MARVIN KALB: Hello and welcome to the National Press Club, and to another edition of *The Kalb Report*. I’m Marvin Kalb.

Our subject tonight, “What Makes *60 Minutes* Tick?”, a look now at the most successful broadcast in the history of television news. Our guests, the executive producer of *60 Minutes*, Jeff Fager, who has had this job since 2004 but who has worked for CBS since 1982, and CBS news correspondent, Lesley Stahl, who has been one of the regulars at *60 Minutes* since 1991, and who joined CBS News in 1972-- I want to note here that Lesley and I were colleagues in the Washington bureau of CBS News at that time.

*60 Minutes* has been on the air for forty years. That’s a very long and distinguished history. And normally I would begin questioning our two guests at this time. But I thought you would like to see this autobiographical introduction provided by *60 Minutes*.

[video]

MARVIN KALB: Wow, indeed. Jeff Fager, Lesley Stahl, welcome to *The Kalb Report*. It’s a pleasure and honor to have you both here. I’m absolutely delighted you could take the time. Let’s talk about *60 Minutes*, how it works, how you put it together. And we’ll start with Jeff in that case. How many people work for *60 Minutes*?

JEFFREY FAGER: You know, I think if you really counted everybody, probably about two hundred, but on the staff, about a hundred people. We have a lot of people that work outside of our staff, our cameramen. But really, I think the important number is about seventy reporters, both on and off the air. And that really is about every level of employment that we have. Everybody’s involved in somehow chasing down stories.
MARVIN KALB: When you talk about reporters, seventy of them, there are not seventy Lesley Stahls. But you’re talking about a lot of the producers who go out and cover stories as well.

JEFFREY FAGER: Correct, I mean on and off the air. A lot of people consider themselves reporters at 60 Minutes and they are. They’re chasing down stories. Lesley works with a team of people who are always-- she just got off her BlackBerry-- always talking to her about the stories that they’re chasing on her behalf. And that’s a huge part of what we do, which is really one of the exciting, I think, aspects of 60 Minutes. It’s so much about reporting.

MARVIN KALB: How many weeks of the year do you have clean, fresh, original reporting on the air?

JEFFREY FAGER: I like to think every week, and I believe we do. Because, you know, in the news business, it’s very difficult to be entirely original. And if you look at even say the war in Afghanistan, we like to think that the area that we’re reporting on is original. And what we’ve dug up is original and unique. What Lesley’s had on, just this season, most recently this story about the dinosaur discovery, was incredibly original in many ways. So, you know, it’s a goal of ours now, Marvin, a goal of ours to be as original as we possibly can be.

MARVIN KALB: I know, but are you putting on a fresh program every single week of the year?

JEFFREY FAGER: Oh, I understand. We actually put on about 35 programs that are fresh a year. We do about a hundred stories a year, and then we go into repeats for about four months.
MARVIN KALB: Okay. So if you do a hundred stories, and you’ve really got ten reporters and correspondents such as Lesley, and each one of them-- what?-- has to produce ten stories a year?

JEFFREY FAGER: Well actually not. There’s not an equal distribution of the stories. Lesley pulls a lion’s share, along with Steve Kroft and Scott Pelley, and account for about sixty of those. So that’s a significant amount that those three do. And Morley Safer and Bob Simon each do about ten, because Morley is in-- Thank god he’s still with us and didn’t retire entirely. But he cut back. So we’ve made room that way. And we have some contributors that do about five a year.

MARVIN KALB: What’s the budget of 60 Minutes?

JEFFREY FAGER: I’m not going to be able to tell you that, I don't think, Marvin [simultaneous conversation]--

MARVIN KALB: Why?

JEFFREY FAGER: I can tell you that it’s a high number.

MARVIN KALB: What’s the budget of CBS News?

JEFFREY FAGER: I don't know that number. But I can tell you that the amount that we [simultaneous conversation]--

MARVIN KALB: You do know the number for 60 Minutes, though.

JEFFREY FAGER: I do know the number for 60 Minutes [simultaneous conversation] yes--
MARVIN KALB: But you can’t tell us?

JEFFREY FAGER: I’m not going to tell you.

MARVIN KALB: Why?

JEFFREY FAGER: I just-- It’s privileged information. I don't think it’s appropriate. I’ll tell you one thing that’s relevant. It’s a lot [simultaneous conversation]--

MARVIN KALB: Oh, I think it’s relevant.

JEFFREY FAGER: No, no. It is. And I actually think that the number is more significant than I think people would imagine. CBS commits an enormous amount of resources to us. And it does cause [simultaneous conversation]--

MARVIN KALB: You make a lot of money for them.

JEFFREY FAGER: And we do. It costs a lot of money to do what we do, though. You start talking about serious reporting that takes months and months, or you go into a war zone with heavy security, it’s expensive business. And that is a real source of pride for us too, which is that we have been able to maintain a story budget that really hasn’t changed much. It certainly hasn’t gone down. And that’s important, because we couldn’t do what we want to do and what we think our viewers expect from 60 Minutes without that kind of support.

MARVIN KALB: I don’t want to press you on this unnecessarily. But I think everything that you just said adds up to an answer to my question.
JEFFREY FAGER: Yes.

MARVIN KALB: How much money does this all cost? Are we talking about hundreds of millions of dollars?

JEFFREY FAGER: No, we’re not talking about that. But we are talking about a lot of money. You know, it’s not the kind of thing--

[simultaneous conversation]

MARVIN KALB: Lesley, you do-- what?-- ten stories in the course of the year?

LESLEY STAHL: I do more than twenty.

MARVIN KALB: More than twenty in the course of [simultaneous conversation]--

LESLEY STAHL: Usually, not every year, but yeah.

MARVIN KALB: How do you come up with the stories? Is it your own ideas or Jeff’s ideas, it’s your producer’s idea? How does it happen?

LESLEY STAHL: All of that.

MARVIN KALB: All of that.

LESLEY STAHL: All of that. People call. People send in letters to us. We read foreign newspapers. Every now and then, Jeff comes running down the hall with an idea. We’re always on the lookout. As Jeff said, each correspondent has a team. And most of the teams, I think, at least I have four producers. And each producer has a partner, an
associate producer. And everybody on the team is responsible for coming up with story ideas, as are many other people in the office who contribute, send us little notes, “What about this? What about that?”

MARVIN KALB: Do you guys meet as a group once a week, a month, and say, “What kind of stories are we going to do? Lesley, you do this. Steve, you do that”?

LESLEY STAHL: No. And in fact, Don Hewitt, who, as you know, created the show, always used to run around saying, “We don’t have meetings and we’re proud of it.” And we don’t [simultaneous conversation]--

JEFFREY FAGER: And we don’t have memos.

LESLEY STAHL: And we don’t have memos, and we’re proud of it. Right.

MARVIN KALB: Because you run down the hall and you just talk to one another [simultaneous conversation]--

LESLEY STAHL: We yell at each other.

JEFFREY FAGER: We do. And it’s not that kind of atmosphere where we need to meet, because it is so-- We don’t have a big hierarchy. The decisions, the correspondents are really, in some ways I guess, in television lingo, would be considered senior producers. So therefore-- That’s one of the nice things about the place, is that you don’t need to have meetings. We’re always talking. We know what we’re doing.

MARVIN KALB: Okay. Well, let's say, Lesley, that you have an idea. You bring it to Jeff and he says no.
LESLEY STAHL: Then I’ll [simultaneous conversation]--

MARVIN KALB: Is there a court of last resort? Or is he it?

LESLEY STAHL: Oh, he’s the court of last resort. But one can argue with him, which is nice. And if he says no the third time, you’re dead.

MARVIN KALB: You’re dead?

LESLEY STAHL: You’re dead. But you could go back twice.

MARVIN KALB: Does he ever change his mind?

LESLEY STAHL: Yes.

MARVIN KALB: He does?

LESLEY STAHL: Yeah. And I think that there’s this attitude. And I have it with my own producers on my team, that if someone is that enthusiastic, you ought to give them a chance, because that enthusiasm will produce something.

JEFFREY FAGER: It’s a very important, I think, aspect of what makes journalism great, which is that you’re reporting on something you really want to cover. So enthusiasm does count for something. It really does. And if someone has-- By the way, we do it. There is a formal system for submitting ideas. And it comes in what you may remember as blue sheets. It’s been around CBS News forever. They come to me and my executive editor, Bill Owens. And we say yea or nay. And we don’t give an explanation. If you really want to cover that story-- Because if we gave an explanation for each ‘no’
there wouldn’t be time to do anything else. There’s so many blue sheets that come [simultaneous conversation]--

**MARVIN KALB:** How many do you say ‘yes’ to that you’ve said ‘no’ to?

**JEFFREY FAGER:** Oh, I think quite a few. I think after the initial ‘no’, the point is that if you feel really strongly that this is a story we should be covering for whatever reason, including that you love it and you want to cover it, you come and you make your case.

**MARVIN KALB:** I was wondering if there is a special style or a school for 60 Minute (sic) questioning. Because over the years, I’ve noticed that there is a style that each one of you engage in [simultaneous conversation] that you let--

**LESLEY STAHL:** --that’s the same for all of us?

**MARVIN KALB:** It is very close.

**LESLEY STAHL:** I’m changing mine tomorrow.

**MARVIN KALB:** You are?

**LESLEY STAHL:** What is it?

**MARVIN KALB:** Because let me tell you, that you all, or many of you, most of you I think-- I’m going to say all. You listen to the person you’re interviewing. The person says, “Ah, it’s going to rain tomorrow.” Pause. Anchor for 60 Minutes. “Rain tomorrow.” Pause, waiting for the other person to speak. And that technique was started [simultaneous conversation] many years ago by Mike Wallace on Night Beat in New
York in the 1950s. And I was wondering, quite seriously, whether that is something that you just pick up, it’s in the air.

JEFFREY FAGER: I think Lesley should answer the question about how she thinks about the questioning. There are some important things you just brought up. One is that the exchange at 60 Minutes is so important. So they really do prepare, I think more than almost any other reporter, for the actual interview. Because it’s also a bit of a performance. But it’s mostly because we like to get information in the questions. And the exchange at 60 Minutes, I think one of the great things about the broadcast is that it doesn’t-- the stories don’t feel that long. Because I think it’s easier to watch. It’s easier to follow when it’s two people in a conversation.

You mentioned Mike Wallace. He is such an important part of what we are today. And it’s interesting that if you go back to Night Beat-- I think of Don Hewitt and Mike Wallace as sort of Lennon and McCartney. One couldn’t have existed or succeeded without the other. And yet, they were always fighting with each other. And thank god Wallace and Hewitt lasted as long as they did. But he so much brought the interview style from Night Beat. It was Mike Wallace’s interview style. And meshing that with Don Hewitt’s, I think knowledge and appreciation and values that he learned from Murrow and the people you worked with, Marvin, really was an amazing combination that created the electricity, I think that resulted in 60 Minutes.

MARVIN KALB: And one of the technique as well (let me run it past you and hear what you’ve got to say about it) in a normal CBS newscast, the reporter, his voiceover, perhaps a fifteen-second beginning or an end. 60 Minutes is radically different. You feature Lesley in each one of the pieces that she does. There is some voiceover, but she’s in the middle of it all. And it’s, like, the adventures of Lesley Stahl: “This week we’re here. And this week, we’re there.”
JEFFREY FAGER: Don Hewitt used to say that. He used to say [simultaneous conversation] adventures of these people--

MARVIN KALB: Really?

JEFFREY FAGER: Yes. He(?) believed(?) it(?).

MARVIN KALB: But that is a deliberate action on your part [simultaneous conversation]--

JEFFREY FAGER: Absolutely. Absolutely.

MARVIN KALB: And that is another specific feature of 60 Minutes.

JEFFREY FAGER: Yes, it is.

LESLEY STAHL: When I first came along and Don hired me, I was trying very hard to continue to live in Washington. And he said, “Kiddo, you have to come and be part of the family. But you have to go to every single interview yourself. You have to be within every second of this story. I want to see you in everything, in the story. You are taking the audience with you to find this out. And we want to be part of your journey, but we want to see you doing it.” So he conceived all the pieces to be like that, just what you see.

MARVIN KALB: It’s interesting to me. Why, if it’s so successful (and it is, obviously) why haven’t all of the other programs at CBS essentially done the same thing?

JEFFREY FAGER: I think that’s a good question, Marvin. I’m not sure that the other programs at CBS-- I wonder-- There were some imitators who tried to copy 60 Minutes.
And I’m a little surprised that, in this day and age, there aren’t more on primetime. Because that has— What we do is not done elsewhere.

MARVIN KALB: Well, you did do 60 Minutes II.

JEFFREY FAGER: We did.

MARVIN KALB: And you ran that program.

JEFFREY FAGER: Yes, I did. And it did very well.

MARVIN KALB: Why isn’t that on the air now?

JEFFREY FAGER: That’s a good question. I think it’s unfortunate, because it really was a great place to work for a number of really talented people. You know, I think that for awhile, it was probably overdone. There was too much primetime news. And these things are cyclical. And look — it’s a business. And they have to do well.

MARVIN KALB: We’ll get to that.

JEFFREY FAGER: Yeah, sure we will.

MARVIN KALB: We will certainly get to that. Let me raise with you kind of an interesting issue, I think for many of us, and it goes by the word ‘lawyering’. And I’m just wondering, when you finish a piece, Lesley, are you obliged to show it to a CBS lawyer?
LESLEY STAHL: If there’s a question. If there’s any question that there might be any kind of a lawsuit whatsoever, any kind of legal questioning, they’re brought in. So I would say about maybe 15% of my stories are screened with lawyers.

JEFFREY FAGER: We make a decision to do it. It’s our decision. It’s not something that’s imposed by the company. You know, it’s a funny-- I think it’s a very interesting and important point, especially for journalism students, that these issues aren’t legal as much as they are questions of fairness. And if you are always thinking about how best to be fair, you’re going to be in good shape. And we value it very highly, fairness. We actually have one individual whose entire job is to read every transcript ever set into tape, then to come to every screening to make sure that people aren’t taking out of context or that true meaning in an interview is not characterized in the body of the story.

MARVIN KALB: Is that a lawyer?

JEFFREY FAGER: No. She’s a journalist, a trained journalist. And that’s an important role that you wouldn’t find, I think, in any other broadcast, that Don started years ago. And we value it, because of course nobody really does it intentionally, it just happens that when you’re working with all that interview material and-- Twelve minutes is not a lot of time for a videotaped story. And ours are somewhere between twelve and fourteen minutes. So it’s easy to leave something on the cutting room floor that had real meaning.

LESLEY STAHL: We’ve had some discussions where this person will say, “Are you really letting the person say what he really meant to say?” So if, you know, “Did you beat your wife?” “Yes, but….” you’ve got to let him say the ‘but’. And that’s her job.

JEFFREY FAGER: If not say it, at least characterize it in the story, the position. So I think it’s important, Marvin, because it’s such a big part of our tradition, that there isn’t an imposed legal screening, but we recognize when we’re going to need it.
MARVIN KALB: Just to be clear, but the call is yours.

JEFFREY FAGER: Yes.

MARVIN KALB: It doesn’t come from outside the shop--

JEFFREY FAGER: Correct.

MARVIN KALB: --at 60 Minutes.

JEFFREY FAGER: Yes.

MARVIN KALB: There is not a lawyer assigned to 60 Minutes.

JEFFREY FAGER: Well, there are lawyers who work for CBS, actually very important figures in our broadcast history, Rick Altabel and John Sternberg, who have been the lawyers who come to screen when we ask them to come. They are within CBS, Inc. In other words, they’re not part of CBS News.

MARVIN KALB: Okay. Explain one other thing to me – over the last couple of years-- I mean, I remember 60 Minutes when there were two and then four, then it would inch to about a half dozen of the correspondents. But now you’ve got ten, plus Andy Rooney. Among the ten, there used to be two CNN people. There’s now, I believe, one CNN person, Anderson Cooper, who’s a fine guy. I’ve never met him personally, and I’m sure he’s a great journalist and all of that. But what do you have to go outside of CBS for?
JEFFREY FAGER: That’s a good question. You know what I’m proudest of is that in our team, we have some of the finest people who do what they do. And it’s still a place where someone like Anderson Cooper, who I think is at the top of his class in terms of reporting and in terms of the future that he offers, and his abilities--

MARVIN KALB: Why don’t you just hire him.

JEFFREY FAGER: I’d love to. You had John Glyne(?) on not-- few years ago. He’s the one to ask: “Why don’t you let Anderson out and he can go to 60 Minutes from now on?”

MARVIN KALB: Is that what he would like to do?

JEFFREY FAGER: No, I don't know. Really, he could get me in trouble here.

LESLEY STAHL: Careful. Careful.

JEFFREY FAGER: I actually, to address your question, I think when Lesley joined, when Steve joined and Meredith joined, there were six correspondents. They brought in Chris John. I think there have been between five and six and a couple of contributors. We’ve got really six regulars and a couple of-- three contributors. And then Charlie Rose is on our staff as well when he comes up with someone that is really good and really strong.

MARVIN KALB: You mean in terms of an interview?

JEFFREY FAGER: Yeah. He’ll call me and say, “Jeff, I think I can get this interview. What do you think?” And so, you know, in a way, I think the value in it is that we’ve sort
of-- we’ve got a little bit broader landscape for story development, for [simultaneous conversation] where we’re going to get our stories--

MARVIN KALB: But I have to tell you, you could get first class reporters at NBC, at ABC, at Fox. There are really some terrific journalists out there. Why don’t you get all of them? My point is that this is a CBS News program. So why do you have CNN people on it?

JEFFREY FAGER: Well, that’s a good question.

MARVIN KALB: No, but does it have anything to do with the time that CBS and CNN--

JEFFREY FAGER: No.

MARVIN KALB: --were sort of making nice to each other, preparatory to a deal?

JEFFREY FAGER: No. No. It has nothing to do with that. I think [simultaneous conversation]--

MARVIN KALB: Nothing to do with it?

JEFFREY FAGER: --it was started when Don really wanted to have Chris John on. And that sort of set the precedent. And I really want Anderson on. So it’s as simple as that. He’s a terrific reporter. And I’m glad that he wants to be there. And I love having him there.

MARVIN KALB: I’m sure you do. Tell me what you think is the secret ingredient of 60 Minutes. I think what I might do at this point is take a break before I even allow you to do
that. Let me, at this point, remind our listening and viewing audiences that this is The Kalb Report. I’m Marvin Kalb. We’re discussing what makes 60 Minutes tick with CBS correspondent, Lesley Stahl, and executive producer, Jeff Fager.

Back to my question – I mean, it’s a really rough question for both of you: “What is the secret of your success?” Well, what is the secret of your success? What do you think you’re doing that other people are not doing?

JEFFREY FAGER: You mean our success at this moment [simultaneous conversation] in time--

MARVIN KALB: At this particular moment. Because I have read enough about you, Jeff, to know that-- You’re coming through right now as a completely self-contained marvelous executive producer. But you have also said that you’re afraid of sitting on a perch that is liable to fall, that you are afraid with each broadcast, you have been quoted as saying, that something could go wrong and suddenly, whoops. What’s going on here?

JEFFREY FAGER: Well, I don't think necessarily something could go wrong. What I mean is, I take it one Sunday at a time. And this next Sunday’s-- I don’t even remember what happened this past Sunday.

LESLEY STAHL: Oh, really?

JEFFREY FAGER: Except for the fact that Lesley had a great story on. But I really do, and I try to instill it and Don used to try to instill it in us, which is that, you know, don’t rest on your laurels. You’ve got to work towards next Sunday. And it’s got to be good. And it’s got to be better than the Sunday before, if we can make it better. You’re only as good as your next story. And I think it’s important on this front, Marvin. And it does
come to the sort of business question. I feel incredibly lucky that we get to do what we get to do.

MARVIN KALB: Absolutely.

JEFFREY FAGER: And I never take it for granted. And I think that would be a first class mistake for any of us to do, that we have this brilliant legacy to live up to, and we believe in it, and we’re proud of it, and we better work hard to make sure that we don’t let it go.

LESLEY STAHL: Can I answer your question about what makes the success of the broadcast? I’ve believed this from the day Don Hewitt hired me. And Jeff has maintained the same sort of basic philosophy. And that is that really nobody does a story they don’t want to do, and that they don’t push and fight to do. We propose our stories. And then if Jeff says no, we go in and fight for them. It’s at the heart of it. And I don't know any other news broadcast or news outlet that’s quite like that. All my friends who have worked on shows like this at other networks, and even within CBS, have been assigned their stories and they grumble about it. But everybody who goes out on a story is going out because they’re desperate to cover that things, whatever it is.

MARVIN KALB: But let me ask [simultaneous conversation] about-- Go ahead.

LESLEY STAHL: And we also can cover a universe of kinds of stories. We’re all expected to cover every different sort of genre. We’re all expected to have investigative stories and interview newsmakers and do social issue stories and personalities, so that in a year, you’ve had such a rich experience. You’re always ready to really go delve, go further, work harder, because we like the subject.
JEFFREY FAGER: And let me follow up, though, one more time, Marvin, which is that the other aspect I think of our even more recent success, which is the past three or four years where our audience is going up, I think also is reflected in the fact that we try to be as current as we can. We really try to-- I think what’s missing in a lot of American television, and it’s missing on primetime commercial television, is a deeper understanding of these important issues that we’re facing in this country. And they are big issues. And I really think that there’s value in that for us, that that’s something we do well. We take a big important issue, and we can dig down deep and give people a much better understanding of it. And we try to do that as often as we can.

LESLEY STAHL: Jeff has really pushed us to be more on the news than we had been for a few years before. And this is a slight turn that Jeff has made. And it’s been healthy for us.

MARVIN KALB: When you speak about the pride, the obvious pride that you take in your work (and justifiably so) do you apply that to the work that you did prior to the invasion of Iraq? Lesley?

LESLEY STAHL: Well, I had an embarrassment prior to the invasion of Iraq, myself. And I had to admit it. And that is [simultaneous conversation]--

MARVIN KALB: Which was what?

LESLEY STAHL: Which is that I interviewed a defector. And we thought we had vetted him. We brought a former CIA official with us on the story so that we wouldn’t get burned. And we did get burned. And he was a guy who told me (and we put it on 60 Minutes) that Saddam Hussein had these-- He even told us they were Renault trucks driving around the country with biological weapons, factories inside the trucks, driving them all over the place. He said he bought the trucks and we bought his line. And we put
it on. And so I know I personally was responsible for a story that led, I think the country and its opinion perhaps in the wrong direction.

**MARVIN KALB:** When you look back upon your career at 60 Minutes, going back to 1991, you’ve done many, many, many stories. This is the only one?

**LESLEY STAHLL:** Well, that’s the one that-- Yeah. That’s the one where I made the big mistake [simultaneous conversation]--

**MARVIN KALB:** Okay, but I mean, that’s a pretty good record.

**LESLEY STAHLL:** And I felt very strongly. Jeff wasn’t there. I think you were over at 60 II.

**JEFFREY FAGER:** I was.

**LESLEY STAHLL:** And I went to Don and I said, “We should come clean with this.”

**MARVIN KALB:** What happens then?

**LESLEY STAHLL:** Well, I went public and I went on another television show. And I said, “I made a mistake, and I’m here to publicly say we were wrong.”

**MARVIN KALB:** But there isn’t a place at 60 Minutes where, if you make a mistake, totally unintentional mistake, that you would say, “Hey audience, we” [simultaneous conversation]--

**JEFFREY FAGER:** Oh, yes there is. Yes, there is.
MARVIN KALB: There is?

JEFFREY FAGER: In fact, that’s a huge part of what Don always believed in, that no matter what it is, even if you think there’s something serious that maybe you missed but-- or you don’t know is to say what you don’t know, is to be so transparent. And the audience, as soon as you do it, is going to understand. We all make mistakes.

MARVIN KALB: Lesley, I’ve been wanting to ask you this question for a long time – I remember when you entered the Washington bureau in 1972. And you were, if not the first, one of the very first women to enter a male club without any doubt. What was it like then? Were we really that awful and insensitive to you?

LESLEY STAHL: I’m going to be very boring and disappoint everybody. The truth is, 1972 was the year that Affirmative Action really came into force in the broadcast industry. And it was very popular then. I know that Affirmative Action isn’t today, but it was very popular in the country. And I had the feeling (and you were part of me having this feeling, as were all the other men in that bureau) that you didn’t hire me to fail. You hired me to succeed. And I didn’t feel outside at all.

I remember the first time I was on the Evening News with Walter Cronkite, and you and Roger Mudd and Dan Rather, all the guys that sat in that front row, gave me a standing ovation. I mean, you were wonderful. And I never felt that there was an urge to sort of reject us young people.

And I came in, remember, with Connie Chung and Bernie Shaw. We were the three Affirmative Action babies. And we all lasted and succeeded. And I think we would all say we were welcomed and did not-- I don’t have any stories of horrible sexism. I have none of those.
MARVIN KALB: Well, I can only tell you that thinking back to those days that Bill Small, who was the bureau chief at that time and who hired you, he always wanted to expand the base. And I always had a feeling that when you all came in, this was something that he had wanted to do years before. Let me jump ahead to the President Sarkozy, which we saw a little bit in the introduction, another one of these things, if you’re in the business and you look at this on television, you wonder. Was this something you anticipated? Or were you absolutely surprised by it?

LESLEY STAHL: I was shocked by it.

MARVIN KALB: You were shocked.

LESLEY STAHL: I was totally shocked by it. I don't think I’ve interviewed-- The only other person who ever stormed out on me was Ross Perot. And, you know--

MARVIN KALB: Did he pull his microphone off?

LESLEY STAHL: He did. But we got him to come back. And we couldn’t get him to come back. When those things happen, when things that are off the script happen (and that was a total stunner) you sit there and think it’s the end of the world. And then you have an hour or two, because 60 Minutes gives you an hour, gives you actually a whole week. You say, “Wow. Well, we really will be able to reveal something about this man and his volatility and his rudeness that we would never have been able to do if he’d given me the straight interviewed I’d planned, if I’d been able to ask all my questions about,” whatever the social issues were in the foreign policy [simultaneous conversation]--

JEFFREY FAGER: I remember when they got back from that trip, they had about twelve and a half minutes of tape, total, because they’d been on a trip with him, too, I think Czechoslovakia or something.
LESLEY STAHL: Bulgaria.

JEFFREY FAGER: Yeah, to accept an award on behalf of his wife who wasn’t there. So it actually was a part of the story that they were [simultaneous conversation]--

MARVIN KALB: So it’s kind of interesting. You were planning to ask him a personal life question.

LESLEY STAHL: Oh, it was a personal-- It was a question about whether his wife had left him--

JEFFREY FAGER: --on the front page of all the newspapers.

MARVIN KALB: Exactly. Now, he might have felt that, “You can do this in Washington.” Well, you do this all the time. “But not here in Paris. This is my backyard.”

LESLEY STAHL: He absolutely felt that. And I was told that no French reporter would have asked that question.

MARVIN KALB: Right.

LESLEY STAHL: And I, in fact, was warned that no French reporter would ask that question. But I’m not a French reporter. Plus, you know, that same kind of thing has happened to me with other heads of state. I went to interview Boris Yeltsen. And again, I worked so hard on those interviews, planning all the tough foreign policy questions, so forth. And he wouldn’t give me an interview. He wanted to play tennis for us. And again, we got to have a window into the personality, into the blustery nature, into what makes these people tick that actually ends up being much more insightful than if I’d had my
interview. And you don’t plan it. You’re devastated when these things happen. And it turns out okay.

MARVIN KALB: Jeff, what does 60 Minutes learn from decisions that it made in the past, about which it’s not terribly proud? And I’m thinking of the tobacco story. When 60 Minutes had an opportunity to run a long interview by a defecting executive who was accusing Brown & Williamson of deliberately manipulating nicotine content to make cigarettes more addictive, big-time story--

JEFFREY FAGER: --one of the biggest--

MARVIN KALB: --biggest-- But you didn’t treat it as a big-time story. At 60 Minutes, the decision was made to cut it down to bare bones and put it out. You did more later. I appreciate that. But at the time, you bent to corporate pressure.

JEFFREY FAGER: Well at the time, I was running the CBS Evening News--

MARVIN KALB: No, no, no, no, no, no.

JEFFREY FAGER: But I'll answer the question, Marvin.

MARVIN KALB: Answer the question.

JEFFREY FAGER: It’s a really good one. And I think if you’re Don Hewitt in that situation-- He said very publicly he’d like to have that again. But he also was in a really difficult place [simultaneous conversation] what is he supposed to do with a corporation saying, “You will not air that piece”?

MARVIN KALB: Why?
JEFFREY FAGER: Well, I think the weakness in that argument is that the public health was at stake. And a story doesn’t get better than that at all. You’ve got all kinds of reasons why this was the biggest story I think that had been brought into 60 Minutes. And there’s no way the company should have been able to squelch it, that that was a terrible mistake in our past, and we all [simultaneous conversation]--

MARVIN KALB: But this was a fear of a lawsuit [simultaneous conversation] right--

JEFFREY FAGER: Right, the craziness, because the public health is at stake. The issue was something called tortious interference, which is that the Jeffrey Wigand had a contract with Brown & Williamson not to go public at any point in time after he left employment or [simultaneous conversation]--

MARVIN KALB: Ever?

JEFFREY FAGER: Ever.

MARVIN KALB: And he changed his mind, decided to do it at CBS [simultaneous conversation]. You had a terrific story--

JEFFREY FAGER: And Lowell Bergman(?) did a great job of reporting it and bringing that story in. And [simultaneous conversation]--

MARVIN KALB: My point, what I’m trying to get at here is, can you imagine that happening again? You’re now the boss.

JEFFREY FAGER: Right.
MARVIN KALB: Some big story comes your way, under what circumstances would you, Jeff Fager, cave?

JEFFREY FAGER: I want to think that if that were to happen, and I think if Don could do it again, that you would never cave, that you would have to say, “You’re going to have to find someone else to do it, to put this broadcast on the air.” And I know that Don would have loved to have had that again. Because Don at that point was the most important figure at CBS. He just was. And he had the ability-- But it was difficult, because again, the company is saying to him, “You can’t run it.” What’s he going to do at that point?

MARVIN KALB: You can quit.

JEFFREY FAGER: You can quit. That’s the only option that you would have.

MARVIN KALB: I mean, that happens in the U.S. government very rarely. And my brother, who is in the audience, did that at one time. When there is a matter of high ethics involved, somebody can quit.

JEFFREY FAGER: Yeah, that’s right.

MARVIN KALB: You can make a public statement.

JEFFREY FAGER: Yeah. So Marvin, I mean, you know, the truth is that we do very tough stories all of the time. And we’re dealing with the aftermath of that on a regular basis.

MARVIN KALB: Okay.
JEFFREY FAGER: I’m proud to say that our company today respects a church and state line between *60 Minutes* and the corporation. And we never hear, “Why did you do that story?”

MARVIN KALB: Then I’ve got to ask you the next question, where you were involved, when Dan Rather in 2004 did the story about President Bush, based on one or two documents that might have been falsified. But at that particular time, Dan was making the point in his story that President Bush, obviously well before he was President, was using preferential treatment to avoid service in Vietnam. Big story, particularly when the President is running for reelection. From the outside, what that looked like was not only corporate caving, but it wasn’t corporate, it was government caving, that the government was so-- The White House directly was so eager for that story to be humiliated that CBS News, where I worked for 25 years of my life, CBS News decided, first, to get rid of the anchor, the CBS Evening News. Then when he went to *60 Minutes*, he wasn’t there for a long period of time either. And then they dropped him totally. What was CBS up to then?

JEFFREY FAGER: Well first of all, I mean, I have to recuse myself a little bit, because I wasn’t involved.

MARVIN KALB: You weren’t?

JEFFREY FAGER: I’d already gone to *60 Minutes* at that point. I was running *60 Minutes*.

MARVIN KALB: You’re always ducking this thing.

JEFFREY FAGER: Sorry. You know, that was a very sad chapter in our history. That’s, I think, right up there with tobacco in so many ways. I think the unfortunate part
Because, yes, the story had real merit. But when you’re going to use documents that are questionable, it hurts the credibility of your reporting.

MARVIN KALB: Absolutely.

JEFFREY FAGER: And so that was a mistake. And I think that the really unfortunate thing there, and the lesson is that we’re all going to make mistakes in journalism. But for goodness sake, go on the air and say you acknowledge there might be something wrong here, even if you don’t know what it is. Because even a couple of days after that broadcast aired, it really became apparent that there was something wrong with those documents, even if you couldn’t prove their authenticity or not. There was something wrong with them.

And our job is not to say to the viewers, “You prove to us they’re wrong.” Our job is for the viewers to appreciate that everything they see has been vetted, and everything we put on the air is going to be accurate, and that we believe it as we’ve sourced it out. And as we’ve checked it out, it’s going to be right. So that to me is the kind of snowball that went out of control in that issue, which could have been solved right away. As we had said earlier tonight, by one of the things Don Hewitt believed and practiced on a regular basis, and he did it himself on Sunday, get on the air and tell ‘em what’s the truth here, or whether you’re-- Even if you don’t know what the truth is, tell them you don’t know what the truth is.

MARVIN KALB: Okay. There are two issues here. One is the story and one is the journalist.

JEFFREY FAGER: Right.
MARVIN KALB: As you said, every journalist gets something wrong. Lesley was acknowledging she got something wrong once. I remain puzzled and part of me offended, not by the first part that something might have been wrong with the story, but by the way in which a corporation treats someone who had been with them for 42 years, who covered wars for them, put his life on the line time and again, fearlessly covered all kinds of things. And there is one story that went sour. Do you stand with him? Do you dump him? CBS dumped him. And I want to go on to other things, because we can milk that one too badly.

Lesley, happily you have interviewed so many prominent people. And you’ve just ticked off a couple before. Who was the one that you really look back upon and you say, “Oy, that was delicious. That was just fabulous”?

LESLEY STAHL: Wouldn’t it be awful if I said Sarkozy, because he left and walked out in the middle? You know, the one that always sticks in my heart wasn’t on 60 Minutes at all. You know, there’s a difference between Face The Nation, which I did for awhile, and 60 Minutes. 60 Minutes is a taped broadcast interview. So you interview someone for two hours, and then you take out your best fifteen minutes or twelve minutes, whatever it is. When it’s live, it’s live.

And I interviewed Margaret Thatcher once live on Face The Nation. And we had a little tiff. And she turned me into a bloody pulp on my broadcast.

MARVIN KALB: What did she say?

LESLEY STAHL: Well, I'll tell you the story. It was during Iran Contra. And she used to come over here once a year, every year. And she was very close to Ronald Reagan. And he, at that point, was himself kind of bloodied by this scandal. And she came over to kind of buck up his spirits and gave me an interview on Face The Nation on her way
home. And I said, “Well, how are you ever going to trust The United States again? We lied to you about these weapons to Iran.” She said something, like, “Oh my dear, our relationship is so strong and long-lasting, this is nothing.”

And I said, “Yeah, but they lied to you.” I went at it again. “And what about you and Ronald Reagan?” “Oh, our relationship is as strong as steel.” And of course I asked it a third time. And she said something, like, “Well my dear, why is it that I seem to love your country more than you do?” And I was just a bloody pool. So I thought, you know, she was playing a game with me. That was my sense. I didn’t think she was really mad. She was really mad.

So I wrote her a lovely note. And she wrote me a wonderful note back, which I frame and have in my office. She was so smart and so wily. And it really was one of my favorite interviews, even though I did not come out very well.

MARVIN KALB: What about one of the worst?

LESLEY STAHL: Ross Perot was pretty tough. And this is a story, too, about Don Hewitt. Don Hewitt knew Ross Perot and wanted me very much to interview him. And I spoke to Ross Perot on the phone, and I went in to Hewitt and I said, “I’m not sure you’re going to want me to go interview him. I don't think this is going to turn out to be the kind of story you’re expecting.”

Because Ross Perot was saying that President Bush, the first President Bush, had tried to disrupt his daughter’s wedding. And it all sounded cuckoo. So I thought, “I’m going to really press him on this, and he’s not going to come off well.”

And Hewitt said to me, “However it comes out, it comes out. I don’t care. Go do your story.” And Don was a great newsman. And I did go do the story. And when I was
pressing Perot about his daughter’s wedding, he threw the microphone and stormed off. We had to go back and get him back in the chair [simultaneous conversation]--

MARVIN KALB: But you got him back.

LESLEY STAHL: We got him back in the chair, and it was a tough interview. We weren’t there to make him look like he was all together.

MARVIN KALB: One other question about Jeff, your uses of different talent. Steve Kroft appears to get to do President Obama time and time again. Why is that?

JEFFREY FAGER: Oftentimes what happens at 60 Minutes is that you end up on a beat, you cover a story, you get to know it well, you are in the trust of, in this case, the President. It’s over the years, The White House has often had one relationship, sometimes more. And, you know, Steve expects that at some point that may go south, and maybe another correspondent would do it because--

But generally, that’s the way it works. You know, Lesley had a great relationship with the Reagans. If she were to do-- And I don't know that you ever did them for 60 Minutes. Probably not.

LESLEY STAHL: No, Mike kind of [simultaneous conversation] had that franchise--

JEFFREY FAGER: Mike ended up with that, yeah. So Mike had that [simultaneous conversation]--

MARVIN KALB: Well, he had a good relationship with the Reagans as well.
JEFFREY FAGER: Yeah. And Scott Pelley did George W. Bush quite a bit. And Dan Rather did a lot of Clinton interviews for us. Steve got lucky because this guy, he started covering in the campaign, turned out to be President.

MARVIN KALB: Let me ask both of you in the time remaining (and it’s about five or six minutes) how do you both see the-- Sort of widening the scope now beyond 60 Minutes, how do you see the fundamental challenges right now to television news? Let’s start with Jeff.

JEFFREY FAGER: Well I guess what concerns me a little bit, aside from the fact that real reporting isn’t done as much, particularly on primetime (it’s not done at all, really) is that I worry that television news becomes a lot more shouting, becomes a lot more extreme, and that the sort of average American gets left out. “How do I figure out what’s really going on in the world?”

Because I think that we’re in that pattern right now. We’re in a cycle right now where there’s a lot of shouting and a lot of opinion. And I’m not sure what the value is there.

MARVIN KALB: Lesley, you’ve talked in the past about opinionated news. And you don’t deal with that. You don’t do that line of work. And I think that an awful lot of people respect you for that. But it is out there. And there appears to be more and more of it. 60 Minutes and most hard news programs will do she said/he said, and assume that the audience will reach their own conclusions. The audience now appears to want you to settle that for them: “She said, he said, now what do you think, Lesley Stahl?”

LESLEY STAHL: Right.

MARVIN KALB: How do you avoid that? How do you deal with it?
LESLEY STAHL: Well, I know that the audience wants us to help them decide. My own daughter tells me she can’t stand, one side/the other side. And I think at 60 Minutes, we do kind of gently — gently — take a slight little steering position, more than probably your evening news broadcast.

I wanted to answer your question, though, that you asked Jeff about the future of news. Because it’ll bring us back to the beginning when you asked about money. And I don’t want to bring up specifics. But I think that Jeff’s telling you that it’s expensive to put our show on, is what worries me. Where’s money going to come from for journalism across the board, and certainly for what we do? I keep trying, when I talk to young people, I keep trying to think, “Who’s going to pay this person?”

For so many years, we’ve had the best and the brightest. The smartest kids in the class want to go into what we do, because they know they’re going to make a living at it. What worries me is, as we have this proliferation of news outlets, and the niching (sic) down of the audience into smaller and smaller slices, none of these outfits are going to be able to pay the kind of wage just for people to make a living, but also to send us around the world, to send us with the support we’re used to. And I despair for the future of what I do and journalism in general.

MARVIN KALB: Does it bother you that most of the young people in this audience, I am guessing, much prefer watching The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, and believe what Stewart says, possibly more than he believes 60 Minutes? Does that [simultaneous conversation]--

JEFFREY FAGER: I don't think I believe that, Marvin.

MARVIN KALB: You don’t believe that?
JEFFREY FAGER: No. But can I tell you my favorite Jon Stewart quote on *60 Minutes*? He was with Steve Kroft and we did a couple of stories with him over the years. And he said to Steve, “You know, I don't know about your slogan.” And Steve said, “We don’t have a slogan.” And he said, “Oh yes, you do.” And Steve said, “No, I don't think we do. What is it?” And he said, “May cause drowsiness.” [laughter]

LESLEY STAHLL: But I think what you’re saying about Stewart is that he does give his opinion.

MARVIN KALB: Yes, he does.

LESLEY STAHLL: And his news is-- there is a truth. There’s a truthiness (sic) in what he does, because--

JEFFREY FAGER: But he also admits that, “Look — it’s fake news. And if you take this seriously, you’ve got a problem.” He says that a lot.

MARVIN KALB: Yeah, but an awful lot of people do take it seriously, which is the point. We take seriously that we’ve got less than two minutes to go. To all of the journalism students in the audience, what kind of advice, succinctly, could you provide?

JEFFREY FAGER: Writing and storytelling, you know, it’s so important. You hear a lot about, in school, people are going to major in communications, English literature, writing courses, history, a sense of the world. I think a great liberal arts education is the best thing a journalist can have.

MARVIN KALB: Language?
JEFFREY FAGER: So important, and especially if you’re going to work overseas at some point, which I did, and I loved. It was one of my favorite assignments at CBS News.

MARVIN KALB: Lesley?

LESLEY STAHL: I would say, start your first job at the smallest place that’ll hire you, because you’ll really get to do the work there. And don’t try to come to 60 Minutes, because you know what you’ll do at 60 Minutes? Get me coffee. You should go work at the place--

JEFFREY FAGER: I got your coffee last week. [laughter]

LESLEY STAHL: You should go work at the smallest place, because you’ll do five jobs, but you’ll actually do journalism. And that’s what you want to do. It’s a skill. You learn it by doing it. And the more you do it, the better you’ll get at it. And [simultaneous conversation]--

MARVIN KALB: Do you encourage them now given all of the negative stuff that they’re listening and reading and all of that? Do you encourage them still to go into the business?

JEFFREY FAGER: Yes. I believe there’s always going to be a place for quality content.

MARVIN KALB: Lesley.

LESLEY STAHL: I’m a little worried.
MARVIN KALB: You’re a little worried.

LESLEY STAHL: I’m worried. I know it’s the best profession. I know I’ve loved every day, still love it. But I’m worried for the future.

MARVIN KALB: Well, many of us worry. But this has been a very fast hour. It’s the tyranny of the ticking clock, at 60 Minutes and everywhere else. My thanks to a wonderful, marvelous audience here at the National Press Club and all over the country. My thanks to our two splendid guests, Lesley Stahl, Jeff Fager. And finally, my special thanks to all of you out there who still worship the idea that a free press is the best guarantor of a free, open society. As my old colleague, Ed Murrow, used to say at this point, “Good night and good luck.” [applause]

What we’re going to do now is answer questions from you. And I see standing up there, there’s another microphone over here. If people want to ask a question, since we have limited time (and I have a feeling more people than what I’m looking at right now will want to ask a question) ask the question. Identify yourself. Ask the question, please.

QUESTION: My name is Daniel. I live in Washington. I’m a big fan of the show and I want to just ask-- Ms. Stahl, I’m going to try to ask in a way that I think you would ask, and not inject my opinion, can either of you make the case to me why such prime real estate on the show is still devoted to Andy Rooney?

JEFFREY FAGER: I'll make the case if you want.

LESLEY STAHL: Yeah.

JEFFREY FAGER: Yeah, I'll make the case. I'll make the case. He’s an icon. There’s no other Andy Rooney. There won’t ever be another one. I love him. I think that he’s not
always great, and he’d be the first to say that. He’s good. I think he makes great observations. And you know what? When he isn’t as good, people except that because he’s Andy Rooney.

LESLEY STAHL: And, you know what? He’s the most popular one in the show.

MARVIN KALB: How do you know that?

LESLEY STAHL: It’s true.

MARVIN KALB: How do you know that? Do you have--

LESLEY STAHL: I’ve been told it so many times. [laughter]

QUESTION: Hi, my name is Nick Morel(?). I’m a student in the School of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington. My question is, as the business model for television news has sort of shifted, become more ratings-focused and, you know, conglomeration, all that, has the content of 60 Minutes changed to focus more on soft news and sort of less on-- more on the personality pieces, and less on the hard news pieces?

JEFFREY FAGER: Well Nick, you know, the opposite is actually true for 60 Minutes. We’ve gone harder. A regular staple of 60 Minutes over the years has been the celebrity profile. I think we did one last year. Our audience has increased as we’ve gotten harder. And I think that that says a lot. I said it earlier tonight, and I think it’s important, which is that I think the country is looking for better understanding of these important stories. And so we’ve been doing more of that. So we’ve gone just the opposite way.
I think there’s a lot more soft. I think there’s a lot more celebrity. I think it’s one of the reasons that we try to avoid it, unless it’s someone really special (and, you know, sometimes we go off on-- we wrong on that, too) but because it’s such a celebrity culture, and there’s also so much crime on television. And I think both of those things are not as expensive and are easier to do.

MARVIN KALB: Are you spending more money now covering hard news than you did before?

JEFFREY FAGER: Yes, definitely.

MARVIN KALB: You’re not going to tell me how much, though. [laughter]

JEFFREY FAGER: Not on your life.

QUESTION: Hi, I’m Jessica Brady. I live here in Washington, D.C. And this question is for either of you. I’m a print reporter. I cover Congress. And for any story that I write, there’s a good number that’s split between off the record and background information, then my on the record information. So for the stories that you write, how much off the record information do you have going into it, so that that twelve minutes that we see of direct quotes is what we-- is actually presented?

LESLEY STahl: Well, you know, we do a lot of reporting before we ever go out to do our interviews. So we take a lot on background to get ourselves educated and ready for the interviews. But obviously everything we put on the air, everything we publish is on the record. So background for us is just getting us prepared to go out there. So we don’t-- Obviously by just the nature of what we do, everything you see is on the record. Does that answer your question?
QUESTION: Good evening. My name’s Helen Dalton. I live in Montgomery County, Maryland. I’m really curious about, where was the passionate interest of any or all of the correspondents when the economy was falling apart? Where was the interest to pursue those stories?

JEFFREY FAGER: Yeah, we did so many of them. I think last year, we totaled, about ten percent of all of our stories on 60 Minutes was on the financial crisis. And we did everything from two parts on credit default swaps, which was not a television story, but we did it anyway-- And Steve Kroft and his team did an amazing job of that. Lesley had a terrific interview with--

LESLEY STAHL: -- Ken Lewis--

JEFFREY FAGER: -- Ken Lewis from Bank of America. We had the only interview that the chairman of the Federal Reserve has ever done, or at least the second maybe in the history, Ben Bernanke. We made that almost our entire broadcast. Paulson, at the time that he-- Actually the week he took his legislation up onto the Hill and was actually embarrassed by that moment, we were with him in his office filming the notes they were taking. We did stories about companies collapsing. DHL was our most famous one, and this poor Ohio town that was losing its factory and all of its jobs. We’ve done--

LESLEY STAHL: -- Buy American--

LESLEY STAHL: -- Buy American, which was a Lesley story that was part of the stimulus package, buy American steel. So no, we’ve actually made it a focus of our attention from the moment it started to crash.

QUESTION: Good, thank you.
**MARVIN KALB:** And a follow-up to that, as you look back over the last year, is there a story that you wish you had done that you didn’t do?

**JEFFREY FAGER:** There’s always those, Marvin. But I’m too busy thinking about next Sunday.

**QUESTION:** My name is A.R. Hogan. I’m a doctoral journalism student at the University of Maryland. And I’m reliably told that Mr. Fager is a bit of a space aficionado. I wanted to ask, I know you were at *60 II* at that time, but on Sunday, 2 February, 2003, the day after the space shuttle Columbia tragedy, just 34 hours later, *60 Minutes* was devoted to looking at that terrible accident. And I wonder if you can share any insight on how you were able to crunch or crash a broadcast together that quickly, which is not the typical *60 Minutes* style, please.

**JEFFREY FAGER:** Well, we really do pride ourselves in being able to crash a broadcast together in no time at all. And Lesley’s been involved in many of them. So many of us do come from the heart of CBS News. And we’re trained at CBS News to be ready to put a story on in a moment’s notice. Our priority at that moment is to make sure— And, by the way, 9/11 I think was a moment we just went wall-to-wall, and in fact took over primetime for several days with our reporters.

But we pride ourselves in making a crash look not like it’s been crashed together. So we tend to add(?) numbers of people. So on a big crash— and I can’t remember when the last one you worked, Lesley. We’ve done so many. We’ll have many people in over the weekends. We work a lot of weekends. And we will double up, triple up the number of reporters on a story to make sure that that Sunday is as current as possible, especially with a big story.
The financial crisis was a little easier, because of course that was not a breaking story like the Columbia disaster. But we really work hard at trying to jump on the news and really give our viewers a deeper understanding of even a breaking story.

LESLEY STAHL: You know, when we crash, we have some new technology. The last one I crashed was Teddy, the Teddy Kennedy interviews. And we have this new technology. It’s where editors, three different editors can work on one story. And the computer magically assembles it all together. And that’s really made a huge difference in our ability to put things on faster than we could before, even faster than last year.

JEFFREY FAGER: It’s true. And by the way, one of the great investments that CBS has made in 60 Minutes is we went high definition, one of the first to go all high definition. You hear a lot about it with television news, but they’re in the studio mostly. We are all in the field, high definition. And that was a hugely expensive proposition. And at the same time, we were able to upgrade our editing so that, yes, we can have one story that is in several rooms, someone working on three minutes of it, someone working on three other minutes of it. It’s an amazing tool.

MARVIN KALB: So how much does the new technology cost? [laughter] Yes, please.

QUESTION: I’m Joanna Hurlburt(?) with the public international law and policy group here in Washington, D.C. 60 Minutes interviews a lot of high profile government leaders. Do you think that your journalism and your reporting increases freedom of the press, civil liberties, and human rights in those countries of origin? Or is the scope more national?

JEFFREY FAGER: That’s a good question. We do our best to interview leaders in foreign countries. We have, I think a relatively large international footprint in terms of the stories we cover. Some of them are very difficult. I remember specifically a story and one of the toughest places to get into is Darfur. They won’t let you into Darfur. Scott
Pelley went with his team, and they actually got onboard of a rebel tank and drove in. But getting an interview with anybody in authority there is a very difficult thing to do. Doesn’t stop us from trying. And I’m really proud of the fact that we still cover the world, especially at a moment when there are two hot wars still going, that we consider that a priority. We’ve already done three stories in Afghanistan and we’re only eight weeks into this television season.

**LESLEY STAHL:** But, you know, you raise a great question, and that is, for most of the places that we go, because we have so much equipment, it’s almost impossible to get in unless we’re basically invited in. And that’s always been sort of a conundrum for us.

**JEFFREY FAGER:** It’s very tough to report from Iran--

**LESLEY STAHL:** Right.

**JEFFREY FAGER:** -- as an example. And that’s been a frustrating story for us. We actually are working on one that we may put on this season that has made it a little easier, because it’s someone who is outside of Iran who spent a long time inside. So we work on those issues all of the time. And I’m sure we can do better at it.

**QUESTION:** Hi, good evening. My name is Greg Sheffrin(?). I’m an education advocate and a former member of this Club. 1994, Gil(?), thank you. Lesley, you said that you were very concerned about the future of journalism. And I have to say that one of the great thrills as a journalist was actually getting a letter to the editor published in *USA Today* above the fold in August, ’98. Unfortunately, it was below an editorial cartoon of Bill Clinton right after the Monica Lewinsky trial. So I’m going to have to ...(inaudible). The letter that I wrote was following a story that had just come out about the psychological impact of news on children, and how it was damaging because of all of
the anxieties and the scary images and the fear that was going into this. And so I had a conversation with a friend who is a station manager for an NBC affiliate--

MARVIN KALB: No, but I’m going to ask you to ask your question.

QUESTION: Yes, sir. And his response was, “If it bleeds, it leads.”

LESLEY STAHL: He’s-- what?

QUESTION: “If it bleeds, it leads.”

LESLEY STAHL: “If it bleeds, it leads.”

QUESTION: So eleven years later, here we are, full of anxieties again.

MARVIN KALB: Do you have a question or don’t you?

QUESTION: Yes, sir. How do we change the news so that it doesn’t scare people?

LESLEY STAHL: You know, from the time I’ve been in the business, I’ve been schooled and schooled that you tell your story. You shouldn’t lead because it bleeds. And a decent news organization wouldn’t make a news decision based on something like that. But you have to tell the story to the American people. It’s a democracy. We thrive on having it told the way it is. And I don't think you can make news decisions with worrying about the effect. I think you have to tell your story.

If you are sensational, though, and you’re going for what you’re suggesting, if you’re layering it, lathering it, you shouldn’t be in the news business.
QUESTION: But I once had a boss who really believed in that. And I think a lot of newspaper and television get sold based on, you know, scaring people. In fact, the philosophy that he lived by was, “We’re not here to make the news. We’re just here to scare people into watching it.”

LESLEY STAHL: How long did you work for him?

QUESTION: Not very long. But you learn a lot, you journalism students, you learn a lot from people that you don’t agree with early in your career, and sometimes even more.

LESLEY STAHL: You know, my very first job in television was at NBC. And this was during the Vietnam war. And they did a study back then where they had people watch the evening news. And there would be something, like, twenty seconds of a battle from Vietnam, twenty seconds. And then afterward, they’d ask people what they remembered from the broadcast. And all they remembered was the battle, which they thought had gone on for five minutes. And so it isn’t just children. We’re all affected, everybody’s affected. And the brain sees these things and explodes them and makes them huge in our minds. It’s almost criminal to be exploitive about it, because it affects everybody.

QUESTION: My name’s Alec. I’m a student at G.W. School of Media and Public Affairs. This is for Lesley. We’re on a first name basis. You talked a little bit about your favorite interview and your worst interview. But I was wondering, what was kind of the one interview that kind of got away and that you really wanted, but you couldn’t get?

LESLEY STAHL: I always wanted to interview Nancy Reagan, most particularly when she was First Lady, but even after. Because I had this feeling, which I still have, which is that she was much more influential and important in all different kinds of ways that we’ll never know about, and that really I realized that she’ll never really tell. I’ve had it in my head. I ended up being able to interview her recently over the telephone for a story I did
for Sunday Morning. But that’s the one that got away from me. And I even wonder in retrospect if I ever asked her to come clean about what their conversations were like. I don't think I’d get a straight answer.

**QUESTION:** Hi there. My name is Simone Perez. And I’m a student at the George Washington University. My question is, do you often find yourself having to almost persuade subjects to be on 60 Minutes since most people are pretty familiar with more aggressive interviewing style of the show?

**LESLEY STAHL:** You have no idea. You have no idea. You know, it depends. It’s very hard to talk most businessmen and women I suppose into doing interviews with us. And we’ve [simultaneous conversation]--

**JEFFREY FAGER:** We’ve been working on a prominent one together, trying to talk him into it. It’s not always easy.

**LESLEY STAHL:** It’s often very, very difficult. We have a reputation for doing tough interviews. We do. And we tell the people who we want to interview in those kinds of situations, “Look — it’s better if you answer all the tough questions. If there’s some problem you have and you want to get past it, take the toughest questions. A soft interview is going to be helpful at all.” And sometimes that actually works.

**JEFFREY FAGER:** And by the way, it’s not-- And truth is, it’s not about being tough. That’s not the goal. The goal is to shed light, is to get information. And sometimes it requires a tough question to get people to open up. So that’s part of what you go through in trying to convince them to do it.

**QUESTION:** My name is Blake Harwood. And I’m a senior at the Landon School and a media and democracy student. So much of the focus in the news industry is placed on
those people behind the camera. I was wondering, do you think that there’s a skill set or responsibility that we as a public need to possess when consuming news?

JEFFREY FAGER: I’m not clear on that question.

LESLEY STAHL: Well, you know, how can we say to the public, “Shape up”? You know, we can’t do that. We just have to keep doing our job. And at 60 Minutes, I have to say, we’re the lucky ones, because we do get to cover serious stories and do them in the old-fashioned way. Nothing’s really changed, Marvin. The kinds of stories we cover are the same that we’ve covered from the first day of the broadcast, if you look at the mix. Jeff’s made us more timely on the news, but if you look at the whole scope--

JEFFREY FAGER: And, by the way, I think that that’s an important part of our broadcast and our legacy, which is that it really comes from the people you worked with, Marvin. You know? Don Hewitt learned everything from Fred Friendly. And Ed Murrow and his gentlemen radio correspondents were like gods to Don. He brought that to us. And he just was an open book. He was a great teacher. He doesn’t get enough credit for that. He just wore everything on this sleeve, including how he thought we should go about telling stories.

MARVIN KALB: Well, we’re out of time, but I just want to say, as a kind of wrap, that we hear a great deal about how journalism is in trouble, and it is. I think only a fool would turn his head away from that fact. And yet, in that environment of journalism being in trouble, you both represent an organization, 60 Minutes, that continues to do first-rate reporting. And even if there’s a hiccup along the way, along the way you’re getting the thrust of honest professionals doing the best they can.

And I think I speak for everyone when I say, thank you both very much for being with us.
JEFFREY FAGER: Thank you.

[applause]

END