Interviewers Fabianna Blanco, Pennie Boyett, Jaimie Siegle and Adam Schrader joined Beatriz Terrazas on her back porch at her home in Southlake on Sunday, Oct. 19. The interviewers are graduate students in the Frank W. Mayborn Institute for Graduate Journalism at the University of North Texas. Boyett and Terrazas served together on the board of directors of the Association for Women Journalists in the 1990s, when both were employed by The Dallas Morning News.

As they found places to sit, they admired a giant spider web and its resident.

B: Just make sure you don’t touch that ... I know, I’m crazy ... Did my dog come out?

P: I hear her walking around, but I don’t see her?

B: Where are you, Rox? [pause] What are you doing? [pause] She’s just being a dog.

J: It’s called a banana spider?

B: They’re argio aranchia

They continued to chat as they settled on the porch. Terrazas admitted to being “a little nervous.”

J: Being on the other side of an interview?

B: Yeah ... I’ve written a lot about personal stuff.

P: is there anything off limits?

B: Um, if I’m not comfortable, I’ll let you know.

P: OK.

They talk about mud daubers, wasps and spiders before the interview begins.

B: I want to show you. This is what I shot right before you came ... I just love her. I’ve got a bunch of ‘em.

[Terrazas shows a photograph of the spider on her phone.]

B: Can you tell I’m a nature buff?

P: I don’t know if you’ve seen the other ones in the Portal to Texas History ...

B: You mean it’s public?
P: Yeah, it’s public but you really have to know what you are looking for before you get to it. A lot of it is people we know, Katie Sherrod and Gayle Reaves

B: Ah, Katie?

P. It’s kind of fun to go back and see those things.

And it begins:

P: We’ll start at the beginning. You grew up in Las Cruces and El Paso? Where were you born?

B: I was born in El Paso, I don’t remember exactly the stories, but I was born in El Paso and we were living in Las Cruces. So I lived in Las Cruces until I was about 12 and then we moved to El Paso and I remember I didn’t want to move. I don’t remember why. I probably wanted to run away or something because I had my little group of friends.

Then I lived in El Paso until I came to the Star-Telegram in 1987.

J: How did your journalism background form? What piqued your interest in writing?

B: You know, I, even as a little kid, I was always writing, whether it was journals or whether it was made-up stories, fiction, I loved to write. I think that probably because I liked to read – I had some really good teachers in elementary school; I had this wonderful third grade teacher, I can’t remember her first name, but her last name was Beckett, Mrs. Beckett. She used to read to us, stuff that probably you wouldn’t be allowed to read to kids now. You know, they read Where the Red Fern Grows, to us and I remember that we cried, all the girls cried, at that when moment. I have never been able to read that book again. But, there was also this other book, A Wrinkle in Time, I can’t remember who -

J: My favorite book, Madeleine L’Engle

B: But I think at one point she was anonymous, I want to say.


B: Yeah, so I think just knowing that there were other worlds that you could escape to. And, plus, I think my parents although they didn’t have the kind of education I’ve been fortunate to have, they grew up in Mexico and I don’t think my mom even finished elementary school, but they felt like it was really important for us to read and I remember trips to the Branigan Library in Las Cruces where we had to check out books and we had to check out books in English and Spanish, because she was going to make sure we didn’t forget out Spanish. And I think that’s probably the seed of storytelling for me. Maybe not necessarily journalism, but storytelling.

P: What about the photography part of it?

B: One Christmas I said I want – it was interesting, you’re making me think of all these things I haven’t thought of in a long time – I said I wanted a typewriter and I wanted a camera. And I think that ever since I was in elementary school, I remember taking my mom’s – I remember taking a Brownie camera
that she had – on field trips at the end of the year to the park – I was maybe in fourth or fifth grade. I have always taken pictures, always. But I wasn’t interested in photojournalism per se. I wasn’t even on the school paper in high school. I didn’t take a single journalism class until I’d been at the university [University of Texas at El Paso] for three years.

And I think, there’s this wonderful woman, part of my work study at UTEP was tutoring because I was always pretty good at writing and pretty good at English, so part of my work-study was tutoring English and writing, and the woman who was in charge of the tutors – we had classes with her, we had to have a class once a week with her, I remember her pulling me aside and saying, ‘You know, I think you’re just not happy.’ I was actually pre-med; I was a biology major.

J: And that was a professor?

B: Yeah, she was an English professor and she said, ‘You know, you don’t seem happy doing what you’re doing,’ and it wasn’t because I wasn’t doing well, because I had pretty good grades in the sciences, except for calculus, but I loved biology, I was fascinated by it. And I don’t know how she intuited that I was unhappy, but she said, ‘You’re a good writer and you’re always carrying a camera around; I think you should try photojournalism.’ And I was like – I don’t think so.

[laughter]

J: Why were you ...

B: You know that, I think that coming from a humble family, maybe even what some would consider to be a poor family, I think that the way to get ahead would have been considered something like law or nursing or medicine, and I can’t tell you that that was put in my head by my parents; I can’t tell you that was something that they told me, but it was something that somehow, I understood to be true. And journalism was not a lucrative, has never been [laughter] ...

P: is not, will never be,

B: ... a lucrative choice of careers. But she was on to something and I tried it and I changed majors and it took me five years to graduate, but that’s how it started.

F: What kind of stories did you write for the Telegram?

B: For the Star-Telegram? Well, you know, I started off as a photojournalist. I was not a writer until 2000, so I graduated with a degree, a bachelor of arts in journalism, with an emphasis on photojournalism, I happened to be able to land what was then a year-long internship and I was really, really lucky, because it was then Cap Cities ABC; they were the ones who owned the Star-Telegram and – my memory’s fuzzy, but I think they owned newspapers and tv stations – and what they did with that yearlong internship is they would send you to three different papers like four months and four months and four months, and I was green. I mean GREEN. And they said, we like you; we think you have potential but we’re going to keep you here so ...

I had a lot to learn, so they kept me there. I was there for five years to 1992, then I went to The Dallas Morning News as a photojournalist until 1998, and then I did a fellowship and I came back and I applied for a writing job.
P: What was the transition like, to go from a photographer to a writer? Did you quit taking pictures altogether or did you still take pictures to go with your stories?

B: I think the transition was made a little bit easier because William Snyder – do you remember William Snyder? – he was a photographer, a Pulitzer Prize winning photographer – I think he’s won two Pulitzers, maybe three – he had decided that he needed to learn a little bit about writing and I think he went to work on our features staff, what was then the Today section, for a matter of weeks or months, and I thought, ‘That’s a good idea,’ and I asked if I could do that and they said, ‘Sure,’ so I went up there.

I don’t know if you remember, when I was at the Star-Telegram, when you were in Arlington, I don’t know if it was because we were short-staffed or if it was because we still didn’t get it, and as far as I’m concerned, let’s face it, a lot of places still don’t get it when it comes to diversity – there were stories that I wanted to do that I kept pitching as a photographer and they either didn’t have priority or they didn’t have staff.

F: What kind of stories?

B: There was a lot going on in national media at the time about the Latino high school dropout rate and I wanted to tackle that and there wasn’t somebody available and I thought, well, I’m going to do it then, so I started finding sources and reporting, and then there were more fun stories that I wanted to do, like there was an animal sanctuary in Boyd, Texas, and I wanted to go write a story about it, so I wrote it and shot it both. So I already had that.

I actually did write for my college paper, UTEP, for a little while, so I had that background already, but I hadn’t written for a daily paper.

J: You basically took a hiatus from writing between your college paper days until you came back from your fellowship to start writing?

B: Yeah, it wasn’t quite so easy. I had some great assignments as a photographer. I got to go cover the pope in Cuba; I got to cover the –

J: Is that the photo that’s in there?

B: Well, actually, that’s Denver. I got to cover the pope in Mexico, too. I got to cover him all over the world. I had a blast; it wasn’t because I didn’t like it. But I also felt like I needed to do more. At the time, I still felt like we weren’t doing all that we could in terms of diversity and covering underserved communities basically, communities of color, so after I saw that William did that, I hope I’m remembering this chronology correctly, and I thought, well, I’m going to try that so I asked if I could go up one floor and do some writing, under Tom Huang and Lisa Kresl and they said sure, and then, I knew I wanted to apply for the Nieman Fellowship and I think I did that after I came back downstairs from that hiatus from photography.

And when I got it and I came back from it, I thought it would be self-defeating to come back and do the same thing when I had been given such a great opportunity to grow.

P: What did you do when you were there, when you were at Harvard? I can remember us talking about it. Tell them a little about what it was like to have a Nieman Fellowship.
B. Well, it was terrifying. You know, I applied for the big three. I applied for Michigan; I applied for Stanford and I applied for Harvard. And I was offered Stanford and Harvard. And everything inside of me wanted to go to Stanford, because I’m a child of the Southwest. You know, I felt really comfortable there; it felt very laid-back.

The interview at Harvard was just so damn scary. It was. I just felt like. It scared me to death. I’ve learned that if something really scares me and I’m offered the opportunity to do it, then I need to do it, because that’s the only way you stretch, that’s the only way you grow.

It was great. I got to meet some great people that I’m still friends with, that I still see sometimes. Chris Hedges was in my class. You learn a lot from somebody like Chris Hedges. I got to sit in and audit any class I wanted. In the Law School, Allen Derschowitz was at the time teaching a class called concepts of law in the Bible and I had to sit in on it.

Um, who else was there? Some great literature classes. Robert Coles who taught the literature of social reflection, I think is what it was called. Maybe that’s the one that probably I still carry with me the most because I think that as a writer you can tell stories that will get people to think.

I remember being in a workshop somewhere, I can’t remember where it was, and DeNeen Brown, who was at the Washington Post, wonderful writer, said a good story should make you feel something, it should make you want to do something, it should make you want to call a friend, or cry, or scream, or shout, or go out and change something. And I think that that dovetails very well with some of the literature Robert Coles introduced us to. It was a survey course so you know we didn’t have to write papers or anything.

I also took a really interesting class with this woman who I can’t remember now – it was on Latinos and film, and we had to start writing a screen play for her class – and I learned a lot about things I didn’t know, about social problem films, and just how skewed they were, that also made me think about the things that I see in media or saw, and I think in some ways it’s gotten a lot worse.

J. What are some of the challenges that you experienced in the industry, as far as, common industry challenges, being a woman in the field, and how do you overcome them?

B. I think when I started out as a photojournalist, being a woman and an ethnic minority, I was at what was then – I guess it was a medium size paper, would you say the Star-Telegram was a medium size paper? I think there was quite a bit of sexism, maybe not internally, maybe not the paper, but I remember being in places where I was trying to get a shot and having guys tell me to move over because that was their spot and having to stand my ground.

I was at a church in Mexico – and there was, I don’t know if it was Univision, it was a big, it was a national Mexican network, I can’t remember who it was – but I was trying to get my spot and, you know, it’s really competitive but I got my spot and security had told me I could stand right there and there were three guys over there whispering and they came and said you have to move because this is our spot and I said, no, I’m not going to move; I was told I could stand here. And the guys go and they whisper together and they come back and say, no you have to move, this is our spot. And I said, Security told me I could stand there. If you want me to move, go get them to come help me move. And they went back and they whispered, they kept trying to get me to move and I was like: it’s not going to happen. A lot of standing your ground.
I think initially too I would show up to take a picture at somebody’s home and they’d open the door and there’s a woman there with all these cameras and she was brown-skinned and I think that there were some reactions at first. I remember having - some of the things were just blatant now that I’m thinking back and remembering things. I was photographing someone for the stock show. I can’t remember, he was some executive or something, and he happened to have, like a cast, and he was on crutches because he had broken his leg or his foot or something and I was trying to position him and saying ‘Stand right here,’ and he was like, ‘Boy, if I didn’t have this cast on, I’d chase you around here,’” you know, stuff like that.

I remember Max Faulkner; do you remember Max Faulkner? I went to cover a baseball game at TCU one time, and I walked on to the field because we used to have pretty good access to the dugout and these guys start yelling, ‘Oooh, salsa, I want some salsa.’ And you know, I dealt with it, and I knew – they knew you – and I told them you gotta tell those guys it’s not cool to do that, and he told them, and I happened to mention it to Max, and Max was not really happy about it and he said, that’s not gonna happen again, so a week later, I started getting these handwritten notes, ‘We’re sorry we called you salsa.’ [laughter]

I don’t think it’s anything that other women haven’t dealt with.

P. I will guarantee you it’s not.

J. I was asking, because other oral histories, I read Carolyn Barta, she was one of my professors –

B. Oh, yeah

J. Hers was really interesting because hers was much earlier even but that’s why.

B. There was a book called The Girls in the Balcony, about the New York Times reporters

J. I hadn’t heard of it.

P. Nan Robertson

F. What about your husband? When did you meet your husband?

B. I met him [John Doty] while we were both waiting for a prisoner to be brought out of the Tarrant County Jail. [laughter]

B. He was working for WFAA and I was working for the Star-Telegram. It was a perp walk. I think he [the prisoner] had burned his house down for the insurance, so we were waiting there.

F. And you guys worked together at The Dallas Morning News?

B. No, he worked for WFAA at the time. He hasn’t worked for them for a long time.

J. You were at the Star-Telegram?

B. I was still at the Star-Telegram. We got married two weeks or a month after I went to The Dallas Morning News.

J. So you and your husband have, you guys share a business and you work with nonprofit clients and you guys do multi-media. How does that work?
B. It’s his business. He left WFAA - When did he leave? ’97? To start his own business. And I was still at the Morning News, because one of us needed to have a sure paycheck – as sure as it was then.

A. What did you think about his wanting to start his own business?

B. I was like go for it. Yeah. You know, it meant I didn’t run into him on stories any more. It’s like we were both at Luby’s [in Killeen], covering the mass shooting, going, ‘Who’s at home with the dogs? I didn’t know you were coming here.’

I’ve always been it’s your choice, whatever you wanted to do, and he wanted to do that, and I was fine with it. He had already seen the writing on the wall. Things were already changing in the late 90s. The internet was just starting to come on big. We didn’t have email on our terminals at the time.

We had a common terminal in the Today section where everyone had to go log in to get email.

It didn’t become common for us until ’99 or 2000. It was like, what’s email?

P. Much less websites for news, or breaking news online, or any of that stuff. Nobody would have looked for it there because nobody else had it either

A. Speaking of online, what was it like when you saw some of your first stories on the internet?

B. You know, it was so much more – I think at the time I really wanted to hold a piece of paper, but it was a little bit more instant gratification if you could see it online. I think the internet has – it’s not all bad what’s happened to news, some of it’s good. I think we’re at a point where we’re trying to figure out how to get information out there quickly and get it all correctly.

I’ve seen some horrible things with the Ebola cases, I mean, I don’t want to talk about some of the things I’ve seen; it’s embarrassing. But I’m not really a journalist any more. I do a lot of different things, so it’s not mine to be embarrassed about but still, part of me cringes, part of me wants to say, ‘I’m sorry.’ I’ve just heard some stupid questions.

J. You said- You said in your Vimeo bio that story is the most effective form of communication, so that’s why you guys deal with videos and stuff. Why do you think story is the best form of communication? And how do you think your journalism background really helps you guys tell those stories?

B. That’s quite a mouthful but—

J. Sorry.

B. I think – let me start with – if you can remember the second part, I’ll start with story. I think that we really are all wired for story from the moment we hear our first nursery rhyme. I mean it’s what our parents use to put us, lull us, to sleep; it’s what they used to tell us family history; it’s what they used to tell us our personal history. Oh, and when you were born you were this, this and this; and then you did this and this and this; and now look at you. It’s such a natural thing. I mean we’ve seen the glyphs on the walls. You know? We’ve seen painting on caves. I think it’s a very primal method for passing along information. And identity- Identity. So I think that is why I feel that.

What was the second part of your question?
J. How does your journalism background play a role, and how does that help when you’re doing P.R. and marketing your stories for these corporations and non-profits?

B. Well, we don’t do a whole lot of P.R. but we do—like we have some clients that ask us. I don’t know if you saw the JMD Multimedia website, but we do employee profiles. So the people who are applying for a job at certain places—it’s a rail business, the BNSF system.

I think the journalism helps because I can interview people. I’m pretty good at figuring out at which parts of the story are relevant to this particular project. I can prioritize. I can organize. I’m really good at organizing stories. (laugh)

I can figure out what’s missing, too, from a story. I think that’s one of the things I always wanted in an editor was, “Don’t tell me what I should do with what’s there, but tell me what’s missing.” And I think that’s really important to me and to the stories that we do. I think having—I think having an idea of where to begin a story, where to end a story. I’m sure I’ll think of something else.

J. What do you think are the elements—you know what are the elements that create a perfect story? Things that are essential in creating a perfect story.

B. Are you talking about a video story or are you talking about a story-story, like a written story?

J. Let’s do written stories because I don’t do much video (laugh).

B. I think it’s really important to have a sense of not just what happened but what the story means. And when I think about what the story means I think in terms of universal themes. Is this a story about home? Is this a story about identity? Is this a story about triumph? Is this, you know, your quintessential underdog story? Because those are the things we humans understand. You know when I think of stories I think of universal themes and archetypes. And that’s been a lesson that was a long time coming for me. It took me a long time to figure that out. To figure out that, for me, the most important part was the theme. You know it’s what you see in the book jacket. It’s not the plot, but it’s what it’s about. This is a story about coming home. This is a story about coming full circle. This is a story about rising above the odds.

I have this great memory when Mike Merschel was my editor at the Morning News; he wanted me to talk to, I think... Is his name Chip, somebody at Poynter? Chip Scanlan? I think his name is Chip, because he was a writing coach, right? So Chip was going to be in town and he [Mike Merschel] wanted me to just kind of talk to him about a story I was working on at the time. And the story was about (laugh), with quotation marks, a nun who had started a birthing center on the border. It was called “Holy Family Birth Center.” And I can’t even remember why I was doing that story. Something about it drew me. I think the nun had become really famous in the medical circle so she did a lot of natural births. Midwife, she was a midwife. Not lay midwife, but nurse midwife.

So I was really struggling with writing this story and I remember sitting on this couch with Chip and he goes, “So what’s your story about?”

And I was really struggling. I said, “Well, it’s about these women, these nurses and they go to this birth center and they are trying to learn from one of the best.”

And he said, “Well, who are the characters?”
And I said, “Well, I have this one woman who is very interesting; she is very young. She came from California. His dad was a big finance; I mean they had a good life. He was like, not like a hedge fund manager, but something along those lines and here she is, she is in this little town, where she is like so homesick and in her first day she goes to find the one pay phone that’s by the Walmart and she is like wallowing into the phone and then like a couple of weeks later she can’t imagine leaving this place.”

And he goes, “Oh! So it’s a story about transformation!” (laughs).

So it’s not really about the birth, not about the nun; it’s a story about this woman coming into this place and being transformed. I really loved that.

I think about that a lot whenever I have — you know I do private classes for people who are working on personal stories. And I think about that a lot and I use that as an example.

F. I read on your website that you are now a consultant and a writing coach. Why did you start doing this and like when?

B. You know, sort of by default. I always get somebody, before the Mayborn [Literary Nonfiction Conference], I always get some, you know one or two people ask me “Can you read this?” and you know, I will; I’ll do that.

But also because I think that – let me think about how I want to put this – there’s a lot of people who have personal stories that they want to put in words and they don’t necessarily want to publish them. They want to do it for themselves, they want to make sense of something that happened; you know of some trauma or some family member, somebody who maybe committed suicide.

J. Like a form of therapy almost?

B. No. I don’t think it’s even therapy, I think they just want to be able to say it. I mean there is a lot of walking wounded out there and some of them want something to leave their kids, like you know, this is what happened. I had a wonderful woman who wanted to share with her very bright daughter the story about how she was so preemie that they weren’t sure she would live. So it’s the story; she wrote it for her daughter. And where – you know they don’t want a degree, these people don’t want to go and take a 12-week class so they can do this. They just want to be able to put this into words and they want a safe place to do it.

And so that’s where I started and now I’m doing a little bit more. I actually have two clients who I’m working with right now. One has a novel; I read it through once. She’s rewritten it and it’s now back with me, and I’m going to give her probably another developmental edit. And probably a line edit with it as well, because I can’t help myself (laughs).

And then I have another client who I’m working with another coach as a team and she’s got very, very powerful story. I mean she’s – it’s almost all the way there; it just needs proper framework. So I think I like helping people get their stories out. I think that, you know? Part of it is that even though these stories are not journalism, I like to imagine that these stories are the one little place where my little sphere is going to connect with somebody else’s little sphere. You know where they touch is what we share in common and sometimes knowing somebody’s story is the only thing that’s going to make you, if not like them, at least tolerate them. In the workplace, you know? Wherever.
I get an invitation almost every year to the Highland Park Literary Festival and when I teach the personal stories, I say, “You know? This is—when you know somebody’s personal story, it might be the one thing that makes you see them as a human being. Oh yes, just like that coworker who I don’t like or who’s a nut.”

P. Or who’s in a bad mood all the time.

B. Yeah.

P. And now we know why.

B. Correct.

F. And how do you like doing this compared to doing photojournalism?

B. You know I am a member of the American Society of Media Photographers. I still do some photography. In fact, some of the clients that my husband works with I’m the producer and I’m also the still photographer and he’s the video guy. I have a really deep love for photojournalism and It’s never going to go away. Since my mom died it’s been really, really hard for me to write. So I’ve fallen back on photography. And I’ve been taking pictures like crazy.

A. I have a few questions.

B. Sure!

A. So I’m interested in a lot of the photography aspect. I was wondering when you first – because you mentioned being in an elementary school and hearing stories like *A Wrinkle in Time*, and that helped you on the story-telling front with words.. When did you realize that pictures could tell a story? When did you start using photography for the storytelling method?

B. You know I probably didn’t realize it until I took my first photojournalism class, which is really pretty embarrassing because I started rather late. So I think what’s interesting to me about photography is that you can say so much with one photo and it is so visceral; it can elicit a reaction so quickly.

A written story to me is more like a journey. It’s something that if it’s told well I can sink in it and I’m walking right along with the narrator or the character. Photographers have this, really good photographers have this unique gift of being able to tell us a lot in one image. They also have a unique gift of being able to show us something that you pass by every single day and have never seen exactly the way that they’ve seen it. Or they might show it to us in five different ways.

That said, I’m just getting back into kind of shooting every day. I’d love to get back into publishing photos. People right now know me as more of a producer and as a writer, and not necessarily as a photographer. I mean one of my clients is like, “Oh yeah I forget! I forget that you take pictures too!” and so, does that answer your question?

A. Yeah. And then so the Internet and digital advancements have helped or hindered journalism; depends on how you look at it. Like with the ability to publish stories fast, you know, social media being able to tweet something out. How has digital impacted the field of photojournalism and how – because you were a photojournalist before digital cameras – so how did you adjust to the switch to digital cameras instead of film cameras and that kind of thing?
B. Well, from strictly the technology viewpoint; I’ll start there just because it’s an easier thing to answer. While I was in the *Morning News*, we saw the first digital camera and I remember covering something. I think it was the Ross Perot in California, there was a political convention and I think he also was in California at the same time, because he ran as an independent and I just remember how difficult it was, the things that went—that you exposed for and the film were not the same. And I remember how unforgiving digital was; I mean I blew out of this guy’s forehead, the highlights. My editor was like, “We can’t use it.”

And I go, “What do you mean you can’t use it?” and he goes, “Well, we can’t use it. There’s nothing there; you know, you can’t put information in. You can put information out but you can’t put information in when there’s nothing there.” (laughs)

And I was like, “What?”

I think it was hard. They were expensive. They were heavy. Technology was not – a satellite phone in 1998, when we went to Cuba, weighed like 90 pounds. You know and now it’s like, I sat next to it in a little car driving across the island so it’s so much more democratic now. You know?

I would say that technology has become more democratized, which means people have more access to it but doesn’t necessarily mean they know how to use it. And I think coming back to your point about the internet, I think for a long time I was reading anything and everything and assuming that because it was there, you know? Like many people say, “Must be true. Someone wrote it.” I read everything with a grain of salt, even when it’s a local TV station, or national TV station, or a newspaper. I mean, I read every sentence with a grain of salt, because I don’t know if it’s a blogger that they had, that they contracted. There was something that just happened a week and a half ago; some blogger wrote something about – I can’t remember what it was. And then – was it Forbes? Do you know what I’m talking about?

J. Forbes has never has writers, they just have contributors.

B. But it was somebody that they hadn’t vetted or something that they hadn’t read, and he posted something and it was really quite astonishing, whatever it was, and then I kind of dug a little deeper and after that they said, well, we are not going to use him anymore. But they couldn’t fire him because he was just a contributor. So I read everything pretty carefully now, because there’s so much of it out there. There’s so much of it that you have to be careful of who’s sourcing it, who do they know, are they using more than one source, are they using somebody that has an agenda as a source, are they using a disinterested party as a source – you know?..

P. You don’t know what to believe.

B. Are they making it up? So I’m really careful but, on the other hand, there’s some interesting stuff that has happened like on Twitter during the Ferguson protests. There was some feed that somebody kept posting that was live and they were there.

J. And it was a kid, one of the guys who lived there, right? And he said, “You know who I saw? I just saw a boy who got shot.”

P. There was live video.
B. But it was one source. It was almost like a self-styled TV camera or TV channel. But they had some name – I’m sorry I’m grasping, but they were live and they were showing things that weren’t being shown on CNN or NBC and it was happening so could watch it and you could see it for yourself and you could come to your own conclusion on whether it was right or wrong. And they were on it! And I was really kind of thrilled that somebody had the guts to do that.

P. And they weren’t stopping them.

B. Yeah and they said “Ok now we’re moving back while there’s stuff happening.” And they was a really calm guy, you can tell he wasn’t a – he might have been like late 30’s or something and I thought he did a good job. That’s what I mean about we’re at a crossroads. I don’t know what’s going to happen. I think it’s an interesting time.

A. So being someone who is both skilled in writing and photography, video and all that, what do you recommend for people entering the profession now? That they work hard on one aspect or the other, or try to learn as much as they can about everything?

B. I think that if you really want to learn to write well, you have to read a lot, and I think if you want to learn the visual, you have to watch a lot. I mean I’m not talking about watching news; I’m talking about watching really well-made movies, where the cinematography is phenomenal. Look at National Geographic; look at the really good photographers, because I think that technology is evolving so quickly that you know you’re going to get one camera today and it’s going to be different tomorrow. I mean I shoot so much with this (iPhone) and I post on Instagram with this, and does it look the same as my camera? Well, if you look really closely, no, but I can make it look pretty darn good because you know I have Photoshop Express on my phone, or whatever it’s called. So I can correct on my phone, but I think that technology should – that’s the way you’re getting the message out.

So I’m not saying not to learn it, but I’m saying focus on the foundation which is the putting together the good writing, putting together what makes a good photo, what makes a good photo story. Get those foundations! There’s some good people teaching stuff out there all the time and I’m not just talking about lynda.com, I’m talking about Mona Reeder just went to SMU and she’s going to be a TA and probably teaching some courses.

And you can also, you know I’ve called people up and said “Can you read this?” I have a couple of friends you read everything that I seek to publish. I have a friend – I have something in The Rumpus that I wrote about a trip I made in 2012 to my mom’s hometown in Mexico, which is like right in the heart of cartel country. And she read this piece that I submitted everywhere; she must have read like seven different versions. Don’t discount what people around you can do for you as far as learning.

A. Speaking of other journalists, who are some of your biggest role models? People who influenced you?

B. People who influenced me. Oh, my gosh! I’m going to fail this one. Well, I’ll tell you someone. The other person who reads my reported stuff and who I really, really respect and admire because she is such a scientist and she’s always telling me to put context in stories, and I carry that even into memoir and that’s – her name is Laura Beil, she’s a medical writer. And I admire her because she left the Morning News when I left in 2006, she was a medical writer there – we had something called Discovery, Discoveries; do you remember?
P. I remember that.

B. ... and because she’s making a living on her own without having to be on staff somewhere and she is a really good reporter, she gets all sides. She doesn’t get sidetracked by kind of the emotion. And I’m not saying her stories don’t have emotion but she can be very objective and I like that. I admire her greatly. I read all her stuff. She found the ground zero of the Chikungunya – the mosquito. Who else? Who else do I read?

A. Or photography influences? If you have those.

B. You know that’s changed so much. I don’t know if you know what’s been going on in my life, but up until March of this year I was a long-distance caregiver for six years, so basically I didn’t have a lot of time. And what little time I had here I was trying to work a little bit, so my media life was just so very different. Now there’s a couple of people whose photography I like a lot. They may have nothing to do with journalism but there’s this wonderful person who I just discovered. His name is Justin Terveen, he does these great landscapes of Dallas. He’s local. I’m going to have to get back to you. Let me think of who I follow on...

J. Instagram

B. Yeah (laughs).

J. I have a question. Let’s talk about the 1994 Pulitzer Assignment. What was that experience like and was that difficult? I mean the violence against women story seems that it would kind of be hard to separate yourself, you know being a compassionate person, to get the third party objective view. You know what was that like? And what was that like getting recognized for it?

51:59

B. Well, I was a photographer at the time. So I covered, who was in Mexico? Greg Katz was a reporter who covered Mexico because we went to different countries. We were a big team and there were reporters who went to certain countries and wrote about violence against women there and then they had photographers who went in after them. So I worked with Greg Katz in Mexico and I worked with David Marcus. Do you know David Marcus? I don’t know what he’s doing now. He’s writing books about education, I think. I was with him in Brazil and I think that...

P: How are men doing these stories?

B: Well, Gayle Reaves was one of the reporters.

P: Yeah, I knew that.

B. I think because they were based there. David Marcus lived in Colombia so he covered part of Latin America and Greg Katz was our Mexico correspondent, so I think that’s how it happened. I forgot what the question was, I’m sorry.

J: What was the experience like in the violence against women assignment?

B: You know, Brazil was really interesting to me, because Brazil is a beautiful country and I discovered that in some ways it’s really pretty ugly for women. I’ll never forget this one moment.
There was a woman who was one of the main people for the Brazil part of the project and she was a model and she had a little boy who was like three or four when this happened. He was maybe 8 when we met him. She was breaking up with her boyfriend and her boyfriend didn’t want her to break up with him so he doused her in alcohol and then he held her over a gas stove in front of her son. My memory is fuzzy but I don’t think they ever did anything; the law didn’t do anything.

When I first met her, I walked in her house and the translator was with me and we started talking and she said come here. She closed the door and it was just me, her, and the translator. Her son was in another room. And she took off all her clothes, so I could see how burned she was. She said – and I went for my, in instinct, I went for my camera. She said no, no, I just want you to see this is what happened and I don’t necessarily want you to take pictures.

I’ve thought about that moment a lot since I’ve been coaching other writers and what I think she wanted in that moment, even though she might not have said it, even though I didn’t understand it, was to have some kind of human connection with me before I shot any pictures. See me as a person. I’m a woman; this is what happened to me. See me as human being. She wanted that connection. So I think that was a story just for me; it wasn’t meant for public consumption. But that was really moving.

It was also interesting that when we were in, I can’t remember where it was, near Sao Paulo maybe. Recife, maybe? I think that’s where we were. I’ll have to go back to look at this; it’s been 20 years. The country had set up police stations where women could go and feel safe reporting violence against them and we couldn’t find the damned police station, because we’d ask somebody and they’d go yeah, huhh. They were lying to us. We couldn’t find them so, it took a long time.

What other things do I remember?

I think maybe the biggest emotion I remember from that time is thinking that finally there was something really worth the telling that could really change people’s lives. And maybe it wasn’t going to change the world, but it was going to change one person’s life or one family’s life and thinking OK, we did well. So that part wasn’t about the Pulitzer, but it was about the difference we could make.

J: Were you surprised when you heard the news that your team had earned the Pulitzer?

B: I think we kind of knew who the finalists were, that news always kind of gets out, somehow there is always a leak. And I think we were pretty hopeful that it was going to be us and I do remember the champagne in the newsroom and calling my husband who was across the parking lot at WFAA saying, “Hey, come over here, we won; we won.”

F: You’ve done a lot of things in your career and done a lot of different things. Are there any new things you want to try in the future?

B: You know, we did a personal project last year and it debuted this year. We have some friends who live in Trophy Club and they’re gay and they had been together for like 10 years, and last December, they asked if we would travel with them to Seattle because they were going to tie the knot, because they could do it there and they couldn’t do it here. They wanted us to go as witnesses and I was like, well, you know, I can’t just go as a witness because I’ve known you guys, I’ve got to take my camera. This is a momentous moment. What was supposed to be like a 5- or 7-minute wedding video ended up being this 20-minute – I mean, literally, it’s long enough to be a 30-minute sitcom – because they are our Cam and
Mitch from *Modern Family*. It turned out so well, and it kind of got us thinking about documentary again. We kind of got bit by the bug, so we’re thinking if there is another documentary we can do. Not about them, but just if there is something out there that we can do that might be fun, that might be a little bit more creative, so I’m kind of keeping an eye open for that.

J: The James Beard finalist award. What was that story about?

B: Oh my god, that was cool.

J: I’m really into food, so I’m like James Beard.

B: That, that was awesome. I have to tell you, that wasn’t necessarily a beat I would have chosen. Food beat. I remember when they told us that we were all going to have to take turns doing part of these themed - we were going to themed sections, food and home and health. And I was like, oh, my god, you are not going to make me write about home. You are not going to make me write about food. I can’t do this. That’s not me.

Believe it or not, I remember sitting with Connie Dufner and I thought: what is she going to assign me? And she gave me some cool stories. She gave me a story about this family that was decorating their home to reflect their two Chinese adopted daughters’ culture. Of course, that is up my alley, so I thought, OK, so that’s cool.

I remember sitting in Cathy’s [Barber] office when I had to first meet with her and we were just both like I don’t know how this is going to work because she’s the quintessential food editor and she’s really good at it and she knows her stuff and she has contacts. I said, I just don’t think this thing is going to work, and I was sitting there kind of like I just wanted to cry. I didn’t know what would be served by having somebody like me write recipes and that’s the way I saw it.

And she said, well, I know this is hard but I’ve always wanted to send somebody to cover the vanilla harvest in Mexico and I was like: Really? And she did and she gave me some. It’s like where do you start? I mean, I don’t even have sources for food, but she gave me some good names and it was a blast. We went. I remember this was when we still had a little bit of money because remember talking to Tom [Huang] going okay well, I’ll get there at this time and spend two days here and one day here. He said to give myself time. I’m going give myself time? I mean, OK, and so I was there for over a week. So I was in the state of Veracruz and then I had to get a driver and they took us up into the mountains and we spent time with vanilla farmers.

J: Did you shoot them as a photographer?

B: You know, I think I did, I but I was with a good friend and a really good photographer, Barbara Davidson. For her it was a treat because she wasn’t, you know, embedded with some troop in Iraq and she wasn’t getting shot at or anything so it was good. The harvest starts roughly around the same time the feast of Virgen de Guadalupe on December 12. So we were there when that happened. We got to watch the processions; we were going to go into the processions and come into the town square with the church. These people were so nice. They said come back with us afterwards, come back with us and we killed a pig and we are going to eat. So we went with them and I don’t know who they are.

P: So Miss Vegetarian here did what?
B: You know what? I really believe, see here’s the thing. Up until I did the food beat, I was pretty strict. But I really believe that sometimes the communion is more important than the principle. With a person, you know, somebody invites you and it’s their home and I think it’s more important. So it’s interesting, Barbara is not a vegetarian and she was like, I’m not eating that, I’m a vegetarian tonight. And I said okay, well, we’ll trade and I was fine.

So that was the story that was the finalist for the Beard.

F: Have you done anything with your Spanish background? Have you written stuff in Spanish, have you worked with people who speak Spanish?

B: I have not written anything in Spanish. I have done a lot of interviews in Spanish because you know the Mexico story, everybody spoke Spanish and I used to get sent to do a lot of photography for immigration stories and stuff like that. So it’s been very helpful; I don’t think I write it well enough to put together a story on deadline. I do go back to my favorite books sometimes, Gabriel Garcia Marquez or even one that’s near and dear to my heart, Hasta No Verte Jesus Mio, by Elena Poniatowska.

F: I’m familiar with Gabriel Garcia Marquez. I was going to ask: what’s your favorite book?

B: Probably Love in the Time of Cholera. There’s something about that that just really moved me.

I can translate and go interview, and translate into English. I don’t think I could do a story on deadline.

F: Do you feel it’s helpful in today’s society to know Spanish and English?

B: You know I think it’s really helpful on a communication level, but I also think it’s really important to understand culture and to know where people are coming from culturally, so I think that, maybe even more than the Spanish. I mean, the Spanish will open the door, but understanding culturally … I’ll give you an example.

There was a story about a crime that happened; I won’t even go into the crime. It’s been many, many years and I was a photographer. A family was held hostage in their own home by somebody and then they did something really horrible to this man who was in a wheelchair in the family. The next day, the people were swarming. This was a family that spoke Spanish and the only people who were at the home when the TV and newspaper, including me, went to get the follow was a 15-year-old pregnant teen and an elderly grandmother. And the grandmother was not talking and she only spoke Spanish. And there was a TV reporter and she was really hounding that 15-year-old. She was saying, “This is your chance to tell us what happened and tell us how you feel.” And a TV reporter came out of the house and he said, “They’re letting people in, you can go in and take pictures of the room where this thing happened.”

And I said, “They’re letting people in or they don’t know they can tell you no,” which is a big difference because they were from Mexico. Trust me, I grew up on the border. Something happens in Juarez; everyone is going to go in; they parade you in front of the media. It’s very different. I said, “I’m not going in, because I think the reason that they let you in is because they don’t realize they have these rights they didn’t have in the other country.” So I think that culture is more important to understand than the language.
A: So you’ve been to different Latin American countries to report. Do you look up on the culture of that country specifically before you go?

B: Well, most of the trips that I made abroad, except for the one for the vanilla story, were as a photographer so I had an interpreter. I think I remember reading a lot about some of the things that are culturally important but it’s been so long I can’t really remember, to be honest with you. I think if I were to do that now, I would do some reading and I would do maybe some, not just guide book reading but reading of books by people who have spent a lot of time there about what not to do, what is insulting, what is not cool to do, what’s OK to do, that sort of thing.

J: What are your favorite books?

B: My favorite books, oh my god. That’s really hard to say because I read a lot.

J: What are you reading right now? Are you one of those people that has three books at a time a year?

B: Well, they’re all in my iPad. I actually just reviewed a fantastic book that made me laugh and also kind of made me cry. It’s a new, her name is Kathleen Founds. It has a weird name. She taught in the Valley. I just turned in two [reviews] actually.

J: What publication?

B: That was for The Dallas Morning News.

J: Do you do that whenever they come pitch you something?

B: I do it for Carve.

J: Which is the writing literary magazine

B: But I also do it for Mike Merschel. This is a great book; it’s called When Mystical Creatures Attack. It’s one of those short stories that are connected to make a whole novel. She is just a phenomenal writer.

She really nails the voice of these teens. It’s really a story about mental illness in a teacher who gets committed and the kids that she leaves behind and the two that keep in touch with her and they’re like, wow miss, we’ve had lots of teachers that threw a terrarium out a window and said we were driving her crazy, but you’re the only one who followed through and that sort of thing. Humor makes really hard topics go down but it’s also very poignant. It’s about the human spirit and how resilient we are and kind of the lengths we’ll go through to help each other, like the lengths these kids go through to break her out of the asylum where she is. She has a really unique voice. If she writes anything else, I’m going to buy her book.

There’s also a book that I want to read that I don’t even remember the name. It’s a first novel by Roxane Gay. And Roxane is an African-American writing instructor and she has published a lot of essays for, she was working for Salon. She has worked for The Rumpus. Now she’s at, not The Toast, there is a new online magazine, The Butter I think it’s called that goes with The Toast.

What nonfiction I read, I can only read short stuff. I’m not a big nonfiction reader when it comes to like history books or anything like that. Especially after my mom died, I just can’t read a lot of nonfiction. But she [Roxane Gay] is somebody who I was using in my essay classes and telling my students you’ve got to read people like her. If you want to write this kind of work, you’ve got to read people like her.
So she has a book out about Haiti that’s a novel set in Haiti. It’s her first novel. [Note: The novel is called *An Untamed State*.]

I’m a big fan of Sherman Alexie. I’m a big fan of Barbara Kingsolver. Sometimes when I need a little inspiration, I’ll go back to my favorites and I’ll reread. Like *Animal Dreams*? I love that book. It’s just a perfect story. *The Poisonwood Bible* is pretty phenomenal.

Who else? Sandra Cisneros sent me a book after my mom died.

J: Yeah, I saw that you were in that society that she founded. And she is from San Antonio, which is where I’m from. And she has a purple house in the King William District.

B: Yeah, it’s a cool house. I stayed in it last time I was there.

[side conversation here about *The Poisonwood Bible*]

There’s this wonderful writer who I am hoping will write some more. Justin Torres, *We the Animals*. The first paragraph [deep breath]: it just sucks the breath out of you. He is a tour de force. He’s going to be phenomenal.

P: You said Sandra Cisneros sent you a book?

B: She sent me a book, *Looking for Marie* [Note: title is *Have You Seen Marie?*]. Which is actually, everybody says it’s a children’s book but it’s not a children’s book, where she’s helping a friend look for her cat named Marie because the friend came to her house and she had her cat and she immediately left and how it’s really about mourning her mother when she died. So she sent me that book.

P: I had followed your blog about your mother’s brain [*My Mother’s Brain: Love in a Time of Dementia*] all this time and, of course, when she died, you stopped. Do you think you’ll go back at some point and do more writing about this? I know it’s closed for the time being.

B: I took it offline and then I – why did I take it back online? Because somebody wanted some writing advice and I had to put it back on for them to see something and I thought I’m just going to leave it up.

When my mom died, a lot happened in a very short amount of time. I have taken a lot of notes and every time something comes to me, I’m keeping notes. I think I have one more piece in me about her death and I have a friend who keeps telling me you’ve got to put, because I have so many essays and some of the blog posts are actually like essays, they’re long enough to be essays.

P: And you had the really long piece that was in *D Magazine*.

B: Yes, “My Mother’s Brain” in *D Magazine*. It made me appreciate Tim Rogers [editor of *D Magazine*] because I am not his market. I am not *D Magazine’s* market. And I had actually pitched him something else and he said, “No, I’m not interested, but if you have any first person essays about your mother …”

J: Did he already know that, had he been reading your blog?

B: No, no. You know who the writers are. I think we met once after I left the *Morning News*.

I’m not really their kind of writer. They have a very unique market and a very unique voice as a magazine.
P: A very specific market.

B: And a very specific voice; wouldn’t you say? And that’s not me, really. You know he said – this is funny – he said write me about 1,500 to 2,000 words, and I remember when I wrote this, I was at a Starbucks in El Paso writing like crazy and when it was done I was like, OK, they’re not going to touch it, and I sent it.

He said, well, you wrote me 4,000 words, but that’s OK. I’ll take it, which nobody ever says that. Nobody. The Rumpus, you know, they don’t care.

I forgot what we were talking about.

I think I have one more essay in me, one more little memoir piece. I think I’m getting close to being able to start to write it. We’ll see.

P: Well, it hasn’t been a year.

B: But I’m feeling it. I haven’t felt the need to write, you know, I’m carrying the camera around and taking pictures. Because it’s a visceral time. That’s the difference, I think. There’s the photography and writing difference we were talking about. I feel the photography. I don’t feel … Right now that’s just coming more easily to me. In August, June or July… sometime in the summer I got this email from an editor at a West Texas journal. It’s called Semi So Journal. And I picked it up. I didn’t know I had one and it’s really a nice journal.

She said, “I saw your pictures on the Day of the Dead on your website. Would you be interested in writing something for us?”

I thought, oh, my god, I cannot write anything, especially about Day of the Dead.

She said, “You know, it can be something you’ve published already. We don’t care.”

I was like, well, I have to ask: Do you pay anything because I try very hard not to write, unless it’s like The Rumpus or something like that where it’s all about the art and they are very careful on who goes in there, I try not to do anything for free.

She said, “We actually do. We don’t pay a lot, but we do pay and we’ll pay you for the pictures that we do use.”

I thought, OK, well, I can do it. It was 800 words. I thought: I can do 800 words. I’ve done 10,000, so I can do 800. Oh, my god, it was bad. It was so hard. I turned it in. I usually am early with my deadlines, but I turned it in the day of or the day after. They wanted the photo package, and I thought it would be nice to do something where I could do the photos and write for a change. But it was really hard.

So I probably will write something about my mom. I put together a book for my sister. My sister was the primary caregiver. After our mom died, I put together a photo book and I had it bound and everything and I wrote it as if it were our mom talking to her and it detailed her relationship with her from the day she was born all the way ‘til she died. And I did it in Spanish, of course, because our mom would have done it in Spanish. That was the last creative thing I’ve been able to do and I really felt like I was channeling my mom because I look it at now and I can’t believe I did that, the shape I was in.

J: The travel writing gold award, what was that assignment?
B: That was for the Rio Grande. They were going to give Bryan. Poor Bryan, bless his heart. Bryan Woolley, I guess you could consider him one of my mentors. I had several mentors. I had some great mentors. I had Victoria Loe as my mentor. Mike Granberry has been my mentor. I’ve had some really good people. Bryan Woolley was somebody who I admired who was going to write a series on the Rio Grande, kind of following the river. He couldn’t do it, and somebody, I think it was Tom, said would you like to do this instead of Bryan, and I said, well, can I talk to Bryan? He goes, well, he gave it its blessing. And I said, well, I’m going to go talk to him. So I went to Bryan and I said, are you OK with me doing the story that you were going to do? He goes, oh, yeah, I think you’ll do a great job.

So they were going to do a three-part series and I looked at it and I talked to Eric Schlegel who is also someone that I admire tremendously, he’s a photographer. After researching it, I went to Tom and said, I don’t think I can do this in three parts. I think it has to be a four-part series and I think we all agreed it had to have a web component, which would have been one of the first times we’d done that.

J: What year was that?

B: It was 2005 when we started it. I set up trips for us and Eric, of course, helped, he’s a good researcher, and people to meet and talk to and interview at key points on the Rio Grande, all the way to the Gulf, and that’s what won. It won after I had left.

F: Were you expecting it to win?

B: I had forgotten. I mean, I left in September. I saw it on a blog or something. I think Mike Precker said something. He said: oh, guess what a writer whose no longer here just won the gold!

P: So did you leave on your own two feet or did you leave like many of us did, here’s a box, bye?

B: No, you know what I did, was they had the buyout rumors for a long time. I knew that if I didn’t take a buyout, the next time, I would not be leaving willingly. I said, I’m going to take some money now and have a say in my own future. In a way, I think it was meant to be. Not for that reason, but right after that was happening, my mother in law was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s or dementia and she came to live with us for a little while.

She said if I can’t live in my own home, I want to choose where I live. No sooner had we got her settled than my mother came down and was diagnosed with it. So it would have been really hard. I was in El Paso five or six times a year, driving back and forth, whenever there was a crisis or whenever we had to make decisions or anything like that.

So that’s how I left, I walked out with all my stuff and with that, there’s a newspaper rack in there. Yeah, I took it. Other people also took it. They told us we weren’t supposed to take them. I said, well, they’ll stop me. I remember Mike Merschel standing there going like this as I walked out and he said I see nothing.

J: And now you’re back to doing reviews and stuff like that.

B: You know I do for him because, here’s why. They don’t pay a lot. But I’m going to read every single day of my life anyway and he gives me some good authors. That Kathleen Founds book was phenomenal. I loved it. I haven’t loved something like that in a long time.

J: I’m excited to read your review then.
Terrazas interview, page 21

B: It’s a really good book. You should read the book. And he’s a good guy, you know. It doesn’t pay much but it keeps me thinking about story. It keeps me thinking about what works and what doesn’t work. Whenever I have a client like the one whose memoir I just read just to see what it needs, I can pretty much pin it right away.

J: Do you think that’s helping you make your transition to creative writing?

B: I think it’s one of the things I can do right now. I can read, I can’t write anything super deep right now, but I can read and I can help others so maybe it’s helping in that way. I don’t do a lot of newspaper writing because it doesn’t pay very well and I don’t have two days to devote to reporting something that’s going to get me $150. The reviews I enjoy reading and I’m getting pretty fast at them.

J: You were talking about pitching to Tim Rogers. What do you, when pitching long form stories and narratives, do you have any advice for the pitch itself? Do you already have little bit of it written or do you sometimes already have it written? Do you just kind of name your sources? Does it depend on the publication?

B: I haven’t pitched a reported piece in so long. I did pitch Tim a reported piece and he turned it down and I think maybe he turned it down because he knew what I was best at. I mean that might be part of it. You get to know how people write. I would say you have to know the magazine or the newspaper and you have to know it well. And you have to know, you have to know the audience. When I’ve pitched stuff to More magazine, I made sure that I knew that audience and I made sure that I knew why I felt my story was going to be relevant to that audience. I made sure that I knew that, like the very first time I pitched to them, I had a friend who had successfully pitched to them. It’s often a referral. These people get thousands of emails and they’re just going to click delete, delete, delete.

You have to have a good referral in the subject line. And you have to have a damn good story in the body and you have to pretty much wow them with the writing. The one that was accepted, and I do have something else that I want to pitch to them when the time is right, I’ve been kind of waiting and now I have a relationship with an editor there and that’s often a big key thing. The one thing that I pitched to them and that they accepted was on spec. And a lot of them will tell you that, but I really worked on making sure she could see the writing in the pitch. It was a personal piece. I don’t know what is going to happen when I do this thing I’m thinking about writing about, but I think it’s going to be interesting. And when I sent it, she said, yeah, we’ll take it.

And she was a good editor. I had almost like an epilogue in there and she said you know, we all felt that it needs to end here. At first, I was like aahh but I like that, I like the end. Then I looked at it and it was like, you know they’re paying me a lot of money, so end it wherever you want. And she had some good questions about what wasn’t in there. So I think she was a good editor.

F: I guess is there anything else important that you think should be mentioned in this oral history?

B: You know me a little bit. Is there anything?

P: There are some other places we can go that we haven’t been yet but I don’t know that we necessarily need to go there.

B: I think that what bothers me the most right now about the media is what’s bugged me from day one and that’s its lack of diversity. I mean I just wish that, if anything changed in this whole big jumble that
we’re going through and whatever form or shape the media ends up in after, we’ve gone through this media revolution, this technology revolution that’s happening right now, I still think we need to fight for more diversity because there are still a lot of stories that I think are not being told. We need more women making decisions.

P: I was going to say, I think diversity means a lot of things in this context.

B: Yeah, I think you need more women making the calls, deciding which stories get play. I think you need more ethnic diversity. I think that you probably need maybe even more age diversity. I think that newspapers and TV as well have lost a lot of depth.

I think when you lose really good people who have a lot of experience who can mentor younger people, you’re going to make mistakes. I think it’s best to not make them rather than having to come back and correct.

I think the world is shrinking and I think that diversity will help with a shrinking world. Because you’re going to meet people who are from, all walks of life, who are from other countries.

We talked a little bit about how unless you know my story, you may just think I’m some pissed-off person. We don’t know the stories of people in other countries unless we have somebody there on the ground. That’s kind of a convoluted way to say it, but I just think we need more racial, ethnic, age, gender diversity in order to do a good job. I don’t think you have the possibility of doing a truly excellent job because to me doing an excellent job in journalism means that you are covering all the stories that need to be covered and how can you do that if you don’t have the right people?

I think you need good visual people too. So many newspapers just up and fired all their photo departments and have them reapply. Well, guess what. My husband is an Emmy award-winning videographer. He can make a good video with this [phone] and it’s going to look great. But you get me, or somebody who doesn’t know video, and how’s it going to look?

You can’t tell a reporter who spent their life specializing in telling word stories he, here, take this and go shoot a picture and make it look great. You can’t do that.

P: But they are.

F: Yeah, that’s what they want now.

P: We as a group did an earlier project where we talked to senior staff people at several media organizations, and I talked to Jim Witt at the Star Telegram. He said basically there are things they have photographers for that they do, but if you’re a reporter, you write the story, you shoot the video, you tweet it, you do all the social media stuff ... you’re a one man band.

A: So right now, I’m the editor of the Southern Denton County section of NeighborsGo, so I cover Lewisville, Flower Mound, Highland Village, the Colony, sometimes even down through here, for The Dallas Morning News and the Denton Record-Chronicle. But I have to do everything myself; I have to shoot all my own photos, post on social media and online, edit, find contributed content. Whenever somebody has an issue, they take it up with me. It is exhausting now, but that’s what they’re expecting everyone to do. So when I had asked you earlier, what do you think young journalists should be focusing
on, like should they be focusing on one aspect or another, I thought, your response was interesting because it’s kind of like what we’re struggling with right now.

B: I’m 52 and I could do that, but I’ve been doing this a lot longer than you have. And I’ve done both sides. I can do both, but it takes me longer.

I’m either doing one or doing the other; one is going to suffer if I try to do them simultaneously, that’s just the nature of it. One is going to suffer. Either I’m shooting or I’m writing; and I do do things with my husband where clients ask if I will shoot pictures. If I’m the producer and I’m setting everything up and I’m setting up the interviews, I’m not making necessarily great photos. I’m grabbing good photos, but I’m also concentrating on helping him get the video. And it’s hard.

This trip we just came back from was three days of interviews, but I wasn’t shooting so it was a piece of cake. Most of it was just lugging equipment upstairs, and that was easy!

One of the things I would like journalists to think about is that we’re forgetting the really basic — which is story and the story is about people. I think every journalist should have to write something about him or herself at some point. Something that’s really personal, so they know what it’s like for people they interview.

A: Kind of to teach empathy?

B: I don’t even know if I would call it empathy. It’s more like this is what it’s like on the other side. This is what you’re facing. I did a couple of things at Poynter, when they asked me to come in and help. When you do a weeklong course at Poynter you usually have to write a personal essay at the end of the week. There was this one woman from ABC or something and she was like, well, I can tell you that anything I write isn’t going to be personal. Ain’t going to happen.

Part of me wanted to say: then how can you expect people you want to interview, or people you want to comment, or people whose stories you want to tell in depth, to be forthcoming with you. It’s not that it’s not fair, it’s just that you just gain so much from plumbing your own depths and asking yourself hard questions and it might help you get better at the interview process — it might help you get the kernels that you need, and all the while remember that it’s a person and not just a story, or not just a subject. I mean we saw that with Ebola. That guy was a person. You know?

P: He doesn’t even have a name a lot of times.

B: Yeah, I saw a really bad interview that someone posted yesterday. I won’t even say who it was but this person asked this doctor, “What was it like when you realized you were going to treat Eric Duncan,” or something like that. And then the reporter said, “Well, it must have been your lucky day, huh?” … I was like, whoa.

That’s when I felt like getting on my knees and saying, “I’m sorry for all of us who ever asked anything like that!” Because he pretty much said, I don’t even know how to answer that. And to not forget that telling your own story or writing something personal about yourself or being interviewed helps you remember what’s on the other side.

P: I think a lot of times people don’t understand what the story should be or really is, that we are talking about people and their lives.
B: Sometimes at the end of an interview, I would ask a source — and I wrote feature stories so this was easy to do — I would ask, “You know, this is what I think your story’s about. But what do you think your story’s about?” I would ask them that because sometimes they would give me insight. And tell me something that’s utterly different.

P: So, what do we think her story’s about?

[Silence; then everyone laughs]