that there was plenty of opportunity to be different legitimately journalistically that after you got the hang of it, it was like as I said before, like picking up money off the street. And I remember I said that to Chris Wallace when he first came over and he later took – came to me with a big smile on his face one day and he said, "I see what you mean. It is like picking up money off the street."

KRISTOL: That's great.

V: Our Media Today (59:04 – 1:19:52)

KRISTOL: The world of TV, the world of news in general, is so different today than when you got into it or when I got into it a little later, got into the government side of it. I often give talks on college campuses and someone, usually a professor, actually, says, "Wasn't it so much better in the old days and not all this cable news, people yelling at each other, the Internet, all this misleading information being disseminated. What can we do to restore the good old days?" You were there sort of during the good old days. Were they really good?

HUME: Well and there was this, there was a clear consensus outlook among the people in the news business. Now, very few of them in my judgment were political activists. Very few of them were – would put their political views ahead of anything else. But the political views were so universally shared among the journalists at that time that there was no need for anybody to do it. You'd just – there was just a sense that by and large, Republicans were the party of the rich and the privileged and the Democrats were looking out for the little guy. And sure you could – you could do a story about a crooked Democrat, sure you would. But by and large, you sort of took that view.

And particularly after Vietnam, there was a sense of skepticism about the military and its abilities and its judgment and whether it really was a good institution or not with a tradition to be proud of. And there was a sense of sort of biased against United States military engagements as if they were to be – now, look, there's always got to be skepticism, that's a professional obligation. But there was a broad sense that in this area, Republicans and generals and admirals were more likely to be wrong than right and the reverse of that.

And that was sort of a pervasive outlook that didn't require a lot of discussion, it didn't require a lot of people to get together and agree on that. It was all sort of mutually agreed upon and not even worth talking about. But it governed the outlook and it meant that you know stories got overlooked that were worth doing and stories got played up that probably weren't worth it and so on and that's how it was. And there really wasn't another competing voice. The public saw through a lot of it. If it hadn't, how could Ronald Reagan have been elected, for example I mean to cite that. And but that was how it was.

KRISTOL: And not only was there one general outlook but the number, the sources of information were so small. I think people today and most college students can't actually believe it when I say when I came to Washington, there were three network news shows, 20, well, half an hour each, 22 minutes of TV time each.

HUME: Wire services.

KRISTOL: Wire services, *The New York Times*.

HUME: The major newspapers. *The Washington Post*.

KRISTOL: A few, yeah.

HUME: *The Washington Post*. And there were papers that were important, more important, more influential in Washington then than they are now. I mean, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Los Angeles Times* were papers with some moment. *The Boston Globe* even –

KRISTOL: From a citizen point-of-view, I remember this in college, the access to news. I mean, so there I was an undergraduate, Watergate begins to break. I can watch one of the three networks. I could read *The Boston Globe* or *The Boston Herald*, the two local papers. Maybe there was a third back then, I don't remember. You could get *The New York Times*. You know that was not so easy but the same day at out of town news. *The Journal* had almost no political news at that point. There was no *USA Today*.

HUME: Had a good reputation.

KRISTOL: Yeah and that was it, that was it. And the columnists you could read were the ones that were carried in the papers that you happened to get and there weren't, and they didn't carry many back then, actually, many op-ed columnists. So the opportunity to get diverse points of view, to read five different takes on one story, to check out several different reporters – it's – I mean it's amazing how little there was.

HUME: Very different. And the – and if you looked at network news night after night, the general sense you got about these stories and the direction they were going was very similar.

KRISTOL: And *New York Times* driven, as you were saying.

HUME: *New York Times* driven to a great extent, I think yeah.

KRISTOL: So that was – it's kind of – so that was –

HUME: And of course that – two things it seems to me have happened since then. The cable news competition came along with Fox and with MSNBC but to a lesser extent because it reflected the liberal consensus only more so. That sort of broke that monopoly that had existed for so long and gave people a place to go.

And, of course, the explosion of the Internet outlets now, which is continuing, I mean it's almost, you know, exponential now that you know you've got – and people can kind of hang out a shingle and become an opinion dispenser or a journalist of some kind. And you get, you know for example, one of the first places I went today when I heard about that Supreme Court decision was to Scotusblog, which is a blog which also has a presence on Twitter. And you know you get a quick take on things from very, in some cases at Scotusblog, very highly qualified people writing about this stuff. And then I got, Fred Barnes sent me something in email that he'd received that was very good on the subject. So you know you get – you couldn't get that kind of insight for days. Now you can get it almost immediately.

And people writing and competing interpretations and viewpoints, whereas in the old days, you would have waited till the news, TV news because really you could get an hourly news bulletin by radio but that was it, had to wait till the evening news. And then you'd get three probably pretty similar interpretations that were pretty orthodox you might say.

HUME: And the next day –

KRISTOL: News the next day.

HUME: And that's it. You could wait for three days for Roscoe Drummond or somebody to weigh in.

KRISTOL: Or George Willard.

HUME: George Willard.

KRISTOL: But it would take a while, right. I mean people really don't appreciate how – I remember that is how you know what do I think about this and then you'd wait for two or three days.

HUME: People complain all the time to me that well, you know, there's all this stuff that gets started on the Internet. I get, I'll get an email about every couple months or so from somebody reporting some amazing fact that Obama was actually, you know, he comes from Mars or something. And I always go to some website, which is in the business of debunking that sort of stuff and send the, patiently send the link.

You know, there's a lot of junk out there but you don't have to be a rocket scientist to distinguish between stuff that makes sense and is plausible and has a ring of truth, and stuff that just seems completely off the wall, at least, I shouldn't have to. And I think that this – this variety of sources is wonderful.

KRISTOL: Talk radio I think is the other thing that happened.

HUME: Oh, yeah. Talk radio, there's you know unlike everything else, talk radio is dominated by the right and these other, you know you get the academy is dominated by the left, the media, despite the presence of Fox News is still overwhelmingly left. And so that's a counterweight for sure.

KRISTOL: I remember when talk radio began, I guess it was in the first Bush Administration, Rush Limbaugh. Was there a legal change? Somehow before that –

HUME: The Fairness Doctrine.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that went away. And also I just think no one really thought, I just think also it's a financial matter that you could actually have a national – there were local shows of course – but that you could have a national talk radio show on AM radio, which at the time, incidentally it was dying, right, I mean it was like the spaces were worthless basically. And Limbaugh seems to have had this insight that you could perhaps there would be a market for him talking. When you think about it, it's kind of crazy. Not interviewing people, just talking and taking calls, right, for three hours.

HUME: Talking and taking calls, playing sound.

KRISTOL: Right, and playing, that's right, playing –

HUME: Playing sound, play snippets, now more universally available than they used to be.

KRISTOL: Right. And it was a – but I remember how big a deal it was when it started. And of course when everyone else came along after him. But-

HUME: It just exploded.

KRISTOL: Yeah. But it doesn't exist in a lot of the rest of the world. If you go to Europe and talk to conservatives there about their problems, the first thing they'll say is no Fox News, which often is due to regulatory impediments, they don't let them set up news stations quite the way.

You know, here it's a free country, right, if Fox wants to, whoever wants to waste his money on a news station, he gets to try at least. And you do have some regulatory hurdles to get on the air and all that but basically it's doable where it's not in much of Europe is my impression. And maybe the money isn't there to invest either.

HUME: Well, when you think about Fox News, of course there is a barrier to entry of something on this scale. I mean, Rupert Murdoch had to be –

KRISTOL: He's an unusual –

HUME: Well, he was willing to put a billion dollars at risk, a billion dollars.

KRISTOL: Right, so that's –

HUME: Now, of course, it's come back to him and to all of our great delight or not everybody's delight but certainly to mine. But, but –

KRISTOL: Right. Yeah, that was not clear. That was, in fact, I'm sure the conventional wisdom at the time was what is he doing.

HUME: Oh, well, was it Bill Carter, the media writer for *The New York Times* who used to write about his imaginary friend, the news channel. Yeah, you talk about an assessment that didn't pan out.

KRISTOL: That's funny. No Fox News they say if you're a French conservative or German, B, no talk radio, actually. I think that is a big deal. No civic, no opportunity to have kind of a grassroots rebellion on some issue – immigration or the kinds of issues that talk radio has, I think, really reflect a genuine sentiment. It's also sometimes (INAUDIBLE) up I suppose, people want to argue.

But and then now the Internet. That is universal. So there are presumably some of the monopolies of these often state run. When you think about Europe, it's state-run news organizations.

HUME: When you think of the BBC, which is paid for by the taxpayers, and it's afflicted with all the familiar biases that you have. And I guess Sky News is something of a counterweight to that. But Sky News from what I've seen of it, plays it very straight. You know there's – I mean, it is just as bland in terms of its the sort of editorial dimension of its reporting. You know, and I don't think it presents a real alternative in that sense.

KRISTOL: But it's hard for young people I think to appreciate. And I think this does lead one to be more favorable to the current dispensation of news sources than the quote good old days. It's hard for them to appreciate just how little news was available to the actual citizen, you know. I mean.

HUME: And of course it had always been that way and you kind of couldn't picture a world where it would be different. I mean I've often thought that one of the things that has made some people so loyal to Fox News was that they lived most of their life never thinking that such a thing as Fox News was possible.

KRISTOL: I think very much so, I hear that all the time.

HUME: You know they just and they still to some extent can't believe that it's actually is there, that it's out there and it's thriving and you know it's got all these attractive people and everything is so polished and it looks great and you know.

KRISTOL: Remember conservatives used to have schemes to buy one of the networks, buy CBS.

HUME: You know, that's an interesting thing you say that because I've always thought that the culture of those places is so embedded that if you – if you did that, in other words, Fox News started from scratch basically and there was a few rudimentary things in place but there was no real network so the culture got created. It is one thing to create a culture, it is quite another to change a culture and much more difficult in my view.

I remember I did an interview once with Jack Welch. It was an event at a convention and I'm sure he was paid, I know I was. He had a book out and he was promoting his book and the event was my interviewing him. It was a dumb idea. They should have had him talk because he was much more interesting on his own than I could make him be. But there was a chapter in his book which was about management and how to do things, about what to do when you're in the middle of one of these firestorms that's engulfing your enterprise. And he said in the book, you know, that the job of the media as far as the media is concerned is not to try to tell your side of the story or do a balanced report or anything; the job of the media is to rip your skin off as they see it. And you've got to face that when you're dealing with it and recognize that that's where you're starting from.

And so now here he was the guy who had run GE, right, which owned NBC. So here's the man who – and who is responsible, by the way – for changing the culture of all these enterprises that he'd acquired over the years and turning them around and molding them to the GE way of doing things and making many of them fabulously profitable. So he was a master at this. This was his stock and trade.

And I said to him, "Do you think that this media being the way you describe it in that chapter is the way things ought to be?" And he looked at me kind of like, "What kind of a question is that?" And he said, "Well, of course not." And I said, "You were the guy who was in charge. You had *NBC News* with *NBC Nightly News* and *Meet the Press*, all that was under your bailiwick. Why didn't you try to change all of that there?" And he gave me an even more peculiar look and he said, "My god, I'd have gotten killed if I tried to do that."

Well, there you are. Here's a guy that probably the most potent executive of his time, manager of his time and he wasn't touching that culture of NBC because he knew better. And he wasn't wrong about that. You know there's something organic about the culture of those places that makes it very hard to change.

KRISTOL: And politics sort of now versus 30 years ago before the explosion in news sources. How much do you (INAUDIBLE)

HUME: I think that the explosion in news sources has coincided with the divisions in the country, which I think are deep and real and persistent. I'm not sure it's cause and effect. I'm – I tend to be skeptical of that. But it gives people a convenient way of saying well, you know, back in the days when we had this, this media, there was a consensus in the media that everybody, you know it was easier to get people to agree to things. Well, I'm not sure that's the case.

But be that as it may, I think the atmosphere in politics is poisonous in Washington in a way that it never used to be. Part of that has to do with the fact that the Democratic Party has become more liberal and its centrist members have been thinned and the same is true of the Republican Party, it's become more conservative, more distinctly conservative and the number of its moderates is smaller.

So you don't have a sort of a body of votes sort of that are in the middle that can be won over to one compromise or another and you have an atmosphere in which the worst fear that many members of Congress have is of being primaried. And as long as that's the case, it's going to be hard to get people to make deals unless you have a president who is particularly effective in making the case for compromises and believes in them and is willing to provide some political cover.

I think President Obama has utterly failed to do that and I would say he's utterly failed because he's utterly not tried. And so I think this atmosphere is going to be (INAUDIBLE) for a while. And somebody needs to kind of win an election big and you know the president looked like he'd won big in '08 and he hadn't really, he hadn't won big enough.

KRISTOL: Or if he had reached out to – I've always thought that the failure right at the beginning to try to get Republican votes, at least some of them on the stimulus package, was crazy. Yeah, and then on health care. And the Republican Party was reeling at the time. You could have gotten 40 House Republicans on the stimulus and a couple of small concessions, and they were so cocky, and they jammed it through but it allowed the Republicans to kind of unite and oppose it and then kind of feel like, "Hey, that wasn't so terrible to oppose it, you know."

HUME: Well, they made it easy for them to do it. And there are two things that come from not doing that. This is especially true of health care. One of them is that you don't have – you don't have people in the other party, you have a stake in what you've done and which tends to mute the criticism in the other party and give you a Republican voice to speak up for whatever – whatever some conservatives are attacking. That's part of it.

And the other part of it is that if you pass a bill like health care and it's got all kinds of terrible problems, well, what you would normally just go fix it. Well, you can't do that because you haven't got anybody to vote to help you fix it because the people might have been with you if you'd sweetened the package for them and gotten them to vote with you are not going to be there to vote to try to fix it. So you know it's almost a tragic result but that's, I think that's where we are and I don't see any relief in sight anytime soon.

KRISTOL: How many people – you know Obama's second term has been worse than his first in terms of consequences. I think that's pretty obvious and certainly in terms of his approval rating and so forth. But I actually think the fundamental mistake was that first few months –

HUME: Well, and the other thing was of course you come out of the midterm in 2010 and you get killed and so you have the choice that Clinton faced with a very similar situation. It was a health care bill that did it in large measure. And there was a sense then that government was too big and so on. That's why he famously said, "The era of big government is over."

But he adjusted politically. This President didn't. And then he got reelected, which furthered the sense, I think, he had that he didn't need to adjust. And now it's all sort of a chicken draw kind of coming home to roost now and it's a dire situation.

KRISTOL: But in terms of the poisonousness of politics, I mean I think it is, one has the sense that it's bad. On the other hand, I always try to point when people the good old days you know featured Joe McCarthy and George Wallace and Ross Perot getting 20 percent of the vote, a guy who's kind of a lunatic, I mean with all due respect to him and as late as '92. And that was pre-Fox News and pre-Rush Limbaugh. And pre- all these things, pre-Internet.

So, somehow, I'm not so sure that all these – maybe there's more, there is more polarization today, I think, as you say, that's mostly just a fact about the country and about the parties and so forth. But the good old media didn't stop demagogues from doing well and people from being pretty hysterical about policy issues.

And in a way, you could argue the current situation, there may be some hysteria, but it gets punctured faster, it seems to me. Don't you think people can sort out more quickly what's true and what's ridiculous?

HUME: The one thing about this proliferation of media means that there's a lot of places from which accountability can flow and you know you come up with some cockamamie theory or something like that, it won't last very long if it's not sound. It's going to get attacked and –

KRISTOL: Yeah. And it's not even by other media. I mean, for me the moment where I really thought wow, this is different, was I think it was 2002, remember there was a very bad intifada going in the West Bank and the Israelis went into Jenin, which was a Palestinian radical stronghold and there were all these reports in which *The New York Times* and others picked up massacre in Jenin.

And then it – but then people, not even Israeli media but just soldiers were filing, you know were emailing back to their families. Said it didn't happen. This is ludicrous. We're here right now, there's some fighting but you know X number of people have died but it's nothing like a massacre, the numbers were wrong by a factor of 10 or 20 or something. And it took a day or two. I've always thought in the old days, that never would have – either never would have been fixed or would have taken a year and then by then it would sunk in.

HUME: Well, I think – I think what you see now is you see a different effect. Things that pop up at the time, that's sort of an immediate outgrowth of something get debunked more quickly. But I do think that certain ideas that sort of lurk below the surface suddenly emerge as conventional wisdom.

For example, well, the Iraq war, now universally agreed that it was a failure from the get-go, it had no redeeming, it is as if the surge of forces and the consequences of that never happened. And you know you don't any, you can't find – you can find very few Republican politicians who will defend that now.

That is sort of set in concrete. And I don't know you could go back and peel back the layers that overlie that situation. But that's a wonderful example of how that sort of emerged as fact and it's almost undisputed among our politicians today.

KRISTOL: So I suppose despite the diversity of your sources, at the end of the day, if people – you know people are willing to just accept conventional wisdom that –

HUME: Well, consensus and conventional wisdom does still emerge. And, you know, if the event was a long time ago or some time ago and people you know are not preoccupied with it, these things can because there's still forces that reinforce that, the forces of the academy and the media and the rest. And there it is.

KRISTOL: All the more reason for Fox News to flourish for decades to come and the rest of us to do our bit to try to fight sometimes against that, puncture that conventional wisdom. Brit, thanks so much for taking the time today.

HUME: Bill, nice to see you.

KRISTOL: And great to see you. And thank you for joining us at CONVERSATIONS.

[END]