



Covering Catastrophe (11/16/16)

00:00:25

Michael Frazier: Welcome, everyone, I'm Michael Frazier with the 9/11 Memorial Museum. We appreciate you supporting us and coming to the program tonight. For the audience on Facebook Live, we encourage you to be engaged in this program by sharing your comments and using #911MuseumTalk.

In journalism school, students are often taught not to begin the lede of a story with a quote. I think I found an appropriate exception to lead into this program. "Journalism can never be silent. That is its greatest virtue, and its greatest fault. It must speak, and speak immediately, while the echoes of wonder, the claims of triumph, and the signs of horror are still in the air." That's from late "Time" magazine editor Henry Grunwald.

00:01:15

To me, there is no job more wonderous, scary, powerful, important, and unpredictable than reporting the news. The risk and responsibilities are even greater when covering a catastrophe. During such an event, people are seeking critical information to help them understand, to keep their family safe, and to determine what tomorrow may bring. You'll hear more about this craft from three highly respected journalists, who I'm proud to introduce.

00:01:49

First, I want to introduce Deepti Hajela. She spent two decades in daily journalism, reporting from the New York bureau of The Associated Press, the world's largest news-gathering organization. She joined the AP after earning undergraduate degrees... and a graduate degree from Northwestern University. In her years at the AP, she reported on race and ethnicity, winning awards for stories providing new ways for her global audience to view the world around them.

00:02:19

Kristen Shaughnessy has been a trusted and familiar face on New York One since 1995. On 9/11, she was sent to the World Trade Center shortly after the first plane hit. She used a payphone to call to the news desk. While on the phone, live on air, the first tower fell. She dropped the phone and joined others fleeing the shower of debris. She made her way - barefoot—to the West Side Highway, where she met up with some of her colleagues.

That little detail, just real quick, I've never told this, but it's a personal thing for me. My wife also was a reporter at the time, on 9/11, and her byline was Sara Kugler, she was actually on a phone on Vesey Street when the towers collapsed, and she ran into a lobby, escaping, so that's a personal thing in my home.

00:03:06

And, lastly, I would like to introduce Maggie Haberman. She's a political correspondent for "The New York Times," and serves as a political analyst for CNN. This Sarah Lawrence graduate was a political reporter for Politico and worked previously at the "New York Daily News" and the "New York Post." When she joins the "Times"-- when she joined the "Times," the political editor noted that "Maggie is a gifted, dynamic, insightful, and high-impact reporter with unrelenting news energy." I admire her and her work. She's a family friend.

And with that I'd like to turn it over to Clifford Chanin, our senior vice president who oversees our public education and civic programs.

(applause)

00:03:56

Clifford Chanin: Thank you, Michael. Let me thank all of you for being here tonight, our three guests as well. I want to... particular thanks to our members. We had a program earlier in the week, and I see some very familiar faces. Welcome back. We must continue meeting like this. And just to note that—outside after the program, we can offer you the sale of a book called "Covering Catastrophe," which is a chronology telling the

day in the words of 130 broadcast journalists-- including Kristen's interview about the day. So, I would ask you to stop and consider that as well.

00:04:38

And I'd like to welcome everybody here. Thank you for taking the time and doing this. There is obviously much to talk about, starting with the day and how much has happened since. But let's go back to the day, because this becomes very personal, and it's out of that personal experience that one moves in many, many directions on that morning.

Let me start, because Kristen, I think is-- and we'll have some clips of her, but just take me to the morning and how the news arrives, what happens in the newsroom, and what each of you is doing in response to this first breaking news-- Kristen.

00:05:22

Kristen Shaughnessy: It was a... hello, everyone, first of all. It was a beautiful day. I mean, we all remember the blue sky. It was primary day in the city, so I was actually covering-- we were very short-staffed, because everybody was geared toward the nighttime.

So I was in a school in Brooklyn, at a school in Brooklyn. We had dragged a cable all through the school. There were only two of us; we normally have crews of three or four. And then we got the call that a train... that a plane had hit the first tower. And we thought it was a joke, honestly, because... we had just pulled all this cable, we thought somebody was playing a game. It was clearly not a game.

00:05:57

We unwound the cable, we got back in the truck, the second plane hit. And that's when we knew it was terrorism. And we were going through the streets of Brooklyn, the streets were crowded, people were asking us what had happened, and we knew nothing more than anyone else. And then there was a fire truck-- the Manhattan Bridge was closed. But there was a fire truck going over, and we had worked with them, and they said, "Follow us."

00:06:18 So it was just the fire truck and our live truck, and we went. And then when we got into Manhattan, the fire truck went to the Trade Center. The crowds of people were so big from everybody fleeing the towers that we got stuck. We literally couldn't move the live truck. So I just got out and I ran. My live truck operator, he parked near the... near City Hall. And I went to the towers. When I got to the towers, they had set a command center at the foot of the tower, with all the senior, you know, fire officials there.

00:06:47 And then, they actually told me that I had to get away because they weren't sure what was going to happen. And it was, it was strange because they're always so in command, and you see the firefighters going up, but there was this uncertainty, because it was such a large fire and such a large impact. There were two, two towers that they were dealing with, and, honestly, journalists were the last thing that they wanted to be dealing with at that point. So then I ran to the pay phone, to the nearest pay phone. I called in to the newsroom and I went live on the air, and then as I was going live, that plane came... the tower came down.

00:07:19 Clifford Chanin: Tower came down. We'll come to that in a minute, but I want to pick up Maggie coming this direction. Your first learning of this and response.

Maggie Haberman: I... I saw it on television; I was leaving to go vote that morning, which I don't typically do anymore in elections that I cover. And I had been covering Mike Bloomberg, so I was on Staten Island with him the night before, when he was supposed to be losing this primary. And he had been saying all kinds of strange things, so that was sort of what I was preoccupied with.

00:07:52 I turn on the television, there was... at that point, there had been two planes. I went to go vote. I called Ed Skyler, who many in this audience probably know, who was Mike Bloomberg's press secretary at the time for the campaign. Because I sort of didn't know who to call. And none of the cell phones were working. I used a pay phone outside of where I voted. And I decided to... I couldn't get through to the desk. And, again, because it was primary day, I wasn't supposed to be doing anything.

00:08:21 So I decided to go down to the site. I got in the cab and in the cab on the way down, the driver had the radio on, and the first tower fell while we were en route down. And when we got to Canal Street-- and I'll really never forget this-- there were pedestrians directing traffic and everybody was trying to help each other. There were these incredibly long lines at pay phones because no cell service was working.

00:08:49 And I got out of the cab and I started walking down... God, I guess it must have been Church Street. I got a couple of blocks north of the northern edge of the site and you could still see the one tower, and there was already a ton—a plume from the first one. And a police van screeched up, stopped, they turned on the loudspeaker and said, "If you don't want to get hurt, everybody better evacuate now." Everybody started running up the street screaming. And I ran as far as I could; I was a really heavy smoker at the time, so that was not that far. And...

(audience chuckling)

00:09:25 Maggie Haberman: At some point, I stopped just because I couldn't run anymore. I turned around, and I looked and you could see the second tower just sort of sway, and then it fell. And it was... this insanely loud sound, and everyone around me was screaming. I tried to get closer to the site. And you really couldn't see anything, it was just all white. I couldn't get much further than... God, I don't remember, it must have been around Murray Street.

00:09:52 So I turned around and started walking uptown, and there were people who were just you know, covered in soot or covered in debris. People bleeding, just sort of walking in a daze. There was a guy who had been a fire marshal in one of the buildings who collapsed in shock on Broadway, and people tried getting him an ambulance to... I was waiting with them for about half an hour, still an ambulance still hadn't shown up. Because all the ambulances were elsewhere.

And then I walked to the newsroom. And people were sort of getting their news however they could at that point-- gathered around cars, listening to radios, you know, strangers standing in doorways of stores. That's mostly what I remember.

00:10:33

Clifford Chanin: Yeah. Deepti?

Deepti Hajela: I was asleep.

(laughter)

Deepti Hajela: Because-- because it was primary night, and I always work election night, so I wasn't supposed to be at work until 3:30. And I lived in Jersey City at the time, and the night before, I'd actually passed through the World Trade Center to take the PATH to go home. And so, right, I mean, you know... I was considerably younger than I am now, so my night life was a little more adventurous than it is now.

(laughter)

00:11:04

Deepti Hajela: So, yeah, I mean, I probably, if it was a normal thing, would have gotten to bed by 2:00, 3:00, something like that. And so, the first, the first thing I remember was my radio was set, my radio alarm was set to the, you know, the pop station. And instead of the usual kind of high-energy patter, all I hear are these really somber voices, which kind of jarred me awake, because I was like "Wait, what? What did I... did I turn on the news radio? What is happening here? Why are they so quiet?" And that was the thing that I was like, "I have to get up, because this is very strange."

00:11:36

And I got up and I turned on the TV, and from my apartment, you could see, you know, the Twin Towers, so it was this incredibly disorienting moment of just in time to kind of-- you know, television news is cycling

through-- one tower I think had already fallen by that point. And then one, and then I think I... you know, I was just very, I couldn't even tell what was happening. Like, I look over, and there's nothing there, but here... And oh, yeah, oh, it was just confusion. I did not understand, it took me a second to realize it.

00:12:10

And then, I mean, you know, I was in Jersey. There was no way I was crossing the Hudson River, no one was going to let me through. So then it became this thing, well, you know, "How am I going to get to my office? What am I going to do? I can't be a journalist and not be part of this." This would be terrible if I'm feeling like I can't help, I can't report on this. And literally it was like, you know, trying to find the office in northern New Jersey. And I'd never, I hadn't been there before. And I was like, "I think, I think it's in Newark? I think? I'm going to go find it."

00:12:44

And literally just, I showed up and was like "What can I do? What do you need?" You know, and was taking phone calls and... yeah, and trying to get feeds. The thing with the Associated Press is that we're, you know, all over the place. So a lot of times it was people calling in, if they couldn't get into the city, you know, call me and I'd take your quotes and feed it to the main story. And that was pretty much most of that day was just kind of like, right, just trying to-- this weird thing of-of reporting on a story that's in my bureau, yet I'm somehow over here, watching it.

00:13:21

Clifford Chanin: You know, your job as a journalist is to make sense of what's going on and explain it to people. But this is an extraordinary challenge to that, because what you're seeing is literally unbelievable and there's no source that can explain it to you. So, that certainly poses a significant challenge.

And yet, in each of... in all three of your cases, it's really the race horse waiting for the gun to go and do what you know how to do. So, what is that moment like, where you have this professional instinct, and yet you're explaining or trying to understand something that makes absolutely no sense to you, much less to put it into some sort of comprehensible form for your readers.

00:14:09 Deepti Hajela: I mean, I think on some level, though, especially when it comes to breaking news... the thing of the first day is, "What is happening?" What like, real, I mean, you know... the whys and the hows and that perhaps, questions to be answered, but it really is this immediate thing of, "What did people experience? How are people reacting? How are people surviving? What are people's stories of these moments?" And I think that was a lot of, at least, you know, the initial kind of reporting.

00:14:40 Kristen Shaughnessy: Yeah. I think it was, it was confusing for us, too. Because I was on the phone, and I didn't know how much the newsroom knew, I didn't know if they knew how bad it was. So, I just had no idea what they were showing compared to what I was seeing. And what I was seeing, I knew they couldn't be showing. So I was trying to convey that-- you have to be careful with your words in that situation, because you don't want to alarm people.

00:15:04 And it's... as a journalist, you have a responsibility to tell what you're seeing. But there's a line, I think, where you don't say some of the things that you saw. So there was that line, and I know when I dropped the phone, I was really worried that they were going to fire me. Because I said... (laughs) they don't understand what it's like down here, and I'm dropping the phone on a live report. Who does that? You're not supposed to do that. But I didn't have a choice. So, and then when I went... I first ran to the East Side, and then I met up with two firefighters who had buried... unburied people out.

00:15:39 You know, they had, they said Father Judge had died. And I was like, "I just saw him. How could he be dead?" Like it just... it did not make sense. It was happening so quickly. And so, to process that was... it was happening in real time, but in slow motion at the same time, if that makes sense.

Maggie Haberman: There is a magnitude to it. I actually think about this a lot, given how toxic Twitter has been for this election. I think about what

it would have been like if Twitter had existed then. Because so much to your point, and so much of that first day, and really the first couple of days, was about trying to get accurate information, which was almost impossible.

00:16:17

And so you have to sort of-- I had a colleague who once, when I was a young reporter starting out, and I was going to go cover a funeral, and I asked her what I was supposed to do, because I had no idea. She basically said, "Write down what you see and just feel." And you really couldn't do that that day, because if you let yourself feel too much, you were going to not get out from under the desk.

And the thing that I regret the most about the initial reporting, at least when, at the "Post," which was where I was at the time, was we went with staggeringly-- and I think most people did-- staggeringly high projections of the potential death toll, which just further alarmed...

Kristen Shaughnessy: Right.

00:16:58

Maggie Haberman: And so I think that wouldn't happen. I think the reverse of what you were-- and I agree with you, that there's things that we make decisions...

Kristen Shaughnessy: Mm-hmm.

Maggie Haberman: That we wouldn't show or describe then. I think the line has so changed that I think a lot of it would be shown.

Clifford Chanin: Yeah.

Kristen Shaughnessy: Yeah. There was a civility that doesn't exist now.

Maggie Haberman: Well, just even, I mean, a lot of the pictures that Richard Drew, an A.P. photographer at the time, took. He took some very famous photos...

Clifford Chanin: The famous "Falling Man."

Maggie Haberman: Yeah, the "Falling Man" photo.

Kristen Shaughnessy: Right.

Maggie Haberman: Yeah, and a lot of places wouldn't show that photo for a very long time, so.

Kristen Shaughnessy: Right.

00:17:28 Clifford Chanin: Yeah. Let's-- because we have Kristen's phone call, on the scene, literally reporting live as the South Tower's collapsing, so we can go to that, show that. It's brief.

00:17:40 (clip begins)

Kristen Shaughnessy (on recording): It's just coming down, Pat. It is just coming down.

Pat Kiernan (on recording): Watch the right side, it's ripping apart.

Kristen Shaughnessy (on recording): It's exploding. It is billowing. Pat, the debris is flying, I'm gonna run.

Pat Kiernan (on recording): Okay. Uh...

(indistinct chatter)

Pat Kiernan (on recording, stammering): All right, uh... our... we hope, we hope that Kristen was not in a position where she would have been injured by that, but the tower is literally crumbling into the, the streets of Manhattan there.

00:18:14

(clip ends)

Clifford Chanin: So, Maggie, you said before that, you know, to feel really wasn't possible, and to function. But it's also not possible not to feel under these circumstances. So, you know, that first day, in the immediate moment, there's confusion. As the fog lifts literally and figuratively, you are now seeing just how bad it is. Let me ask, what is the first impulse in covering this for each of you? What do you feel you've got to really dig into in order to tell this story and explain what has just happened?

00:18:52

Maggie Haberman: So for me, at the time, and I think there was-- there were so many different columns of information. For me, at the time, I was covering City Hall, so my first priority was covering Giuliani, who was still the mayor, and who was a very calming voice for a lot of people at that point.

00:19:14

And so I was focused on trying to get, A, if I'm being honest, I was sort of drawn to the calm, because he was projecting that. But he, and he had this very famous line about how the death toll would be more than any of us could bear, which I think I'm misphrasing a little bit. But it was trying to find out exactly what the city's response was going to be, what the federal response was going to be, what the coordination was going to be.

00:19:37 By the second day, it was pretty... you know, there were all these reports initially, on the first day, that, you know, there's another five planes out there, there's all sorts of other stuff going on. And it was clear that that was not happening, obviously, that second day. But it was really trying to... it was two prongs. It was the response, which was in general sort of being treated as a large disaster area for... and the government reaction. And then there was the human response, of you had people who were sort of, you know, near the site or near hospitals with pictures of their relatives, looking for them.

00:20:16 And so I think that the challenge was to try to-- those were, those were the two areas that I dug into. But it was, it was utterly chaotic for the first day. And there was a futility that I-I think we kept bumping into. So I have this very vivid memory of Mike Bloomberg got caught on a... he went to a blood drive, and there were all these very long blood drive lines that ended up not really being necessary because there were so few people who were wounded and ultimately saveable, but an NBC camera caught up to him, candidate Bloomberg at the time, and said, you know, "Does it send a signal to have somebody like you here doing this?" Mike Bloomberg, who is not known for his emoting, said, "I don't really know that it does anything." And it was, it was sort of...

(laughter)

00:21:08 Maggie Haberman: ...It made me laugh when I heard the audio at the time. But it was... he was describing a level of sort of futility to all of this. We really just had to basically sit and wait. And so for me, it was how did we sift through the available information while so little was forthcoming.

00:21:28 Clifford Chanin: Let me add a quote from Kristen's colleague, John Schiumo, at New York One, who said-- of his own reporting on that day-- "I actually said on the air that I was no longer reporting as an employee of New York One, I am just telling you the story as an eyewitness. And I didn't have to say that, but it kind of freed me up to be able to do whatever it is I had to do-- whatever that was, reporting with emotion or whatever. I didn't feel I wanted to be constrained."

So, you know, the tension is not just what you know and what you don't know, the tension is being New Yorkers, being here, being, in some sense, like everybody else, targets of this attack, and yet you have this job to do. And were there moments where you put that aside, let me ask Deepti, in some way.

00:22:13 Deepti Hajela: I think... that the difficulty, or the struggle to put things aside, came for me a little bit later, I think. Because in the immediate aftermath, the day it happened, day after, in terms of what I was doing in the bureau, there was a lot kind of editing and kind of running the shift and kind of making sure stuff got out onto the wire. So, with that-- and, you know, and coordinating, and, "Oh my gosh, where is the staff?" And "Oh right, there's this reporter with this." And "Oh, my God, who am I going to send?"

00:22:45 You know, so that really for a long time kept the feeling of it from really being able to set in, because it was like, "I don't have time." Really, you know, the woman who... my colleague now, even to this day, who was on the desk when it happened, I mean, she must have been in the bureau for you know, 36 hours straight. And then she finally got to go home, and then I came in.

00:23:08 So it was really just kind of like, "Right, there's still fire. There's still..." You know, and then there's a report of, like, "Oh my gosh, is something happening at the Empire State Building?" I was like "Oh my gosh, okay, who's near the Empire State Building? Can someone go check that out?"

Like, that was really the thing. It was actually, for me it was harder... you know, in the days after that, when we started really delving into families and their stories and all the different ways we tried to write about this loss that really involved, "Hello, person I've never met, can I please talk to you about this incredibly devastating moment? And can you please share with me this horror that I can't even imagine?"

00:23:48 And those were the days, and those were the conversations and the stories that I would do interviews, and I would get maybe one or two done. And then I'd get off the phone and I'd be like, "You know what? "We're done, we're not having, we... I cannot, we're not having anymore conversations tonight, because... no." There's only so... you know, I mean, and I'm just hearing about it from, you know, their perspective. And that's it for tonight, you know?

00:24:11 Clifford Chanin: Let me come to Kristen, because, actually, I'd like to show the second clip now. Because-- and I don't think you've seen this before, you said.

Kristen Shaughnessy: No.

Clifford Chanin: So, with apologies. This is later in the day.

Kristen Shaughnessy: Right.

Clifford Chanin: You were back in the studio, and I think... I watched this. I mean, it does capture, in some sense, very vividly, the moments that Deepti and Maggie are describing. And we get to see it through you recounting your experience, so let's show that.

00:24:43 (clip begins)

Pat Kiernan (on recording): I gotta tell you next to me, next to Sharon is Kristen Shaughnessy who, we had a frightening moment on the telephone with Kristen just after 9:00 this morning as you watched a relatively, in hindsight far too close, to the World Trade Center.

Kristen Shaughnessy (on recording): It was close, yeah, yeah.

Pat Kiernan (on recording): And we heard, as you've told us, "I've gotta leave the phone and-and get out of here."

00:25:03 Kristen Shaughnessy (on recording): I was literally in an area where there was just FBI agents and police officers and medical personnel, and there were some civilians. And then, as I talked to you, the building went down and I thought "There's no way it can reach us." Only not very far away, maybe two blocks, I guess. But... and then I realized it's coming quick. And it was... the way I can describe it, the sensation, was like, you're trying to outrun a tornado, because there's this ball of dust that's just picking up. You saw people were losing their shoes, they were... nobody was screaming. That was just... I don't know what John said earlier, but...

00:25:39 Sharon Dizenhuz (on recording): Everyone's described it very orderly.

Kristen Shaughnessy (on recording): It was just... yeah, it was eerily silent. People were just running, run, run, helping each other, picking people up. You know, there was a couple people who dropped in front of me and, you know, you just... people would pick them up. When you know FBI agents are running, you know it's serious. And the thing that John and I were talking about, John Schiumo... when you see the pictures, I haven't seen a picture yet that does justice to what we saw down there. There's-- I know the pictures look bad, but it's so much worse than that. It's... I don't know how to explain it. But it was unbelievable. And then we went to the public phones that... you know, the lines were packed.

00:26:15 And I know there was some talk about getting rid of public phones, well, thank goodness they didn't, because it was the only way people were getting through. Cell phones were down. There was a time I was the only one... it was right across from City Hall, a place that's normally packed, and I was the only one there.

Sharon Dizenhuz (on recording): Wow.

Kristen Shaughnessy (on recording): It was eerie. And they let me, you know, continue to do live reports from there, but...

00:26:33 Sharon Dizenhuz (on recording): Kristen, when we were on the phone with you and you were giving the initial part of your report, when we saw that collapse, can you describe what went through your head as you were realizing, "I'm describing this as a reporter, from a distance," and then suddenly "I'm in the middle of this, I'm in harm's way, I've got to go"?

00:26:54 Kristen Shaughnessy (on recording): Yeah, I actually had an FBI agent grab me by the arm and he said, "Kristen, you've got to run." His words were "Kristen, you've got to run or you're going to die." Those were what he said to me. And we ran together, we ran for probably seven blocks. And I- I had heels on, which was not a good day for heels. Took those off, I was running barefoot through the street, as many people were; I saw shoes all along the way. People just dropped gloves, pocketbooks, there were bloody shirts, it was unbelievable.

00:27:19 (clip ends)

Clifford Chanin: So, how did you mobilize yourself to do that?

Kristen Shaughnessy: Um, I think you don't have a choice. You're a journalist and that's what you do. I don't remember doing that, actually. I remember being on the set, I remember them asking me-- or just telling me, "You have to go on." That's what I remember. But I don't remember talking about that. I'm actually glad I talked about the civility that happened afterward-- which you mentioned, Maggie, right, like... it was as if you didn't know if the world was ending or not, that's really how we felt. Because you weren't sure...

Maggie Haberman: That's exactly right.

00:27:49 Kristen Shaughnessy: We didn't know what was happening, right? So, people were falling because they were trying to run and they were tripping, and people would not run past them. They would pick them up. Which was... I was like, "You're going to go out, this is the way to go out." Because, you know... Everybody... it was humanity at its best, and its worst.

Clifford Chanin: What did this do to your various news organizations? I mean, what kind of strain did this put on you? What was the nature of the challenge that was taken on? How did this get defined within the newsroom for each of you? You were all part of a much bigger machine, but what were... what were the marching orders as soon as you were able to get them? Please start with Deepti.

00:28:28 Deepti Hajela: I mean, I... I mean, you know, I work for the Associated Press, right? I mean, we are global, right? I mean, so I can't... I don't remember if they were, but I imagine it's the same thing that it's always been, is that, right, you've got to get the story, right? And I mean we, you know, being the global organization that we are, I mean we just came at it from every state, every country, every aspect of it that we possibly could, which is one of the benefits and the advantages that we have, is that we have people everywhere.

Clifford Chanin: Maggie, you and Kristen are both working for local organizations. Does that make it different from what Deepti described?

00:29:03 Maggie Haberman: Yeah. We, I mean, we told a very... a very New York story, it was much less about the world, other than in sort of the Bush administration response, which there was some focus on. There was a huge effort spent on trying to focus on the relatives of people who had died. And because the "Post" is and was very focused on city politics, there was an enormous focus on what would come next. Because we were in the middle of this mayoral race, so my marching orders were...

Kristen Shaughnessy: They changed it, right? I mean, it changed...

00:29:40 Maggie Haberman: Right, I mean, they moved the primary two week later, and then there was, there was the runoff, I think. And then... God, I don't even remember.

(laughter)

Maggie Haberman: I think. And then there was this effort by Giuliani to try and stay on for awhile, and that became very consuming and defining. It was... and it was a weird time, because it was sort of the best of the "New York Post" in the sense that we had some really strong, I think, coverage of what was happening at the governing level, which was hugely important at the time.

00:30:16 And it was an utter rehabilitation of Rudy Giuliani's career at that point. And then... and then we had some utterly silly, idiotic stories. Like we had some front page story about all of the watches that had been corralled by... it was so weird and it made no sense, and it was like, "Here's a bunch of watches that were picked up from—you know, sent to the property clerk. They were harvested from the site, some were still ticking!" with an exclamation point.

00:30:45 It just was... there was a strange disconnect, in a way. In our coverage at the time, the "Post" was being led by a new editor, who was from Australia. So there was a little bit, I think, of that window, where the "Daily News" was much better at telling the human side of what was happening.

Kristen Shaughnessy: Yeah, I think... I think what's New York One did well, was tell those human stories.

Maggie Haberman: Yes.

00:31:11

Kristen Shaughnessy: And it was, it was cathartic for us as well, because I was assigned to the fire department. So I had followed that fire truck in, so I knew what had happened to so many, and I got to meet so many of the families, and you could kind of go through it together-- I mean obviously, they were going through much more, but to meet them, to hear about their loved ones, for me, that was comforting in a way.

And to want to do justice to their story. Because you had one individual, you were telling his story from his family's perspective, and you wanted to make sure that they were happy with the tribute that you were essentially writing for them. So that consumed the next, I would say, couple months for us.

Maggie Haberman: Us too.

Kristen Shaughnessy: So, yeah.

00:31:50

Clifford Chanin: Let's talk about--and a number of you mentioned it already, but the deep emotionality of what you're doing now. Because, you know, in terms of the fire department, in terms of any story involving family members, you... you're all at some point likely, as Maggie indicated, you're going to be covering funerals as part of the job anyway. But this is very different. This is much deeper, and it's constant. So, in doing that, are you looking for the same thread through each of these encounters, or are you looking for something that makes each one stand out in a different way? And, secondly, what is that doing to you, to have to engage with this on a near-constant basis over a prolonged period of time?

00:32:36

Kristen Shaughnessy: I think, just like the museum shows, is that everyone has a story. Like, I think that's why we all go into journalism, in a sense, because everybody has a different story, so you're telling these stories. And for me, that was helpful, because it... the enormity the enormity of the incident and the numbers of people, the number of people who were killed, then you single... you tell single stories, and you realize that everybody has a story.

00:33:02 And that, to me... it made people human, they weren't just part of a collective mass number, so it was... I felt it was helpful for me as a journalist, and hopefully for people who, you felt like you knew these people who died and you were going through this mourning as a nation. And as a world, really.

00:33:22 Deepti Hajela: I feel like, you know, it made me-- forced me to be better as a reporter and as a person, because it's really this...you know, it's... not something I really... You know, interviewing, sure, is part of your journalism education, right? I mean, asking people questions, it sounds so, like, "Oh yeah, I'm just going to ask you a question." I mean, it's really hard. It can be, you know. And learning how to connect with people, right, and how to-- you know, and some of the stories I did were, you know, in all the different ways that we were looking to talk to people about their grief, one of them was about people who had lost more than one person in the attacks.

00:34:09 And I still remember to this day that, I remember that I talked to this one gentleman who had three children—two sons and a... two daughters and a son. And both of his daughters had died.

Clifford Chanin: They worked at Cantor.

Deepti Hajela: They worked at Cantor. And he was out on Long Island, so this is... I think. So this was like a phone conversation. You don't even have the comfort of being able to look someone in the eye, to be able to, you know, kind of really connect with them that way. And it was... you know, obviously. And, you know, he was willing to talk.

00:34:40 And at the end of it-- at the beginning, obviously, I introduced myself, told him my name, so on and so forth. And at the end of it, he said to me, "Your name sounds like you might be from the part of the world where people are... they think these terrorists, hijackers came from." And I just

kind of braced myself, because I said... you know, I'm thinking, I'm like, "I don't know where this is going to go. But, however it goes, okay."

00:35:10 And I said, well, you know, "I'm South Asian." And he said to me, "Well, I hope that in any kind of backlash that you are safe." And I got off the phone, and I, you know, like, just had to be still for a second. Because it was this moment of just the... the strength of human grace in the midst of horror is, you know, something I carried with me then. That people are, no matter what, capable of such connection, and such kindness, that... you know, and I carry that with me in how I do my reporting now.

00:35:56 That was the most dramatic moment of, you know, circumstance of talking to people in pain, but it's... you know, unfortunately, in 20 years, it hasn't been the last one. You know, there have been plenty of unfortunate phone calls and talking to people. It really is about keeping that in mind, is that... right? Is that if you approach people with grace and compassion and empathy, that even at these hardest of moments you can connect with them.

00:36:22 Maggie Haberman: Yeah, it was... (clears throat) whenever I cover people who have suffered a tragedy prior to that day, I try... would always try to put myself in their shoes and just sort of listen. And this was, this was much more challenging. And I covered rebuilding here for three years afterwards. So, uh, I covered the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, I covered the early stages of this museum, and... and there were... one of the things that... it was such a public... I'm not going to articulate this well, so I apologize, but it was such a public loss. It was such a... it was such a shared experience, but we still, we could not understand what these people were going through, no matter how hard I tried, the only way that I could understand it was to basically take on an amount of pain that I couldn't understand how people could get out of bed.

00:37:19 So, it was very hard. And there were a lot of... there were about 20 relatives of victims who I became pretty close with, and I spoke to a lot. And they would call me at 11:00 at night, or they would call me at 8:00 in the morning; this was before I was married, before I had children, so I

was freer. And I just sort of... you had to just sort of let them feel. Even if it wasn't really about a story. And that was how I did my job.

00:37:52

And I think the thing the media did that was, I think, problematic afterwards, as a group, was... you know, these families did not all come from the same place. They did not all have the same experience. There were a lot of people who wanted to get up and focus on rebuilding the site. There were other people who were furious and wanted to sue Saudi Arabia. There were other people who were furious with Giuliani, there were other people who loved Giuliani, and we developed this habit of describing everybody as "the families." And they were not "the families."

00:38:26

People had very different views. There was the fight over whether remains should be gone through again at Fresh Kills Landfill on Staten Island. But I-I... that period is sort of a blur for me, to be honest. Because it was devastating, and it was daily devastation. And for... I mean, I remember having a conversation with one father of a firefighter who... it was two years later, and he sort of burst into tears as we were talking; we were just having coffee, and he was just talking about his son. And he was reliving that day every day, and I think for a lot of the family members it was like that.

00:39:08

And so, I don't really know, to your question, of what were you looking for when we were covering that? I don't know what I was trying to extract from their stories other than just to tell them the best we could.

Clifford Chanin: What have each of you extracted from this overall experience as journalists, as people for that matter?

00:39:23

Kristen Shaughnessy: I think, going off both your points, it's just that you put yourself in people's shoes when you're interviewing them-- which I tried to do before, as well, but even more so after September 11. It just gives you a better sense, because that could have been any of us, but the

story wasn't about us, it was about the families who were, you know, collectively mourning, but in different ways.

00:39:48 You realize everybody deals with grief very differently. And... there's no right, there's no wrong. It's just, it's grief, so however it envelops you, that's how it goes. You have to tell the story how... and as you said, not every story is... there's no really two stories that are the same, so. It was... it was an interesting time, it was obviously just sad and devastating.

00:40:13 But you felt this responsibility as a journalist to really do a good job, because people were relying on you for information, whether you were at a local station or a national station or a worldwide station, you know-- or organization-- they needed information. That's what everybody craved, because nobody really understood what happened, so.

00:40:31 Maggie Haberman: I think, I mean, just as a... as a journalist, I think it was, it was... I learned an enormous amount from it. Mostly from the human aspect, certainly in terms of how our... how our government functions, and functions under enormous strain. As I... I mean, it was, it was a seminal experience for me. I'm a lifelong New Yorker; I got married down here. You know, it was tremendously affecting and I think changed me forever in ways that I don't, I don't totally understand, except for when I think about it.

00:41:12 I am struck, after covering this election, which was, as I... I used the word "toxic" earlier, and I could use that times ten. The... this election in a lot of ways I think is a culmination of events of that day. There's a certain arc to it, based on what the subject matter was. Based on the talk of immigration, based on what one candidate said about Muslims. When I contrast it to what happened after that day and how, to your point, about the generosity of spirit that most people had, and how the country really came together. And... It is, it is disheartening to watch what is happening now.

00:41:57 Kristen Shaughnessy: Also, just to-- it also forced you to see-- Sharon Dizenhuz was one of my colleagues at the time, and she said, "Your life is pretty much defined before September 11 and after."

Maggie Haberman: Yes. Exactly.

Kristen Shaughnessy: I think that goes sort of for everybody. But it also forced you to get much more of a world view, because we kind of just did our... lived our lives, we didn't really think about everything else that was happening in the world. And it really forced you to understand that things were very different from where we lived, and you had to understand what was happening around the world to understand what happened here.

00:42:33 Deepti Hajela: I think... you know, I think... there was, right, a lot of unified feeling and all, but even in that, like you were saying, because there was also plenty of... you know, it's not an accident that man on the phone was worried about my safety.

Kristen Shaughnessy: Right.

Maggie Haberman: Yep.

00:42:51 Deepti Hajela: Right? Like that wasn't him being... you know, overly cautious. I mean, right? That was based on things that were happening. So for me, since then, I think it did kind of send shockwaves to, to... throughout this country for things that maybe... changes in demographic trends and whatever that people hadn't been paying attention to, that all of a sudden then they were paying attention to, so it made it even more important, I think, to write about the things that do bring us together, but the things that make us different.

00:43:30 You know, I have always written about race and ethnicity from the time I started in journalism. And that just kind of, you know, made it exponentially more important to talk about and to address that everyone's not having the same experiences, and to talk about, you know-- especially, even in New York, you know, communities of color, South-Asian communities, Arab-American communities, you know, and how are they telling, and finding room to tell those stories? Because they are part of this collective experience as well.

00:44:06 Clifford Chanin: I want to pick up, both Deepti and Maggie have talked about this trajectory and where it is today and how this all figures in the election, the way the election was conducted, and, of course, you can see the seeds of 9/11 in many ways, I mean if you think since 9/11, we've been at war, in multiple theaters, not just two, but it is extended beyond that, under presidents of both parties. And so, talk a little bit more-- and let me start with Maggie, because you have been covering the campaign. What is the impact? And talk about what it feels like to see the contrast between the grace that you described and the toxicity that you also mentioned?

00:44:55 Maggie Haberman So, one of the hallmarks of-- I cover Donald Trump this campaign. And on and off from the beginning, exclusively focused on him since last November, and I've covered him on and off since the late '90s, when I started at the "New York Post." So this version of Donald Trump is not hugely surprising, in the sense that he has always had certain hobby horses that he's focused on.

00:45:20 But the, it became pretty clear after the 2014 midterms that immigration was going to be a driving force, and the confluence of immigration and fears about terrorism. And so Trump played on that, you know, very effectively. And one of the things he did was essentially argue as if he was doing a rehearsed Bulworth, and say "I'm eschewing political incorrectness," and the subtext of that for me was always that "This is political correctness that started after 9/11. You know, when we all had to pretend." That was his message.

- 00:46:03 This has been, you know... look, this has been a campaign that had not, in this city, but there were two terrorist incidents, one was in Paris and one was in San Bernardino. And Trump, you know, used that as sort of the hallmark of his, of his candidacy. I don't think that the nation has ever stopped being afraid, on some level, since 9/11. I think most people that I know in the city have never stopped being afraid.
- 00:46:34 We are, you know... and there were reminders of what happened for years, as we know, as we took however long it took for the Freedom Tower to get built at One World Trade Center. The Cortlandt Street subway station on the N and R was shut down for a very, very long time, and so forth. So we had these touchstones here.
- 00:46:52 In terms of the campaign, the... I'm not going to describe this effectively, just because, I mean, I have really found this election just sort of brutalizing to cover. The amount of hate that has been spewed; this is the first time that I have ever had anti-Semitism hurled my way, in a significant way in a campaign, is pretty... is pretty dramatic.
- 00:47:19 Trump has basically-- Trump's defining proposal was the Muslim ban, on Muslim immigrants. And his advisors tried to get him to go away from it, he never totally got away from it. You know, Democrats who had hoped to oppose him and Republicans who had opposed him in the primary, had described this as essentially a national identity battle. And Trump is the president, so I think that how this-- president-elect-- so how this is going to play out, I don't know the answer but we are not showing many signs of healing as a nation yet, and he is not doing much to suggest that he sees the magnitude of what the job is.
- 00:48:05 But I think that, you know, when you contrast the language of this campaign to the first year I began at "Politico," in 2010, was, there was the talk of a mosque near this site, and President Obama and Mike Bloomberg both spoke very strongly in support of it, and in support of religious freedom. And the arc of this election has traveled fairly far away from that.

Clifford Chanin: Let me get Kristen on the trajectory of this story to the current day.

Kristen Shaughnessy: Yeah, you know, I mean, Maggie said, I think, all that could be said, because we cover it from a...

Clifford Chanin: Sure.

00:48:35

Kristen Shaughnessy: ...from a local perspective, and I'm not in our political unit, so I almost feel like I have to hand it over to Maggie, because we... you know, we cover the papers, and it's interesting just to see how... I'll say that with their segment called "In The Papers," the way that they're, the stories are played. It's interesting to watch the different perspective, and it was interesting for me because there was so much right after, the day after, when you looked at the electoral map, and you look at New York and Los Angeles, we're the first and second news markets in the world, and then you looked at the electoral map, you have two blues, and then you have a lot of red in between, and it's...

Maggie Haberman: Almost entirely red, if you look at the voting map.

00:49:20

Kristen Shaughnessy: Yes, so it was sort of like... people weren't listening. You know, there was... there was a large part, and their issues might not have been the issues that they were... that the media was talking about. We were relying on media from the first and second markets, and everything else in between was pretty much red, right? I mean, when you look at it. So I think people have to hear everybody, you know?

Maggie Haberman: I agree.

Kristen Shaughnessy: I think that's probably why we missed a lot of it.

Clifford Chanin: Deepti.

00:49:48 Deepti Hajela: I mean, I didn't cover the campaign, so I, you know... I think what... talking about 9/11 and covering it, and even now, I think for me, it feeds into the thing that kind of got me into journalism to begin with, right? Because it is really... the power and the privilege of journalism is being able to take a step back, right?

00:50:16 Because most people don't have that in their day-to-day lives, to be like "Oh, what's the connecting factor between this and this?" Right? Most... who's got time for that? Nobody. Except us, right? I mean, that's what we're here for, is to make links and to connect the dots, and... even if those are historical dots, to say that, "Oh," you know, "because of this law in 1965, they opened up... for where we are now in demographic," you know what I mean?

00:50:41 And making those connections, I think... especially after, you know, obviously coming, you know, a catastrophic event like 9/11, but any moment of real kind of, when you're faced with, "Wow, this is a place that we haven't been," so we're kind of feeling our way, which was very much what 9/11 was about, was like, "Oh, okay, where are we going to go?" I don't know, this has not happened in my lifetime. I don't know.

00:51:07 What can I hold on to? I can hold on to that what I think is important and what I think is meaningful about the journalism that I do is that really trying to help people make sense of the connections that they may not have seen but to bring those out, and so that they can... you know, get a better sense of the world that they're living in.

00:51:27 Kristen Shaughnessy: And there's so much more social media now, so it's a...

Maggie Haberman: Yeah.

Kristen Shaughnessy: That's, I think that's the game changer.

Maggie Haberman: Yeah.

Kristen Shaughnessy: As you know, covering the campaign, with Twitter so, media... but people have so many opinions, and they don't shy away from expressing them.

00:51:42 Maggie Haberman: I mean, Twitter... Twitter is poison. I mean that's what I meant when I was saying before, just the fact that if that had existed after 9/11, I do think that it would have influenced how the nation behaved, because I think it would have influenced the coverage. Just because I think it's become sort of a... like a, like a molten center that flows out, but, most people, the lesson of this election is that most people are not on Twitter, they're just... they're living their lives, and there's so much rage and anger that goes into what everybody is saying there.

00:52:14 Clifford Chanin: Let's see if we can take a question or two before we close. So... in the back there, please. Wait for the mic, sir. Just behind you.

Audience Member: If 9/11 happened today, with the... I believe, unprecedented hatred for the media, how would it be covered differently?

Maggie Haberman: That's a really good question.

Kristen Shaughnessy: It is a good question. (chuckling)

00:52:41 Maggie Haberman: I don't think it would. I mean, I don't think it would. I think the concern would be that-- you touched on something that we

didn't really talk about, which is that people still actually had a greater trust of the news media after 9/11. Which is for better or worse, in terms of foreign policy positions that were taken, to some extent. But... I don't think it would change the way we covered it, necessarily, except for the thing that I said earlier about how I think there has been a lowering of the bar of what is considered decent. So, the...

Kristen Shaughnessy: You might have seen different images.

00:53:17

Maggie Haberman: You would see different images. There were... and the people who were... you asked about people who were affected by this the most, in my newsroom it was the photographers, honestly, because they, a lot of them were down there anyway; I remember a colleague who I adored who has passed away, in part from 9/11-related illness, several years ago. He had a chronic lung thing afterwards.

00:53:40

But he was just, I remember seeing him in the newsroom, just covered in dust. I mean, the things-- there were things he saw that he would never tell me about. The photographer at my wedding was a "New York Post" photographer who had like a secret stash of photos in his car of images-- horrible things that he saw, that... it was like his secret shame, basically.

And I don't know that it would... that I think would be different, and that I think would have a profound impact on the public.

00:54:12

Kristen Shaughnessy: And I don't know if it would necessarily be the media who would do that, but I-I think so many people have cameras and phones now...

Maggie Haberman: Exactly.

Kristen Shaughnessy: That that's what would drive...

Maggie Haberman: Totally.

Kristen Shaughnessy: ...the coverage. We didn't have that then. And also, cell phones, we had beepers then...

Maggie Haberman: We had beepers.

Kristen Shaughnessy (laughing): Beepers.

Maggie Haberman: There was no Twitter.

00:54:28

Kristen Shaughnessy: And everything went down. So there really wasn't anything but eyewitness accounts to-- because, you saw the picture on our air, it was just trained on the tower, but it was from far away, it was from the Empire State Building, that's what they used...

Maggie Haberman: Very true.

Kristen Shaughnessy: That was the only thing. So you would have had people at Battery Park taking pictures... everybody who was down here would have had their phone.

Maggie Haberman: And you think about actually what a rare thing it was at the time, when you would get somebody who had recorded with, you know, a handheld camcorder or whatever it was, some image from Lower Manhattan where they were pretty close and it was very jarring.

00:55:00

Kristen Shaughnessy: Yeah.

Maggie Haberman: But you're right, that in sort of this instant era of citizen journalists, it would change.

Kristen Shaughnessy: Yeah.

Clifford Chanin: One more if we could. Right here. Just wait for the mic, if you would.

00:55:16

Audience Member: I feel that it's not necessarily issues that people misunderstand about the part of America between the coasts, but just the level of anger, and when you have started addressing the level of anger as being something that has made America more toxic, I wonder if you have given thought to whether journalism has any role in trying to control it. Some politicians try to have a role in urging us to get above and beyond it. Can journalism have any role in that, too?

Maggie Haberman: That's a great question.

Kristen Shaughnessy: And it's almost at a higher level than I am. Like, the decisions of what to cover and how much to cover-- those are all sort of made back at the newsroom.

00:55:59

Maggie Haberman: I think that... I think that a way that... I think that a way that major media... there's such a diffuse media now that didn't exist in 2001, there are so many different internet-based sites, I mean, this just wouldn't have been... it was a big deal that we had a website at the time. But I think that what journalists can do-- I was thinking when Kristen was talking about the sea of red in the middle of the country, because what this election showed was that, I mean, the striking exit poll figure for me is that 60% of voters think that Donald Trump is unfit to be president. Well, he's going to be the president, so clearly that was not a disqualifier, whether he was fit or not.

00:56:41 I think that... I think an enormous number of factors, some of which is two wars after September 11, some of which is the fiscal crisis, but I think a number of factors have made people have a psychic break with their elected leaders and I think that they have come to think that media does not represent them anymore. And so, I think that, I think that trying to address that is something the media can do.

00:57:11 Kristen Shaughnessy: And also, just going to-- we were saying, a lot of bureaus have shut down, right?

Maggie Haberman: Yes.

Kristen Shaughnessy: Right, so, you need bureaus in all parts of the country, so that everybody sort of has an understanding of the feeling throughout the country, as opposed to just a couple of markets.

Maggie Haberman: Yes, and what's disqualifying for some members of the media isn't necessarily disqualifying for everybody else, which I think was-- or a majority-- which I think was the issue here. Or part of the issue.

00:57:36 Clifford Chanin: We've come to the end of our program. As you can see, the things we started talking about lead inevitably to where we are today. And there is much more to say about it. I think over time we will engage these issues, because it doesn't seem to me that we'll have any choice but to engage these issues. But, for this evening, let's thank Deepti Hajela, Maggie Haberman, and Kristen Shaughnessy. Thank you.

(applause)