Brittany: Okay. Well, if you don't mind, we'll go ahead and get started today. So just like a quick introductory. What originally sparked your interest into journalism?

St. James: I didn't know that I wanted to be a journalist. When I was in high school, I did speech and debate and I was really good at extemporaneous speaking and original oration. I qualified for nationals twice, writing speeches about current events. And when I was a senior, my mom said, 'Boy you sure like public speaking, and you like writing your own speeches, and you love current events, you should be a foreign correspondent. And I knew when she said that she was right. I hadn't taken any journalism classes in high school, but being a foreign correspondent seemed right. I already read the newspaper and that was it.

Brittany: Okay.

St. James: Never question your mom, that's the lesson.

Brittany: Never question mom.

Bailey: What did your mom do?

St. James: My mom was a stay-at-home, mom. ut she was very strong. I have four brothers and was raised exactly like my brothers, and we were all taught that we were all going to go on to college and go have careers and livelihoods and support ourselves, and that's what we all did.

Brittany: Awesome

Blanca: So, is anyone in your family a journalist?

St. James: No, I'm the only one. But my mom, she would watch the news and read the newspaper every single day from as long as I could remember. So the news was always part of my life, because it was always on and my mom always said that it was just incredibly important that we were aware of current events happening around us. So she was my big influence.

Blanca: So you can say that since you were little, news was a big part of your…

St. James: Absolutely! As long as I can remember, we had the news on every day and the newspapers in the house.

Brittany: Good! We think that every journalist has at least a little bit of curiosity in them, that's organic or nurtured or anything, where did you kind of get your curiosity from?
St. James: It's all got to be my mom. My mom was really the one who nurtured us and encouraged us to be the best we could be in whatever it is that we chose to be. And, always encouraged me in particular, to be curious, and to be strong, just like the men that were in the household. So I would say that that was definitely my mom. There's also a certain amount that I'm sure is just in my genetic code.

Brittany: We all think, I know that we all have a little bit of curiosity in us and wanting to learn more.

St. James: Yeah, It's a sense of adventure and curiosity. Sure.

Brittany: And then we heard that you have a teaching certificate, is that correct?

St. James: It's not active anymore. Yeah, yes, I went to school and then life happens. And I decided to go to grad school and get a teaching certificate. So my teaching certificate was in secondary education. So I was certified to teach speech, journalism and English.

Brittany: Which is coincidentally exactly what I have a teaching certificate in.

St. James: I did my student teaching at Sam Houston High School in Arlington...

Brittany: Okay.

St. James: ...and enjoyed it, but then got my first TV job and just never went back.

Brittany: Right. So, do you ever think about going back to the classroom at either the high school level or collegiate level?

St. James: Definitely not high school now, but I have thought about it in the collegiate level. I was actually six hours short of my master's degree when I took a job as a journalist and always regretted just not finishing those last six hours. I saved the six easiest hours for last. Journalism hours, which, of course, I could teach in my sleep now, but I just never did it. And I think I'd have to go and start from scratch again, because it's been so long. So I'm not sure that I have the patience to do that at my age.

Brittany: Okay.

St. James: It's unfortunate that you would have to have a master's degree to be a college teacher when my experience should be enough. But it's not so. So I probably won't ever be a college professor. But I think about it on occasion.

Brittany: Yeah, okay. Um, in your early days in the newsroom, were kind of interested in you being a journalist, as a woman. So did you ever experience any type of struggles that you had,
specifically because you’re a woman? Or did you ever think you were treated differently, especially when you were getting started?

St. James: Well, I started in Abilene at a KTAB-TV. It was, those newsrooms are very small, there were only maybe six of us that were reporters so I don't remember being treated unfairly as a woman in that time, because there were so few of us that work had to be divided up and you just did. So I don't remember that. Certainly at certain parts of my career, um, I was treated differently. Because I was a woman I was not given story assignments that were given to men. I'll give you a good example. This happened at Channel 8, I had done a couple stories on motorcycle gangs. You know what motorcycle gangs are? These are the guys that will hot rod around cars and get real close, maybe be threatening or harassing. And so I did a couple stories at the request of the news director at the time. And then it's like, he forgot that I've done them. I looked on a storyboard for investigative reports planned for a ratings period and I noticed a male was assigned to do an investigation on that. And I asked the reporter and he said, 'Well, I don't know, the news director told me to do it.' So I marched into the news director's office and said, 'What the heck?' and he said, 'Well, just seems like more of a guy's story than a girl's story.' And so those sort of things did happen periodically throughout the years and I was pretty unhappy about that one. I thought it was unfair and I, I voiced my discontent with this decision.

Brittany: And, um, did you ever, did you get to work with that other reporter with this story? Or did he kind of just take it and…

St. James: He didn't ask me for my help and I did not offer it.

Brittany: Okay. Yeah. I think we can understand that one. Yeah, for sure.

Bailey: For that example, were there ever any measures that you took to kind of give yourself the leg up or to help yourself in the business?

St. James: I've always been strong and confident enough to speak up when I thought that I deserved something or something was not happening that I thought that I should get. So I always worked hard, maybe harder than most. Um, I was really, I was assigned the medical beat at Channel 8, not because it was something that I chose, it was something that was designed to force me out of the newsroom because the news director thought I would be unhappy with it. I was the police reporter in Oklahoma City and had requested the police beat at WFAA, was not given it and the news director at the time assigned me health because at that time, it was not a prestigious beat, I don't think. But I really worked at like the police beat. I developed sources, I did hard hitting medical news and I felt like I tried to set myself apart with that beat. I couldn't change it, I was already assigned that beat. I wasn't going to change it. That was not going to happen. So I had to make the most of it. So I just vowed to work extremely hard to make it an important beat. And I really think that it was.

Brittany: I think so as well. For sure.
Blanca: So, you think you needed to do something different from, from males, Journalist males, to prove that you were good enough? You know what I mean? Uh, because sometimes people don’t take seriously, females. Um, I’m asking you because I’m working with a female politician and I had the same question and they told me that, sometimes, they have to do things extra, to prove that they are good enough to be there. Did you feel that sometimes?

St. James: Uh, I’m trying to think. Maybe because I was a strong enough personality, I never felt like, for the most part, people didn’t take... I think people took me seriously. Maybe because I was such a strong personality. I’m sure that there were occasions where I was not treated with the deference that maybe I thought I deserved. But for the most part, I think I was treated equally to most of the men. Yeah.

Brittany: Good. And then, what led you to Channel 8 from Abilene?

St. James: Um, so I didn't go from Abilene Channel 8..

Brittany: Okay.

St. James: I went from Abilene and then I came here and ran a very small cable news, newsroom for one year. And then I took a job in Oklahoma City for two years. So that was the duration of a contract. I had met my husband, my current husband, when I was here working at the cable station and we dated long distance. But at the end of my contract (in Oklahoma City), I was going to come back here because we were going to end up getting married. And I was in Oklahoma City at the time of the Oklahoma City bombing. WFAA always my aspiration, I mean, they were the cream of the crop and so more than any place in the country, that's where I wanted to come to.

Brittany: Okay. And do you think that's also because you were born and raised here?

St. James: No.

Brittany: No, okay.

St. James: No, I was not born and raised here.

Brittany: Oh, Okay.

St. James: I actually grew up outside Houston.

Brittany: Oh, I'll say, Okay. I knew it was Texas.

St. James: Yeah, but no, I mean, WFAA was, had a national reputation of being the journalists the broadcast journalism powerhouse, and that's where I wanted to be.
Bailey: Okay, So when your mom had the news on, was WFAA one of the...

St. James: Well I grew up outside Houston. So it was not WFAA, because Houston has its own TV stations. So, I interned at KRIV which is the Fox affiliate in Houston. I grew up watching, we watched mostly NBC, if I recall, in Houston.

Bailey: Was there anyone on the news, as you were watching as a kid that you aspire to be, that you looked up to particularly?

St. James: I loved Ron Stone. And, and, um, I'm trying to think of if there was anybody else locally that I remember, but I definitely remember Ron Stone, I really enjoyed him. Dr. Red Duke. I don't know if you know who Dr. Red Duke is? He was a medical reporter but also a trauma doctor in Houston and I definitely remember Dr. Red Duke growing up. I was also a fan of Barbara Walters, her strength and her perseverance, despite clearly people saying that she wasn't going to you know, that she wasn't talented enough that she wasn't this or wasn't that. er perseverance has been something that definitely I have looked up to. Yeah.

Blanca: So do you think that maybe she wants you to have that strong personality, and speak up for, would you think that it was her?

St. James: No, I really think it was my mom. My mom raised me just like my brothers. We were all equals in our house. And I believe that it was my mom.

Brittany: Um, what did you love broadcast wise about working in North Texas?

St. James: [sigh] This was... Well, I'll tell you, I was offered a job. John Miller was the news director at the time, he offered me a job. And I'll never forget how thrilled I was to accept the job. I remember driving back to Oklahoma City thinking, “I can't believe those people think that I'm good enough to work there!” I was so thrilled. I really loved everything about North Texas. It has a small enough town feel, but big town issues. There was always something exciting and interesting going on. When I started, I was a general assignment nightside reporter. So I ended up on whatever the big story of the day was. Back then, we had reporters that were in the helicopter. And I was in the helicopter many, many, many times during the week, because helicopters are flown based on weight. So you'd have the pilot, he was always a male, heavier, a male photographer on the other side. And so they needed somebody who was light to balance it out on that side, and that was me at that time so I was in the helicopter a lot. I loved it. And I just loved everything about covering the news. And at the beginning, I was always excited to come in and see what the day held for me.

Brittany: I think it's like that for a lot of journalists. They have that...

St. James: To start! It wasn’t that way to end, but it was that way to start for sure.

St. James: Yes.

Brittany: So we know you've covered many stories, Hurricane Katrina, 9/11, the Oklahoma City bombing, but can you tell us a little bit about your time with ebola survivor, Nina Pham, just because this was such a Dallas centered issue.

St. James: Well, I didn't spend a lot of time with Nina Pham. I interviewed her only once, but I covered Ebola intimately, and was the person that broke that story nationally. I broken it on Twitter.

Brittany: Okay, on Twitter. I did not know that, that it was on Twitter.

St. James: Um hum, I broke it on Twitter.

Brittany: And then, were you ever contacted as a journalist like to be a contact for other newspapers? Do they come to interview you because you knew so much kind of first hand knowledge?

St. James: Many times. Yeah, yes. Many other publications got in touch with me. And I was quoted in articles and all sorts of things and interviewed for various things. Yes.

Bailey: So how did she get this story? Was that a decision that you decided that you wanted to cover it? Were you assigned it?

St. James: Well, I broke it. Remember, I told you I covered health and medicine like it was a police beat. So I had sources and so I broke it just like you would break any other big story because I had the right sources. And then I continued to work at it like any big story. I worked my sources.

Bailey: Now, you mentioned Twitter for breaking the story, was adapting to the digital technology boom in the newsroom Was that something that you had to work with? Did it come easily to you?

St. James: It was painful for all of us because it was just an added thing that you had to do, in addition to, you know, covering your story. And you had to be on this crazy stuff called social media and talk about it there too. It was just another thing that you had to do. So it was, I won't say that was an easy transition for any of us in the newsroom. And I went pretty willingly. Not everybody went so willingly into the social media realm.

Blanca: How do you feel about the social media? Do you think that it's a good tool or not so, because I have heard that right now, most journalists are worried to be the first one even if they are not right.
St. James: I think you have to be very careful. I think that social media can be very dangerous, if you are careless. I think that being first isn't best if you're wrong. And so I still think that the same things that you do for a regular report that you would have in the newspaper or on the air, you need to still have those double-sourced and you still have to utilize everything else that you would to be careful. And you can't just spout off something just to be first on social media. I think it can be really good, though too. There are certainly instances where you use social media to alert the public around you to danger or spread important information about something. I think it can be incredibly useful. So I think it's mostly a good thing, but it certainly has some downsides. You have to be careful for sure.

Brittany: A little bit back to the Ebola situation. Can you tell us what it was like to interview Nina?

St. James: I know you want to ask me about Nina. Nina was not the most interesting thing about Ebola to me. It was fine and I'll talk to you about Nina. Let me tell you what the biggest story out of that whole thing was to me. So you break the story, everybody's covering it, everybody is freaking out about Ebola. And I think that I was probably one of the few that was not freaking out about Ebola because I had, I had looked at it enough to be a voice of reason to know that there were 50 years of research about Ebola. And so I really felt like I was the voice of calm during that and that it was my responsibility to be calm. There was one time in the morning where I think it was when Nina Pham was diagnosed with Ebola and I was anchoring the weekend morning newscast and I had the flu and I had a high fever. I was just not feeling well. And the co-anchor that came in to sit with me said something about, 'You know, this is really frightening time. There's a whole lot that we don't know. We'll come back to you and talk to you about it after commercial break'. And I said, "No, no, no, no, no, no, we're not going to commercial. I cannot leave the public thinking that there's a reason to panic. Before we go to commercial, I want to talk a little bit about what we know about this and why we know that this isn't going to spread like the flu. You're not going to get it from riding on a bus with somebody else, you're not going to get it from touching the handle of something that somebody might have been three miles away from. That's not how this disease works." And I really felt like I was the voice of reason in Ebola. I only interviewed Nina Pham a couple times. I interviewed her when she picked up her dog. I did a sit down interview with her about her experiences. Um, and it was fine. But the biggest interview came from Gary Weinstein. He was the doctor who treated the nurses. He was responsible for everything that was happening in the ICU at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas. He treated the original patient Mr. Duncan, he treated the nurses, he was the key player and knew everything about this. And so when I scored that exclusive interview, that was a big deal, because he was the only one who had - he had the best insight of anyone.

Blanca: The doctor and you? [laugh]

St. James: Well, the doctor certainly had more insight. But I was able to get that interview because of the years of work that I had done working the medical beat and understanding who are the players. I mean, like, I was able to recognize, I knew who was the doctor that was treating them long before anybody else did. And it wasn't even just because I had inside
sources. If you were smart enough to make connections between public testimonies at the state and be able to listen to what they were saying on the record, you can make those connections and be able to figure out what was happening behind the scenes. And so I was able to figure out what was happening behind the scenes by listening to the nuances of what was being said to our politicians publicly.

Blanca: It seems to me like you were, like the translator, between the medical things and the scary things to the public, because sometimes we don't understand very well.

St. James: But I think that's the job of a journalist, to be the translator to be able to communicate effectively from the powers that be, and then communicate that to those that are listening. Right.

Brittany: And you kind of touched on this, but what was it like to cover such a Dallas based story, but turned into a national story and even an international story? What was that like?

St. James: I didn't really think about it that way. I mean, I was working twenty hours a day and all I was doing was working. I just put my head down and I just worked. So I didn't really think, I didn't think beyond that. Because I was so bombarded with people asking me for stuff outside. At some point. I said, I can't take any more phone calls. I can't. I just have to concentrate on what I'm doing today in order to be able to survive 'til tomorrow. So I didn't really think about the broader, you know, what I was doing, I just knew that it was really important for me to be the voice of reason and calm and acts here locally. And I felt like if I were responsible enough to do that locally, others would follow suit. ABC News and I were working very closely together. So I knew that they were listening very carefully to what I was doing. So I feel like that was my influence on the network and CNN as well. But certainly ABC News I worked very closely during it.

Bailey: I was going to say what about after the fact after the story was covered and all, like, the national news are quoting you and bring you on? Did you feel very satisfied as your job as a journalist?

St. James: I felt like I did. I had done a good job. I felt like I had been responsible. And that made me feel good. I didn't succumb to any of the hype. And I didn't try to feed the panic to build myself up. I really felt like I was steady and that was important to me.

Brittany: That's good. I think that's good to have, like a virtue to have as a journalist.

St. James: I don't know that it was a virtue. But, I did feel like I was steady.

Bailey: I like what you said, you didn't feed the panic.

St. James: I did not feed the panic.

Bailey: Do you think some journalists do that, especially..;?
St. James: No question about it. Yeah, no question. It's unfortunate. But it happens. And I don't
know if that's just part of the excitement of doing what we do. But I certainly have seen it and
I've certainly sort of shook my head and rolled my eyes about it on more than one occasion.
Yeah.

Brittany: Do you mind if we switch over to a Oklahoma City?

St. James: Uh hum, no go ahead.

Brittany: Okay. And so a question on Oklahoma City was, on Oklahoma City, kind of was that
something similar to Ebola as in, you had to, it was such an inner...

Brittany: Let me rephrase this, much like Dallas. It was locally based, and you were in
Oklahoma City, locally based, but it turned into a national and again, again, international
story. So how did that happen? Because it was before the Ebola crisis. So how did you treat
that..?

St. James: Like 20 years before.

Brittany: Yeah, how did you treat that situation, since it was earlier in your career?

St. James: Well, there's a total difference between being a seasoned veteran journalist and
handling a big story and being able to block out all the noise and being a much younger
journalist. But I'll tell you, the Oklahoma City bombing changed my life. It changed my
perspective as a journalist in so many ways. So it was different. And I was one of the first
journalists on the scene. I did the Phil Donahue show, I did Oprah Winfrey. I was everywhere.
Because my job was standing outside of that building for Channel 5, KOCO for my on-air shift
from 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. So I worked a lot. I mean, I lived there. It changed my life in a
couple of ways. So I'll just, I'll give you the story of where I was at the time, because it's funny.
My now husband was up there visiting me, so I was running a little bit late to work. I was
supposed to be at work at nine and so I was running late and we were on the road right down
the street from the news station and I thought I'd blown a tire. So we pulled over, got out and it
wasn't the tire, so I thought maybe something fell in my trunk. And then I looked and I saw this
mushroom cloud coming from downtown. I said, “Well, it looks like I'm on fire duty today.” So he
dropped me off to the station because he was using my car. Because no, I mean, we couldn't
have known that a building had been bombed. And I walked in, and the producer said, “Go get
in your car, go downtown!” And I said, “Well, I don't have my car.” So I took a producer's car
and there was no going into downtown, I had to abandon her car on a street and then walk in by
myself. So that was how that started. In walking in, it's like going into a war zone. There was no question in my mind, from that moment, that it was going to be a big deal. I
mean, on everybody's mind. And so I ended up doing almost nothing that day. Because for
whatever reason, they went live and the anchors voiced-over almost everything that day. It was
frustrating. I was out at hospitals, I was covering blood banks, and almost nothing that I did saw
the light of day that day, because everything was just live shots. So that was the most frustrating
day of my life as a journalist, because I felt like I didn't do anything. They sent me home early
and said, “Come back tomorrow. We'll see you out there at 5:00 a.m.” And that's what I did. I
was home like at eight o'clock, went to dinner with a friend that was also a reporter. You're like,
what the heck? But then after that, I worked non-stop for, you know, maybe a month before I got
a day off, something like that. But for me, the Oklahoma City bombing changed my life because
it changed how I approach people in grief. I don't know if you've ever had to interview someone,
but it's not uncommon to be asked to, to go out and knock on somebody's door who's grieving
and ask them to talk about it. You know, their child has been murdered, or something like that.
But the city of Oklahoma was very protective of the people who were involved in who lost loved
ones. And I remembered the respect with which all of those people were treated. And I vowed in
that moment that I would never approach somebody in grief ever again and ask them what they
were feeling or anything. And so it totally changed my approach to people that were in moments
of crisis. How I would ask them for something and how I would speak to them totally
transformed. And I've never knocked on another door, except for one other time in my life.

Bailey: Can tell us about that time?

St. James: Yeah, I didn't go well, I was ordered to do it and I really didn't want to do it. I just, I
had not done it for like 10 years since the Oklahoma City bombing. My approach was when
somebody was in grief, or when I was asked to do that, I would never knock on somebody's
door. I would go ask a neighbor to go approach the family for me. And if the answer was no, I'm
not interested in talking to her, I left. This was somebody whose son had been killed in Iraq or
something like that. And I knocked on the door, because somebody assured me that it would be
all right that they were expecting me or something like that. And the mom opened the door,
instantly knew who I was, covered her mouth with horror and backed away. I had just added to
her trauma. I would never do that again. I just can't do it. It's just not, it's not worth it for 90
seconds of air-time. It is not worth it to traumatize somebody else. So it changed that.
Um, I'll tell you the most vivid memory that I have in the Oklahoma City bombing. And this is
why I believe even when bad things happen, that people are truly good at heart. I mean, I was
pretty miserable. It was cold, it was rainy initially. At one point, if you looked at the building that
the front had been sheared off, I was over on the far right-hand side on this forklift thing, you
know, in this in the driving cold rain. I mean, I was just, it was just miserable covering it. And I
was in the car shaking with my photographer and somebody knocked on the window
and I rolled down the window. And they handed in some warm socks. And I mean, I was
soaked, we were soaked and this person handed in warm socks. They had clearly made an
effort to make sure that the socks were warm, they handed them in and they walked away. And
I remember thinking, you know, that is just, that's just human decency. That's what human
decency is. Just that small act of kindness. That's the most vivid memory I have from all of that
time. Because I remember that feeling of feeling like somebody really cared about me, and that
was a good thing.

Bailey: Especially in that time of trauma.
St. James: Yeah, you know, I'd always followed sort of the golden rule. And certainly, Mr. Rogers will say, you know, “Always look for the helpers.” And so in everything that, After that moment where I got the warm socks, I always looked for the helpers, because that's what could make a bad story into a story with an upside.

Blanca: Can you tell us about those emotions? I'm pretty sure that being in that moment you see people crying, dying or suffering, I'm pretty sure that when you come back home, that can sometime be overwhelming. How do you deal with that?

St. James: No, for me not. I think that people that are sometimes, you know, first responders or, you know, police, fire, journalists are able to compartmentalize. And I'll tell you, I can tell you the exact moment that I learned to compartmentalize. I was a beginning reporter in Abilene, Texas. And I was sent out to cover a drowning on the lake. And the family, they'd been searching for this guy for 24 hours. The family was there. I mean, they had me convinced that he was washed up on the shoreline and they were going to find him. And so you know, I'm rooting for this family. And I was standing there when they snagged his arm. So you could see the arm over the side of the boat, where they were patrolling. And the grief from that family, just, I mean, I just nearly broke down. And they, they brought his body ashore, and they were just wailing. And I was wailing. And I realized in that moment, I could never let myself cover a story that way. I can never let myself get connected in that way to people. I had to be able to compartmentalize in order to be able to cover it. And I didn't have any problems after that. But I had to make that physical choice to know that I had to be able to separate myself.

Brittany: So you think that helped in Oklahoma City, and…

St. James: That was Abilene. In Oklahoma City, we were required after, after the immediacy of, it was maybe two or three weeks, our station required that we all attend group counseling. And I was so interested because I didn't feel like I needed it. And still don't think, but there were people that had not even been out to the scene that clearly needed this emotional therapy. It was fascinating to me. But no, I felt like I was always able to separate myself. I was able to empathize but not be so invested in a story that I was not able to cover it. After the drowning issue in Abilene.

Brittany: Um hum, after that one. Okay, a little bit of a turn. So we know you've left Channel 8 and then now you're with Medical City.

St. James: Yes.

Brittany: Okay. And then how did you know it was kind of the right time? Or did you know it was the right time? Or did it just kind of spring up or were you like, this is a good time for me to make a career transition.

St. James: I had been looking for sometime. You know, journalism can become just an obsessive job. I mean, my phone went off all night with tips. I had, I just really lived it and I
breathed it. I have three children that are all one year apart. And I never made it to anything of theirs during the school day. And I always just, I just regretted it. And I wanted something that had more balance, so I'd been looking for something with balance for a while. And the right job came open with the right boss. This was a boss that I had worked with professionally in the healthcare business as a medical reporter. And I knew that this was who, is the sort of person that I wanted to go work for. So I took that opportunity, never knowing that I was going to be diagnosed in that week in between jobs, with cancer.

Brittany: It was that week? we didn't know it was that week.

St. James: It was the week, yeah, you know, it's that week before I was taking a new job. I was there, you go out, you buy yourself some new clothes and a new purse. I got myself some fancy sunglasses and went to my annual gynecology exam. And that was it. And yeah, he felt something. He goes, “You know, I think it's a cyst.” I said, “Are you kidding me? My insurance runs out tomorrow.” He goes,””I'll get you in tomorrow for a sonogram and they'll drain it and it'll be fine.” But it was not fine. So yeah. Super bad timing, super bad timing.

Brittany: Yeah, so how did that affect the transition?

St. James: Well, the Friday before I started work, because, you know, after they did a biopsy, you know, when they had a PET scan and some other things, it was like, we gotta hustle up these results, because I can't show up for my new job and career not knowing what it is I'm facing. So Friday afternoon at five o'clock I met with my breast specialist and learned what it was going to be and what was going to be in store for me. So literally, it was the Friday before the Monday I start work and I agonized all weekend. I mean, what do you do? I mean, I was sure at that point that I was going to have a double mastectomy. So, I called my new boss on Monday morning, she was out of town. She said, “Just show up, show up to your orientation. Let me figure out what we're going to do.” And I showed up to orientation said, “I'm going to need to speak with HR.” That was the first words that I had to say to somebody. They were very supportive. So it worked out okay. But it was hard. I won't lie to you, it was a hard transition. Anytime you start a whole new career, it's like drinking from a fire hydrant. And then if you deal with, you know, a cancer diagnosis and surgery and chemotherapy and all that on top of it. It was yeah...

Brittany: A lot to say the least. It was a lot to say the least. Um, can you explain a little bit about what you do it medical city?

St. James: I am the Assistant Vice President of Communications. For me, that means that the PR and community outreach directors at all of our hospitals report up to me. And I do media, earned media, community outreach, I helped organize our social media channels for all the hospitals, press releases, you know, all that stuff. I do a significant amount of internal communication as well. So if our president needs to do speech or send out a official email or something like that, I write those. So it's a it's a lot of variety, but it's different because it's mostly behind a desk all day. It's different than my previous 25 years.
Brittany: Right. Have you made the adjustment? Are you good with that now, or?

St. James: I really only think that it's in the last year because I mean, I've been, I've had my last surgery was this last June, but I've had surgeries like every three or six months. So it's taken really until now for me to be able to take a little bit of a breath.

Brittany: That's good that everything is kind of..

St. James: Sort of, I have a bone scan on Wednesday, so we'll see. (That bone scan would confirm metastatic cancer, which is not currently curable.)

Brittany: Yeah, okay. Um, I'm kind of going back to this. Do you ever miss the environment of a newsroom?

St. James: Every day.

Brittany: Really?

St. James: Yeah, I didn't think that I would because I was really ready to get out of it. But I miss the people of the newsroom and the camaraderie. It's a family different from any other family. So I miss my friends in the newsroom a lot. I miss meeting people and getting to see how other people live. And meeting them on their level every day, which I don't get to do, you know, but occasionally. So I miss that a lot. That was always the most interesting part of the job is going out and meeting somebody new and seeing them in their workplace or in their home or something. And so I do miss that a lot. A lot, yeah.

Brittany: That would be something that you kind of get used to for so long in your career. And then all of the sudden, you kind of make the switch.

St. James: It's what was always most appealing to me about the job. Now, I don't miss some of the politics of the newsroom, I don't miss. I miss the good parts of journalism a lot.

Blanca: Have you thought maybe you could come back?

St. James: I used to joke with my friend (reporter) Rebecca Lopez that we didn't want to go through menopause on TV. So, I don't know, I don't know. I've had a complete hysterectomy with cancer and chemotherapy and so, it would have to be the right situation. I certainly don't ever want to stand out on a side of an icy road and talk about that. And I covered every bad weather event for Channel 8 for 18 years. I stood on the side of the freeway talking about ice or flooding or whatever. Despite being the medical reporter, I was out on all of those things and I don't want to do that anymore. So if I were to go back into it, it would have to be with the caveat that I would not have to cover that sort of stuff.
Blanca: And I appreciate that you will not cover that because, you have experience now.

St. James: Yeah, but that didn’t matter, I mean I had 25 years of experience when I left and I still, the last thing I did, the week before I left the job was a huge ice storm. And I mean, I was sitting on the floor at DFW airport covering the shut down of planes, you know? And I was talking to my new boss like, “You gotta get me out of here!” There was not a place I can use a restroom, I’m standing out on the tarmac. I mean, I don’t want to do that. So, I don’t know that that would be an option for me to go back into the business and really not have to do that. It would really have to be the right circumstance. So anybody that’s out there listening to this, they can think about that.

Brittany: Okay. We kind of are, a little bit of our final question. What advice do you have to upcoming journalists especially female journalists?

St. James: You know, I thought a lot about what I going to say here, but I didn’t that about that. That is a good question. I don’t know that my advice to an upcoming female journalist would be any different than a male journalist. I think that if you are dedicated and realistic about what this job is, I think that’s important. I think you have to go into it with open eyes. There’s upsides and downsides to any career. If going in and witnessing history, even if it’s history on a very small level, is something that you would love, then you should go for it and not let anybody tell you that you don’t have “it,” which was told to me at Channel 8. So don’t listen to those who say, “You can’t.” You have to believe in yourself. And if it's what you want, then believe in yourself and go get it.

Bailey: Would you mind telling us more about the story when you were told...?

St. James: [sigh] Ah, kay. Yes, you know, newsrooms change news directors not infrequently. And it was a change of a news director. And I was out on maternity leave and was called it from maternity leave to meet the new news director and he said, “What exactly is it that you think that you do here?” I said, “Well, I can tell you what I did before I went out on maternity leave.” And he said, “Well, that’s not going to be what you do when you come back. You know, some people have ‘it,’ others don’t. You don’t.” And I said, “Have you ever seen me? Do you know what I do?” And he goes, “No, but I heard.” I went, “So you're telling me this, not on the basis of actually having seen me do anything, just based on what somebody else in a leadership position that didn't like me has told you?” And that was it. And I worked very hard to change this news director’s mind. And I'm certain that I did and I know that he would have fired me. I know that he wanted to fire me and know that he was not going to renew my contract. But in the end, I was a really good worker. And I changed his mind about what ‘it’ looked like. So yeah, that's a true story. And I don't know if that would have happened to, I don't, maybe that would not have happened to a man but it certainly did happen to me.

Brittany: Do you think it was because you were on maternity leave?

St. James: No, no.
Blanca: Was it because somebody didn't like you?

St. James: I think it's one of those things where you can be really, really liked by one person. And because you're really, really liked by this person, when somebody new comes into this position, those favorites are not going to be their favorites. And I think that that's a circumstance that happened to me. I was really, really liked and then I was really, really not liked and then I was really, really liked and I was really, really not liked. I mean, those sorts of crazy waves happened for me throughout my career. One person loves you, the next person hates you.

Blanca: But I think it was because you were honest towards yourself, so some people take it…

St. James: I think that's absolutely it. I think some people are better able to handle that than others.

Blanca: Yeah, because when you are trying to please everybody everyone is like you know, being honest with yourself, right? So, I think that's what happened.

St. James: Yeah. But yes, I certainly was on the love-hate roller coaster for a long time.

Bailey: So you kind of mentioned it here, and you mentioned a lot about your mom like when you were growing up. Does she remain a support system throughout your career or did you have other sources that were a big support for you?

St. James: I'll say that the women of the newsroom were always supportive. So you would think that there would be some competition and you know everybody wants to be the one who gets the story or does this, but I think that for me the female reporter support system at Channel 8, for the most part was, was very strong for me and in Oklahoma City. Many of those women are still my dear friends today. So I had some good female support. My mom lives in Mansfield so she watched me for many years. I told you, right, she treated me like my brothers. I mean, we were always equal. So my mom never sung my praises, it was only during the Ebola that she actually gave me what I thought was a compliment of real pride. And that was when I did the interview with Dr. Weinstein and her friends and told her about what a good job I had done with Ebola. And I think that was the first time she was like, “Ooh, she's not bad.” A friend had said that the interview was good enough to be on 60 Minutes so, that made her proud.

Blanca: So, what is the biggest change that you have noticed since you have started this career to now? Because, I'm pretty sure that it has changed.

St. James: Oh, so much!

Blanca: Can you tell me what is the biggest change? The thing that has shocked you the most? Because right now, I think we are living in a special time.
St. James: This is not the only time that I remember there being a serious shift in journalism. I remember our news director coming in and having a newsroom meeting saying, “You know, we're going to start this thing called a website. But don't worry, it's not going to impact you at all.” So I mean, and of course it does, that impacts everyone. So there have been lots of shifts. For me the most, the most serious shift in journalism has been away from being careful about the words that you say, whether they're in print or in person. And it's the rush to be first, it's the rush to feed this huge news cycle. I mean, it used to be where we had maybe an hour and a half or two of news during the day that you could cover. Well now, I mean, they have two and a half hours at daybreak alone, and then they do an hour at noon. And then there's I mean there's so much time to fill, and so there's a certain carelessness to fill the time. They don't, you know, there's not time to check, you've got to do more stories, fill it and move on. And so that, to me, has been a tough shift to be, to have been part of that and to be watching. Because I can tell when somebody has phoned it in in order to move on to the next thing. And so I think that that's an unfortunate shift. I also think, because of social media, I was brought up where the journalist was not supposed to be the focal point of any report. Your job was to be the observer, and you are the mouthpiece to communicate what was happening, but you weren't supposed to be part of the story. And I am not a fan of reporter participation stories, in being in being the story. Making the journalist a personality has been a shift for me, because that to me, that gets in the way of what the story is, if the journalist is part of the story.

Blanca: You should be the fly on the wall ...

St. James: Yes, you're supposed to be on the fly on the wall. And the idea for doing a broadcast story especially is, this is what it would be like if the reporter wasn't there and the viewer was there. So for me, if the reporter's doing a walking talking, here's what I would do standup -- I'm just not a big fan of that style. So that's been tough for me to watch, too. And that's part of social media, in order to get followers, in order to spread your news message, you have to be a personality.

Blanca: You take a lot of selfies and...

St. James: I take a lot of selfies, Yeah, and there's some of that, that can be really great. I mean, it's not lost on me that I was the health reporter that developed breast cancer, and then I didn't even cover it. But then I've covered in in my own way on social media in the hopes of helping so that would be a different case of reporter participation, I suppose. But for the most part, I'm not a fan.

Brittany: I think for our final question today, what are some of the positives that you do see, with just journalism as a whole and how important it is to our society that we do have a free press.

St. James: Knowledge is power and all things. Knowledge is power in breast cancer. Knowledge is power when it comes to voting for your elected officials, when it comes to deciding where you're going to live, and how you're going to pay your mortgage. And if you're going to buy a new car, knowledge is power. And we can't have that power without journalists. I still think that
it's one of the most important professions on the planet. Okay, this is going to be my opinion and it incenses me anytime I hear our president call out fake news. And in instances when clearly it is not fake news, NBC and ABC, those are not fake news sources. Those are legitimate journalists. And it bothers me when I hear people in power disparage those who are trying to spread knowledge. So I just think it's an incredibly important profession. And I hope that journalists don't listen to that noise and they keep on keeping on, because it's the backbone of our country, it really is.

Blanca: I wanted to ask you this but you kind of already answered my question before. How do you feel when you hear people, powerful people saying that journalists are the enemy? Which is dangerous, because I mean, the bombs and all those things, because people are believing it.

St. James: I don't know how anyone would think that journalists are the enemy of the people, when journalists are always on the side of the people. I mean, every story has got more than one side. And if you can't find that both sides with one reporter than just don't watch that one reporter. Don't. Find another resource. Journalists are not the enemy of the people. Journalists are the people.

Bailey: Well, thank you so much for your time.

Blanca: Can you explain the difference? Because people don't understand that? If maybe. So, what is the difference between a real journalists and a commentator? Someone who say only opinions? So, do you know what I mean, because people don't realize that is a huge difference.

St. James: Well, I think that I think that you've summed it up. If you are giving your opinion on something, then then for the most part, you're not acting as a journalist. And there are some occasions where you can have a true journalist who can write an opinion commentary on something. John McCaa is a good example. He is the anchor of Channel 8, and he will periodically do a commentary on a community issue or, you know, something like that. But he makes it obvious that it is a commentary. In all other cases, the idea is that you're only presenting the facts -- and as many of the facts of all different sides as you possibly can. So there's a there's a huge difference.

Blanca: Okay, that's it, thank you so much.

St. James: I'll say, I'll say this too, I'm not wild about journalists that give their opinion on public public issues. You'll never know if I'm a Republican, a Democrat, a Libertarian, an Independent on anything. I have tried really hard to be as objective, and as, sorry chemo brain. I can't think of the word help me.

Blanca: Unbiased

St. James: Unbiased, Thank you as unbiased as possible. And I think the best journalists make it known that they are completely unbiased.
Blanca: I think it’s hard with social media because, somebody posted something and then they forgot it’s public ...

St. James: Yeah, I've seen, I've seen many journalists that I that I like and respect post things that clearly show bias. And I wonder why would you do that? You don't have to do that. But certainly, it's not uncommon now. Because social media makes it easy for you to have diarrhea mouth in some cases.

Blanca: [laugh] Yeah. It's hard sometimes. It was awesome!

St. James: Yeah. All right, what else can I tell you?

Brittany: Is there anything else you would like to be in part of your world history that we didn’t ask about?

St. James: Hum, let me think.

Blanca: The best thing of this career? The best thing of being a journalist?

St. James: Well the best thing about being a journalist is, is definitely meeting different people. And some of my most impactful stories, I think were not necessarily the big stories like Ebola or the those stories that were more important, but some of the ones that that I'm most proud of, are not necessarily the big stories, the stories that touched my heart and I think touched other people's hearts.

Blanca: Do you remember one?

St. James: Oh, yeah. I had the privilege of covering a former Dallas Cowboy who was diagnosed with a bone cancer. And he and his wife allowed me to cover him to his death. And I was there when he died. And her strength really was very inspiring to me. And I will never forget James Parish and his wife. I was honored to cover a little boy who was losing his sight. And he had a wish list of things that he wanted to do before he went blind and because of my story, every last thing on his wishlist came true, everything came true. Now, it's unfortunate that I didn't get to cover the story ‘til its end, because I wasn't allowed to. But that story was impactful to me. Here's a great story. A couple years ago, I did a story on an organization out of Fort Worth, that turns wedding gowns into Angel gowns for babies that don’t survive. And I had tried so hard to convince our assistant news director that we needed to do the story. He was like, “People don't want to hear about dead babies.” And I said, “This story is going to inspire. In fact, we need to have a wedding dress drive here at the station, because women will come.” And he absolutely did not believe. So, I put the story together. Normally, you would go through an editing process, you'd write a script, somebody else approves your script, and then you'd have it edited. I wrote the story, my photographer edited the story, waiting for the news director, or the assistant news director to go out of town and then we would present it to somebody else.
And the assistant news director left, the night that he left, I presented it to the executive producer who put it on and the next morning, people just started to show up with wedding dresses. We didn't plan it, women just started to show up with wedding dresses. The first wedding dress that was donated - I wasn't even there -- but they they rode the DART train with their wedding dress from 50 years ago, because they wanted to know that it would go to another family. I mean, I'll never forget it. I'll never forget it. And they had thousands, enough dresses to fill a warehouse from that story. And I mean, that's a good thing. So those stories, they're not the famous people, they're not the rich people, they're not the powerful people. The ordinary people that do wonderful things are the, are the things that I take from journalism.

Blanca: I think that's why we are here.

St. James: Absolutely. It shows the power of this job, though, too I mean, you can make or break somebody's life in 90 seconds on TV, you really can. So, it's why journalists really need to still be careful with what they saying and how they say it.

Blanca: I think it's more important when you cover people who are not famous or powerful then when you cover public...

St. James: I think you can have the same care, no matter who you're covering. Everyone should be treated with the same respect and the lack of bias.

Blanca: Yeah, but I think sometimes for people who are powerful or famous, it's harder for them to be heard. They are kind of voiceless.

St. James: There's no question that journalists are the voices of the voiceless. It was a great career for me for many, many years. And I and I really enjoyed many, many aspects of it. But I never would have gotten to do something like plan and prepare to have a Halloween party at my house. But now I get to do that. And I never ever, ever would have been allowed to leave my job at two o'clock on a Friday to come talk with three fantastic smart women in my living room (referencing the women conducting this interview), because I'd have been preparing for the five o'clock newscast. And it just, I would have had to take a whole day off in order to make this happen.

Bailey: Well, we really appreciate your time, we do.

St. James: Of course!

Bailey: Is there anything else you want to add?

St. James: Oh, I can’t think of anything. I’m sure that there's lots, 25 years, there's a lot. I was very blessed to be able to experience some fascinating things.

Blanca: The worst experience?
St. James: The worst experience, I don't know the worst experience. Oh, I've got a good story. I'll tell you, I'll tell you a story that, that taught me, that shaked my life too. So when I was in Oklahoma City, it was my second live shot and I'm standing out on bridge where some kids were jumping off the bridge into the creek below and they had broken their necks and died. So I was taking over for another reporter. I was not tremendously experienced. This is my second story in Oklahoma City. And went out there and the reporter said, “okay, don't worry about it. I've already cut the video for you, here's the sound bite, here's what the story is.” So I took over for him. And I did a live shot. And I forgot who I was, where I was and what I was doing. It was the worst experience of my life. It was so horrible. And I sat on that bridge and cried after that live shot, because it was just a disaster. It was a disaster. And I went back to the newsroom and the assistant news director, and I take this with me and in a leadership role now to know that not everybody's perfect all the time. He looked at me and he said, “Well, I'm not ever going to see that reporter again, am I?” And I said, “No, sir.” And that was the last time I ever did a live shot without having notes in front of me, because you never know when you’re going to forget who you are, what you are, why you're there.

Brittany: Well, thank you so much. We appreciate it.