

Journalist Transcript

[Opening Music]

Susan Neville: Hello, and welcome to Naptown. I'm your host Susan Neville, and our guest for this initial series of interviews is writer Dan Wakefield. Mr. Wakefield is the author of nine non-fiction books, two memoirs, five novels, including the best-selling *Going All the Way*.

Bill Moyers called Dan's memoir, *Returning, A Spiritual Journey*, "One of the most important memoirs of the spirit I've ever read." In his book *Island in the City: The World of Spanish Harlem*, James Baldwin wrote, "Dan Wakefield is a remarkable combination of humility and tough mindedness, it makes these streets and these struggling people come alive."

Over the next few episodes, we'll be talking to Mr. Wakefield about his life, including his deep friendships with writers such as Baldwin, Anne Sexton, Joan Didion, and Kurt Vonnegut, and his interviews as a staff writer for *The Nation*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *New York Times*, and other newspapers and magazines, with such luminaries as Bobby Kennedy, C. Wright Mills, Dorothy Day, Adam Clayton Powell, Joan Baez, and Golda Meir, some of whom became good friends.

Again, I'm your host, Susan Neville, welcome Mr. Wakefield back to Naptown.

[Transitional Music]

Susan Neville: So we're back and we're going to be talking about your work as a journalist for *The Nation* and *The Atlantic* and other places.

Dan Wakefield: Well, after I covered the Till Trial with *The Nation*, and I came back and my Columbian friend, Sam Astrachan took me to the bowery to meet Dorothy Day and her associate Ammon Hennacy, who is a great character, who—he wrote a book called "Autobiography of a Catholic Anarchist".

And anyway, so then I wrote my next article called "Miracle in the Bowery" about Dorothy Day and what she called her the "Catholic Worker, Hospitality House". And she, of course, was well-known at that time because she had been

Bohemian, as it was called, in her years in the 1920s. And after I did research on her and after I wrote the article, which was very laudatory about her work and the "Hospitality House", in fact, the article was called "Miracle in the Bowery".

But after the arrival came out, she wouldn't speak to me, and I was really upset. And I asked friends there what I had done wrong. And they said, "Well, it was that quote from the past." And I had read a wonderful book by Malcolm Cowley, who still an editor. He'd been a writer in the '20s. And he wrote a really good book called "Exile's Return" about Fitzgerald and Hemingway and all the guys who've gone to Paris in the '20s and then come back in the '30s.

And in that, he happened to say in passing that Dorothy Day was the only one who could drink Eugene O'Neill under the table at the Hell's something bar. So I thought that was a great achievement and I put that in, but Dorothy did not like that and took me a long time to understand that she was trying to not be part of the glamorization of booze that was part of the 1950s.

So after that article is when I proposed to George Kirstine, the publisher of The Nation, that I go to Israel, and do a series of articles, and I guess I talked about that. But when I got back, in Israel, I. F. Stone, the independent journalist, and he had offered me a job working for I. F. Stone's Weekly in Washington D.C.

And I went down there, and I could see it was not for me. It was much more research-oriented than writing and observing. So I came back and I told him that I had this offer from so and so. They made me an offer that I would write two articles a month and I would get \$75 a week. So that was a good deal.

Susan Neville: Right.

Dan Wakefield: And I did that, and I covered, of course, a lot of civil rights stuff. But also, whatever was going on in New York that looked like it might be an article, you know, I would cover things like the conference, the convention of the National Association of Manufacturers. There was always stuff to satirize in those things. But some were really interesting.

My favorite—I love trials, I love covering trials. I mean, it was a great drama, of course. And the best one probably was—there was a trial of James Jones, the author. The man he had served with—

Susan Neville: James Jones, the author "From Here to Eternity".

Dan Wakefield: The man he served with in the Schofield Barracks, which he wrote about in "From Here to Eternity", had sued him because he had hardly changed their names. In other words, I think Robert E. Lee Stewart was changed to Robert Lee Prewitt, and he was the bugler who was exactly—

Susan Neville: Right.

Dan Wakefield: So it was like seeing the book come alive. You know, whoever was TNT somebody was dynamite somebody. And it was a strange thing, like watching a novel, the characters step into real life.

Susan Neville: In the courtroom.

Dan Wakefield: In the courtroom. And the main guy who brought the suit was Anthony Maggio, which was the name of the character Anthony Maggio. So at one of the intermissions, I went up to Jones, and you know, he's a great writer and I didn't want to insult him or anything, but I said, "Mr. Jones, I just have to ask why didn't you change their names?"

Susan Neville: Right.

Dan Wakefield: He said, "I knew those bastards would never read the book, but they saw the movie."

Susan Neville: That's so funny.

Dan Wakefield: So, that's how it happened. And they lost the trial—I mean, the soldiers, the guys, which I thought there was no way they can lose except they had a Brooklyn lawyer going up against a Random House ace lawyer. And also, the flaw in their case was that Maggio, previous to that, had sold an article and let somebody write about himself in one of these Playboy knockoffs like Nugget or something. And he was claiming to be Anthony Maggio of the book.

Susan Neville: Oh, funny.

Dan Wakefield: So as the Random House lawyer said, you can't, on the one hand, try to profit from being that, and on the other hand, say you were libel. So anyway, they—and I remember, the article was picked up by a couple of magazines abroad. I remember there was one in Germany and it's the only time it was ever translated in German.

And I remember the lawyer was from one of the big firms of that time in New York, something like while Weil, Gotshal, something. And I remember sending him a copy of the German translation, and I think it was in a London magazine. But at any rate, that was really great to watch and just to watch. And I love watching really good lawyers, what they did.

Susan Neville: Was James Jones there throughout the trial every day?

Dan Wakefield: Yeah, he was there every day. Yeah.

Susan Neville: Would he have to pay or would it have been Random House. If he had lost, who would have—

Dan Wakefield: Well, it would have been Random House because he wouldn't have had that kind of money that they—

Susan Neville: Right.

Dan Wakefield: And there were a lot of these guys. I mean, there were like seven or eight, as I recall. Anyway, the next great trial I saw was when I wrote my first article for Esquire, which was a profile of Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. And it was called the "Angry Voice of Harlem". And Powell, you know, that—if I understood things in any way in those days, I would have not then been surprised about the O.J. trial and the response to the black community and loving that O.J. went free.

And Powell was constantly based in the New York papers, the white New York papers, and maybe even more beloved by people at home. And he lived very high and sort of flaunted his wealth and he had a vote in the House and commuters something, and he just enjoyed being Adam Clayton Powell.

And anyway, he was brought to trial for some kind of tax problem, that he had paid the right amount of taxes to Grundy [assumed spelling] that—whatever it

was. And his lawyer was one of the great lawyers of that era, Edward Bennett Williams, who is in Washington, and Murray Kempton, the New York Post, my mentor was also covering the trial.

And so, it ended up that I would have lunch with Kempton and Adam Powell and Edward Bennett Williams. And that was fascinating in itself and discussing what had happened that morning in the trial. And I remember one of the high points of the trial was when Powell's lawyer got the IRS expert on the stand. And he very meticulously went through what the expert did and what he knew. And he led up to a point where he read a part of the IRS manual to the expert. It was something extremely complex and hard to understand. And after he read it, Williams said to the expert, "Do you understand it?" And the expert said, "No."

And at that moment, that's when they knew. They had one of those clocks, the minute hand would go click and go to the next thing. As he said that, then Williams said, "I move we have a recess now, Your Honor." And then they went click. And then that was-- it was really dramatic. So we go to this lunch and Powell was overjoyed, you know, and he said, "Oh, Ed, what a great job you did. You destroy that IRS witness." And Williams said, "Well, don't get so excited." He says there was one woman in that jury that was weeping for that guy. And he had seen, which I didn't see, he knew what everybody's reaction was on the jury. And it was great to see these guys work.

And also, there were some judges you wanted to cover. There were some really nutty judges, you know, who would just-- I remember one who really got upset at any liberal cause. And one of the issues was Norman Mailer and Dorothy Day, and Mike Harrington. The Young People Socialist League led a protest against the Civil Defense Department because the Civil Defense was having people have an air raid drill, where people were supposed to go down in the subway to protect yourself against the atomic bomb.

And Mailer and Dorothy Day who's saying this is nonsense. This wouldn't protect everybody from the atomic bomb. So they were picketing at one of these--there was actually a practice thing where people were supposed to run down in the subway when the sirens went up. So they were picketing, and they were arrested. And I remember some of them spent the night in jail.

And so, they then were brought before this judge who hated anything like this. And he would just get how can you people do these insane things against the law of the land and all that stuff. So it was always fun to cover him. Later, this friend of mine, Ted Art Bernstein known as "The Rug" because he didn't have any hair and he's always talking about buying a rug, but he never did. And he was in Washington Square Park throwing frisbees.

And somehow, he was at a part of the park where you weren't supposed to be playing around. Anyway, he was arrested and he had to go before this nutty judge. And it was—that was—you know, the judge was saying, "What is it? This man was taken?" "He was throwing the frisbee." "What?"

[Laughs]

Anyway, the judges were sometimes worth entertainment and coverage. But—

Susan Neville: I'm still thinking for some weird reason about the people going down in the subway as a drill. So everyone in New York actually had to do that that day.

Dan Wakefield: Not everyone, but whoever was out walking around—

Susan Neville: had to go down—

Dan Wakefield: —this drill.

Susan Neville: Do you remember being out and walking around?

Dan Wakefield: I remember watching the people protest and get arrested.

Susan Neville: And get arrested.

Dan Wakefield: And because of that, I've been suggested an article for Esquire where I interviewed the general who was the head of civil defense in New York. And he showed me all these maps and complicated explanations of radiation. And so, this is like the bomb that hit in Westchester. "Sir, what if the bomb hit right in Manhattan like Times Square?" He said, "Oh, you mean, ground zero?" I said, "Yeah. What would that—What would that effect be?" He said, "Well, it would be goodbye New York."

Susan Neville: Oh my god.

Dan Wakefield: So the article was called "Goodbye New York".

Susan Neville: Wow. When was John Hersey, this is an aside but John Hersey's Hiroshima.

Dan Wakefield: In the New York or—

Susan Neville: Right.

Dan Wakefield: I'm not sure when it was.

Susan Neville: Yeah, I can't remember either.

Dan Wakefield: I think it was not that long after Hiroshima—

Susan Neville: Right, it must have been.

Dan Wakefield: But back to Powell— you know, doing that, that was my first article for Esquire, and boy, I really want to do a good job. And I spent a lot of time with how— I went to some of these meetings that the—he was the minister of the Abyssinian Baptist Church. I remember he said to me was, he said, "Now, a lot of preaching is how you modulate your voice." He said, "For instance, there's a phrase that's very effective, you have to say, you know, without this, the people perish, you lower your voice at the end of that." He was a great speaker. And so, that's what made him a great preacher, but I wouldn't say he was a great minister.

Susan Neville: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Is that it?

Dan Wakefield: I thought of that in the Hillary campaign—

Susan Neville: Yeah, yeah, I was trying to think, "OK, when is this?"

Dan Wakefield: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." In fact, I remember at a meeting, a neighborhood meeting in Powell's church that I went to. There was a group of neighborhood activists, and Powell was really pretty dismissive of them, except for this one guy. Powell was very polite and wanted to hear whatever

this man had to say. He was a tall, black man. I remember he had boots that came up to his knees. And I remember the time Powell called him Malcolm.

Susan Neville: Oh my gosh.

Dan Wakefield: And that was indeed Malcolm X.

Susan Neville: That was Malcolm X. The trial of Adam Powell—I mean, he was the first black senator from New York or—

Dan Wakefield: Congressman.

Susan Neville: Congressman.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah, so he was in Congress representing Harlem.

Susan Neville: And so, was the feeling—I mean, as you were watching the trial, was it—that this was a setup?

Dan Wakefield: Well, they were after him.

Susan Neville: They were after him.

Dan Wakefield: There was no doubt about that. And he flaunted, among other things, I remember he was having an affair with the daughter of a woman who was the publisher of The New York Post. I think she was Sarah Lawrence at that time. And he would go places where he would bring her with him to some public address that he had to do. And she was very beautiful.

And so that was part of his image. But I remember once we were to have dinner. And he originally said, "Well, I'll take you to dinner, name some really fancy restaurant, midtown." And then the last minute, he said, "No, no, we should go." And then he took me to a restaurant in Harlem so that he can look appropriate, as you know—

Susan Neville: Since you were doing a feature story.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. And so—But he was very condescending to the people at the restaurant in Harlem. And I remember—And of course, they were bowing and scraping,

the maître d, the waiter, everybody, and Powell had ordered liver and onions. So at one point—remember, maître d says, "Powell, how is the liver?" Powell, didn't even look up, "It's a liver."

Susan Neville: It's a liver [laughs]. Was he a good congressman?

Dan Wakefield: He was good for that district. And that was his mission, and he performed it, and they loved all his wanting of the rules and having wealth and all that stuff. He was them.

Susan Neville: Was it like when you—I mean, kind of know your political biases, and at the beginning, you talked about liking to go to conventions because you like to write satire, and you're really good at satire. Was it harder to do serious political feature stories with—

Dan Wakefield: No, I loved it. I got it. In my very next piece I did for Esquire was a profile of William F. Buckley Jr. And that was really fun too. I remember when I called him up, I said, "Mr. Buckley, this is Dan Wakefield and I've been assigned to write a profile of you for Esquire. So when could we meet?" This is assuming it was going to happen.

Susan Neville: Right.

Dan Wakefield: And Buckley says, "This is to be a profile or an assassination?" And he knew that I wrote for The Nation. And I said, "Well, Murray Kempton would vouch for me." You know, and he said, "Ah, bringing out the big guns." And so, the whole thing was—it was really a lot of fun. And I remember having lunch with him at the yacht club. The great embarrassment of my era then was I wore white pants to that one. Why did I—

Susan Neville: This wasn't like something you ordinarily did?

Dan Wakefield: No, no.

Susan Neville: It's not a Truman Capote kind of thing?

Dan Wakefield: No. And I was trying to be—

Susan Neville: Yachty [phonetic].

Dan Wakefield: Yachty [phonetic], and I was about the unyachtiest [phonetic] guy in New York. But the great thing about writing that piece, at this time, Buckley was still thought of as a young right-wing kind of nut. I mean, people—

Susan Neville: Right.

Dan Wakefield: And he had written this book, "God and Man at Yale". He just started a national review. And you wouldn't have believed that he would later become part of the established, which he was.

So I can understand why he would be leery of me, of The Nation writing about it. But I really did try to do it as balanced. I didn't want to be—I mean, there was some fun to be had because he would say things for that purpose, you know, to be fun, but basically, a serious article.

And I got a long letter from him when it came out. And he said, well, you know, all the things, I misunderstood this nuance or that, or I hadn't quite understood the role of that conservity, whatever. And then it ended up and he said, but I appreciate your fair-mindedness.

Susan Neville: That's great. Did you find yourself—Was he charismatic at—I mean, did you find yourself being convinced by things he had to say and then had to kind of rethink them or think, yeah, he's got a point there.

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Dan Wakefield: No, I didn't convince him in his political things, but I enjoyed him. You know, I would think we were friends ever since. Whenever I needed a quote from the right, I can call him up or I can go see him. In fact, in the very last book I wrote "The Hijacking Jesus", I went to his townhouse and interviewed him. And I remember when I did the piece on him, I met his sister Priscilla, who was managing editor of National Review, and I quite liked her and I liked him. I met his wife. She was a big socialite, and not terribly charismatic.

But anyway, but he was. And of course, he and Kempton were—they were best friends. And in fact, no apartment—someone said Kempton and Buckley [clears throat], you know, was always clearing his through to make it really [inaudible]. He said those two should get a hotel room.

[laughs].

But I remember when Buckley's wife died, I wrote him a note of condolence. And I never had this happen, he wrote me back a thank you for my note.

Susan Neville: For your note, oh.

Dan Wakefield: So he was extremely courteous. Also, I was-- later, when I wrote the book "Expect a Miracle", I had--as part of that, I went to Lourdes. And in fact, the publisher didn't pay for that.

But it was when I was in New York in I guess, '92 to '95, And I met out woman at a GQ party, a woman who was the editor of Mademoiselle. And I said, "I want to go to Lourdes." And she said, "Well, would you do an article for us?" So they--Mademoiselle paid for my--

Susan Neville: Mademoiselle paid.

Dan Wakefield: --trip to Lourdes. And I wrote it. And then I sent the book to Buckley. And he had me on his show on Firing Line. And that was a big deal.

Susan Neville: I can't remember what he said in your book "Hijacking of Jesus" because--which was about the hijacking of Christianity by the religious right. And do you remember his--

Dan Wakefield: I don't remember--

Susan Neville: --do you remember what he said?

Dan Wakefield: It wasn't anything groundbreaking--

Susan Neville: Got it.

Dan Wakefield: --or whatever. But I remember driving when I was writing stuff for the Atlantic, I would call him and sometimes just to know who was the right person to call or--So, yeah, he was very--Oh, and he came to the book party for "Going All the Way". There was a sort of little publisher's party in New York. There was a big party in Boston and then there was a publishing small party in New York.

But friends of mine had a party in New York at this really grungy place in the village called like Cafe Wha. W-H-A. And Buckley attended that. And my agent at the time was Knox Burger who was then the guy who, you know, first published Vonnegut. And Knox's wife, Kitty Sprague, who was a very bright, nice woman, she was at the party.

And she told me later, when she walked out, and she was a very homey, very well-dressed attractive woman. She walked out around the same time Buckley was walking out of the cafe off. And Buckley, offered her a ride up town. She said, "Oh, that's alright. I'm just going, you know, we live on the [inaudible]." "Oh, you mean you live down here?"

[laughs]

And she was quite stunned. But him coming to that party was fun. And so, Harold Hayes was the editor of Esquire. And he's the guy—he was one of the great editors. And he really transformed Esquire. He's the guy who backed and encouraged, gave over his—you know, gave him the money and the backing to have time to do those pieces on DiMaggio and Frank Sinatra.

Susan Neville: Did you ever publish any fiction in Esquire?

Dan Wakefield: No.

Susan Neville: Yeah, I never really think of you as a short fiction either.

Dan Wakefield: I only wrote three.

Susan Neville: Only wrote three.

Dan Wakefield: And actually, I wrote them before I'd written a novel. And they were sort of to prove to myself that I could write—

Susan Neville: Right.

Dan Wakefield: I'll never forget. The first one was taken by Playboy and it was called "The Rich Girl". And it was-- I could have been in the position of James Jones. I mean, it was based on a woman I had gone out with who is from a wealthy Texas royal family and she'd gone to Sarah Lawrence.

And anyway, the thing I basically changed is the story about meeting her and then meeting her mother who didn't approve of me and me buying a ridiculous Italian suit for the occasion, which has made things even more ridiculous. And so, I'm first delighted that it's going to be published in Playboy and it pays 1500.

So then, I said, "God, what if she reads this thing." And then I thought, "Well, she'll never read Playboy." Also, the one thing I changed, I made her sort of not as smart as she really was to emphasize—because I thought, I can't change Texas. I mean, if I tried to say she's from Oklahoma, that doesn't work. So I just thought, "Well, I'm lucky it's in Playboy." So Playboy is published weekly, and I get a letter from this woman.

Susan Neville: Oh no.

Dan Wakefield: And I'm living in Boston, turns out she's living about city blocks away. And it starts out, "Dear Dan, my husband subscribes to Playboy. So, I was reading your story, or should I say our story." "Oh my god." But it goes on to say she liked the story. And I couldn't—I really couldn't because I had made—she was a very bright one and I for comic effect made her like not bright in the clichés of Texas form.

Susan Neville: It's so hard. I mean, it's amazing. It seems like it's more embarrassing sometimes to publish fiction than nonfiction.

Dan Wakefield: Oh yeah.

Susan Neville: It's closer to the bone. And then, you know, you take those real things and you change them in ways that usually make you look worse, make any, you know, character that it's sort of based on look worst. It's like you're a caricaturist and—

Dan Wakefield: However, this is what's really interesting. I couldn't understand why she liked it. So I showed this story to a woman at the time who was a good friend. And I said—I told her, "How could she like this?" So the woman I gave the story to called me up and said, "Well, you idiot, she liked it because you said she was beautiful." Nothing else matters.

Susan Neville: That's so funny. So funny.

Dan Wakefield: But I wrote that. And then the other story I wrote in that same period was called "Autumn for Apples". And it was a very nice piece about Indianapolis and about-- really about Kithy Woollen, my first girlfriend in high school, about going to her house on Dean Road, which was at--in those days really remote in the woods and very grand and--

Susan Neville: It's still beautiful.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah.

Susan Neville: I mean, there's still so many of the trees that--yeah.

Dan Wakefield: The town, there's all kinds of other houses--

Susan Neville: Yeah, there's lot--Yeah.

Dan Wakefield: But anyway, it was a very nostalgic--It was published by Red Book, and then it was in the Martha Foley Best Americans Stories of 1966. So that was just fabulous. And later, somebody, I think it was the Herron or whatever university, Herron-- they made--their students made a thing out of that story. It was called [inaudible]. They took pieces of board from an apple crate and made that the thing you put the volume in, and it was a really beautiful volume with drawing of the apples and stuff.

So that was that. And the third story was something kind of silly and satirical, A Visit from Granny. And I sent it to my friend, John Williams, who I knew from Bread Loaf Writers Conference. He [inaudible]. And he was the editor of the Denver Quarterly and he published that.

Susan Neville: Wow. So you had good luck with the three stories.

Dan Wakefield: So that was it. OK, that's enough.

Susan Neville: I have now proved to myself I can now go ahead and write a novel. And then of course, you kept writing journalism.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. And I guess the journalism was tapped or topped or something with the Atlantic commissioning me to write a whole issue, the magazine about the effect of Vietnam on this country. And the way that came about—

Susan Neville: that's the piece that was "Supernation at Peace and War".

Dan Wakefield: —"Supernation at Peace and War". And that came about because another great editor, Bob Manning [assumed spelling], who I think he had taken over The Atlantic just a year before I was in Nieman Fellow in '63, '64. And he had been a Nieman Fellow. So I met him [inaudible] then he asked me to write. I remember writing some essays. I wrote a long piece about Kerouac and the Beats.

And anyways, so I was at his house, he invited me over. This was a time when he was living in Cambridge, and he was having a cookout. And we were standing outside drinking martinis. And he was saying it's really hard or impossible for a monthly magazine to cover the Vietnam War because it's changing all the time. And he said maybe the way for us to do it is to talk about the effect on this country. And he said maybe the way to do that is to send somebody around. You can go around the country, with that in mind, how is or affecting this country? Yeah. And then we had another martini. He said, "Well, why don't you do that?"

And so, that was great. And I think I started in May. And I went to places—try to go to places where I knew people had some connection. I came to Indianapolis. Of course, I went to Shortridge, and talked to students and Ms. Jean Grubb, who was still the Echo faculty advisor. And I said to her, "I really like to talk to some students. Who could I talk to?" And she said, "Well, there's a great kid who's president of the student council named Pat Nolan."

So I met him and we had a good talk and he said, "You know, my dad is a lawyer, but he's a writer. He's written a book. And you should really meet him. He's a great guy." And in 1968, while I was writing it in '67, this was the time of youth rebellion. And for a high school kid his dad was a great guy was pretty unusual. So I said, "Well, I'd like to meet this guy."

Susan Neville: So that's how you met him?

Dan Wakefield: That's how I met Alan Nolan. That's how I met Alan Nolan and we became friends.

Susan Neville: The great historian.

Dan Wakefield: Yes.

Susan Neville: The Civil War, primarily.

Dan Wakefield: Yes. He wrote—His first book was about the Iron Brigade, the Hoosiers who went to the Civil War. Then he wrote a book I love called "Lee Considered". And he said it was not reconsidered, because nobody really looked critically about Lee and his role as a general and so on. And that book was a selection of the Civil War book club, and the Civil War book club in Atlanta advised the other book club members to burn the book. And it's very disrespectful.

Susan Neville: So do you remember, you know, what he, what his son said about Vietnam? That part of your journey?

Dan Wakefield: I don't know. I mean, I shouldn't—I look—I would assume now I was not a big supporter of the war, but I can't say that because I don't remember. But the other part—Well, one of the—what became sort of infamous was I went to Detroit and I asked to spend an evening in a police car just making the rounds. And of course, the police were very—hated all the hippies. And remember, we—as we were making our rounds, we go up to some corner, and there's a bunch of guys with long hair and no doubt somebody playing a guitar. And one of the cops said to the others, "Look at those. Those motherfuckers out to be in Vietnam."

And so, I wrote that. So later, I ended up finishing the writing in Boston in the Atlantic office. And the managing editor of the Atlantic was a woman named Emily—I will think of the rest of her name. But she was one of these grande Bostonian, grande dame, and a wonderful woman, Emily Fleming [assumed spelling], gray hair with a bun and the glasses on a chain. And she would come in with various questions about editing sentences.

And so—And one day she came, "Now, Dan, is motherfucker two words or is it hyphenated?" And I remember then after that, Manning [assumed spelling] called me into his office. He was red in the face, you know, wiping his brow

furiously with his hand. And he said, "You know what? I really hate any kind of censorship. I would never change anything. But, Dan, we go to high schools. So, is it alright if, for the magazine, we change motherfuckers to bastards? And then in the book, you will put it back to motherfuckers." "Yeah, boss, that will be OK."

Susan Neville: Yeah, that's so funny. So where else did you go? You went to Indianapolis, Detroit--

Dan Wakefield: I went to San Francisco. I saw—led by Allen Ginsberg.

Susan Neville: Seriously?

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. I went to—

Susan Neville: What was it like?

Dan Wakefield: It was very peaceful.

Susan Neville: Was it very peaceful?

Dan Wakefield: Yeah.

Susan Neville: Like Woodstock?

Dan Wakefield: No, it was—there wasn't music, there was just, "Moo."

Susan Neville: Oh like Ginsberg but the Daisy and—Was it Ginsberg? No, no. He tried to get people to levitate the Pentagon by going "hmm".

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. Well, this was just—it was in one of the big parks in San Francisco and people sitting in meditation and umming. I went to Haight Ashbury and saw that scene. And I went to LA, I went to Hollywood and stayed with the Dunn's. And I remember one of the nice things about this assignment, it gave me an excuse to meet anybody I want because—

Susan Neville: Which is a great thing about being a journalist.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah, well, especially with an assignment that broad because everybody had an opinion.

Susan Neville: Right.

Dan Wakefield: So it didn't matter to me which they were for writing purposes. So—But I remember, I wanted to meet a man named Dalton Trumbo. You know who that—

Susan Neville: No, I do not.

Dan Wakefield: He was one of the Hollywood Ten screenwriters. And he was one who, under an assumed name, won an Oscar. But later, unlike some of the others, somehow it was OK for him to then write under his own name and to be a screenwriter and be accepted and so on. His whole career was really fascinating to me. And so I just looked him up and—

Susan Neville: Asked him about the Vietnam War.

Dan Wakefield: And I remember, he kind of reminded me of Santa Claus. He had a white beard, a very nice gentleman. And—But the—then the big thing was and plan all along was I was to end up in Washington.

You see Manning, before the Atlantic, well, he worked for Time Magazine. He's done a cover story on Hemingway, when Hemingway won the Nobel Prize. And he said, "I remembered knocking on the door of Hemingway's house in Nevada." And Hemingway before he said anything, he said, "Are you a drinker?" Bob said, "Yes." So he let him in. So they had the feeling that if he said no, he wouldn't even gotten to the house. But Manning—OK, so he's been a big writer for Time Magazine. And then, he was the press secretary for Dean Rusk, who was Secretary of State.

And so, he arranged that I'd have an interview with Russ and with Hubert Humphrey. And I remember going in to that experience. I thought, "Well, you know, Humphrey will be a great guy, and I probably won't like Russ because he's one of the architects of Vietnam." And so, it would turn out to be just the opposite because Humphrey was very—everything was like can. You know, it was—everything he said was like a press conference statement.

Susan Neville: Right.

Dan Wakefield: It wasn't anything spontaneous. And Russ was very interesting, very thoughtful. And the best part was—and this was a terrible mistake that I didn't put this in, but I knew that whatever I quoted from Ross was going to have to be approved. So I thought this wouldn't have been approved, but who knows? Anyway, I should have tried.

But after we had sort of our official conversation, he walked me out of the door. And he said, "I hope you don't think I'm as Presbyterian as I sounded and as slow." "Nope." And he said, "You know, a lot of people don't know this. But during World War II, I dropped parachute supplies for OG men." And it was like he was trying to say I'm really a good guy. So that would have been the best line in the whole piece.

Susan Neville: Yeah. So did you get the sense that he was sorry that he was involved in the way he was?

Dan Wakefield: I got the sense he was certainly not an enthusiast.

Susan Neville: Right.

Dan Wakefield: That he was carrying out his duties. And that was my impression.

Susan Neville: Interesting. And then, of course, the politician has to say politician things and—

Dan Wakefield: And he said, you know, this is the administration's answers right now and so on.

Susan Neville: Interesting. You know, I have so many questions, I have so many questions. And I think the next time it would be—I would love to, like, look at that piece specifically, maybe have you read a little bit of it or, you know, talk about it specifically because—I mean, you've just then covered the entire country during a really tumultuous time. I mean, you just kind of dropped in on Ginsburg and Joan Didion and John Donne, and you know—

Dan Wakefield: Trumble.

Susan Neville: And the Trumble, and I'm thinking, "Wait a minute. So, you know, is the time when Joni Mitchell might have been at Joan Didion's house." And, you know—So there's all that kind of People Magazine kind of interest, but mostly I'm thinking that we're having this conversation in 2019. And the example you gave of the policeman in Detroit, and then of, you know, going out to the coast, it seems to me that you must have seen that kind of division in the country that has only maybe not intensified, but we're looking at it again in much the same way.

I mean, it's still the kind of—red Midwest and the blue Coasts, and not any kind of understanding in—of one another really, but you're kind of moving between them—there. And I wonder, just, I don't know, I'm interested in hearing your thoughts or if there was anything you thought of them that is applicable to now or—

Dan Wakefield: I didn't meet Joni Mitchell. I think this was pre-then. But I did meet the guy who was making the bookcases for their new house in Malibu who was Harrison Ford.

Susan Neville: Harrison Ford, that's so funny.

Dan Wakefield: Later loaned his airplane so that Jon [assumed spelling] can fly out when Santana [assumed spelling] was in the hospital in LA, et cetera, et cetera.

Susan Neville: He was a carpenter then.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. Well, he was—you know, as an actor, if you weren't in a big-time role, you had to have other jobs and he was a carpenter. He's very good at it.

But one thing I wanted to say about Alan Nolan is I think, you know, when you say about the country division, you always found, despite these divisions, you found, even in Indianapolis, Alan Nolan and his role in art history. American history and Indiana history is somehow connected to my first awakening.

I was at Columbia, and there was a big story in the time that the first meeting of the American Civil Liberties Union in Indianapolis, the Indiana Civil Liberties Union was to be held at the Indiana War Memorial. And then the Indiana War Memorial denied them being able to meet there. And then every hotel in Indianapolis denied them being able to meet. And this—the Civil

Liberties Union was made up of outstanding professors from Indiana University, Purdue University, and a man like Alan Nolan who was an outstanding lawyer in Indianapolis. And these people, they were labeled a pinko organization.

Of course, Indianapolis also was a [inaudible]. Edward R. Murrow came to Indianapolis and did a whole story on that subject—Yes. A half hour, he had a show, *You Are There*. And so, I wrote a letter to the star. And I said it's really a shame. I was a junior at Columbia. I said, "Really ashamed to read about your hometown about the denying Civil Liberties Union to meet in the War Memorial." So it's become more famous for that than instead of a 500 mile race. So this letter was published in the *Star*. So that was my poor parent's initiation—

Susan Neville: Into having a journalist as a son.

Dan Wakefield: —what was to come. And then in the *Star*, there appeared a letter responding to my letter as saying, "This is what happens when nice young men go East to college." And it was signed only with initials, JGT. So I had no idea what that was.

Then the next letter was from my Shortridge friend, Dick Stout, who was at DePaul. And he said, "Well, I agree with Dan and I didn't go to an Eastern college. I'm in Greencastle, Indiana. And besides, who is his critic who was afraid to sign their name and only sign initials?"

So that was that. Then, OK, flash forward to about 25 years later. Sitting at Ted Steve's apartment in New York where I always stayed when I went back to New York. We had a room together in the Village. And we were talking about what we always talked about, Indianapolis. And I told him that story. And he said, "Well, wait a minute." He said, "The letter attacking you was JGT?" I said, "Yeah." And he said, "That was Charlotte's mother." Charlotte had been his girlfriend and her mother had been one of the founding members of the John. And Ted said she kept a scrapbook of pinko or column A organizations, et cetera, et cetera.

Susan Neville: That's amazing.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah.

Susan Neville: That's amazing.

Dan Wakefield: I—Yeah, really amazing.

Susan Neville: Well, yeah, and I guess when you're talking about—I want to get back to the division thing, but you've also just talked about Dorothy Day, you know, being put into jail and being accused of being a pinko. So that's partly the times, I guess to that division.

Dan Wakefield: But what was interesting to me when that set that thought up was the fact here's the red state of Indianapolis, but here's Alan Nolan who was certainly no pinko, that he's a civil libertarian, an outstanding leading citizen, he's respected by everybody, and that's where he is.

And then it's Kurt Vonnegut who comes back and who gives a talk to the Indiana Civil War Liberties Union, which he says, "I grew up in a city that was just as segregated as Biloxi, Mississippi, except for the drinking fountains and the buses." So there is that. And—

Susan Neville: And there's the fact that Deb is from Terre Haute and—

Dan Wakefield: Yes.

Susan Neville: Yeah. There is that.

Dan Wakefield: Vonnegut, is there [inaudible].

Susan Neville: Right, right.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. And, you know, of course, when—during these civil right stories, I would always find in whatever city, the civil liberties lawyer, the civil rights lawyer who was being attacked in their house, was being threatened, and people throwing things on.

I mean, just like here, I think Bob Collins who was the first sports writer to come out admiring the Christmas basketball team. And people drove around his house at night, shouting bad things and wrote to the Stars saying you should

fire him and all that kind of stuff. But he was there. And he didn't back down. And he was a brave guy.

Susan Neville: So did you have—I mean, when you were going around in the '60s and doing this article, did you feel that same—I mean, I'm sure that my father, at that particular time, would have, you know, had the same reaction that the police maybe did in Detroit. He was pretty conservative during that era. So I don't know.

Dan Wakefield: Most fathers were.

Susan Neville: I think so too.

Dan Wakefield: Except Alan Nolan was—

Susan Neville: Yeah, except for Alan Nolan. So—But he would have, I guess, what it's saying is, if you would have asked him or asked his friends, he would have said, yeah, this is a really frightening time. What's happening to our kids, they don't understand how fragile the world is because you just come out of World War II, and that was the time you were writing about. The kids of the World War II generation saying no, we're not going to go fight.

Dan Wakefield: There was a famous folk song by Phil Ochs called I Ain't Marching Anymore.

Susan Neville: Yeah, I remember that.

Dan Wakefield: I met him through Babit.

Susan Neville: Did you?

Dan Wakefield: Yeah.

Susan Neville: Wow. Wow, I thought I—I never thought that someday, I would be sitting interviewing somebody who had met Phil Ochs [laughs]. You could have knocked me over [laughs]. That's interesting.

Dan Wakefield: At Schwab's drugstore—

Susan Neville: The Schwab's drugstore—

Dan Wakefield: —is where Steve—of course, it was all through [inaudible]—

Susan Neville: Wait, is Schwab's drugstore where you saw Jim Morrison too?

Dan Wakefield: No, I saw him at the Liquor Locker.

Susan Neville: At the Liquor Locker, OK.

Dan Wakefield: Whereas the Indiana University Lilly Library has my liquor—

Susan Neville: Liquor receipts.

Dan Wakefield: I didn't know that.

Susan Neville: That's so funny.

Dan Wakefield: And I thought it was very noble. See, this is how you can trust the Lilly Library.

Susan Neville: Right.

Dan Wakefield: They did not allow their graduates to just look and transcribe my liquor bills.

Susan Neville: Yeah. Is that because you're still living? I mean, is there when something like the Lilly Library gets all these receipts? And we're sitting here in the basement of Butler University Library, taping this.

And even as we speak, there are probably students up on the third floor going through Etheridge Knight's papers that are kept in this library. And they're very interested in receipts. I mean, they find, you know, all sorts of receipts. And is that because he's deceased that they can look at the receipts and catalog them and talk about them or—

Dan Wakefield: I don't know. And besides, this was a particular person who was in position of authority, maybe another position—person there would not—would have said sure.

Susan Neville: Oh yeah, that's true.

Dan Wakefield: I don't know, there's no rule. I think when I make my final deal with them, I want to straighten that out.

Susan Neville: Right. You probably should. It's like, you know, Willa Cather's letters, it was like 100 years or something after her death, I think, that they were finally made available and everybody was thinking, this is so exciting. There's going to be something amazing in the letters, but—and the letters of course were wonderful because they were written, some of them, by Willa Cather and by amazing people who wrote to her. But she had pretty much called anything out of it that she didn't want people to know.

Dan Wakefield: I wondered if I could—when you said that, I was thinking, "Could I now go back and look at these other things I want taken out?"

Susan Neville: Oh, probably not at this point. But you probably could say, you know, I want them to be locked for another 10 years or something. Interesting.

Dan Wakefield: Well, you know, I was—I don't want to keep this—this is the only copy I have.

Susan Neville: Right.

Dan Wakefield: And so, I want to give it to the Lilly library, so—

Susan Neville: Oh, I have a PDF of that actually. They found it here in the library, so—

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. No, because I was wondering if I should read something.

Susan Neville: Yeah. No, I think that would be great. Do you want to wait and do that next time?

[Music]

Thanks again to Mr. Wakefield, and thank you to our listeners for listening. That town was taped at Butler University's Irwin Library with the help of Megan Rutledge Grady. Funding for Naptown was provided by the Eris [assumed spelling] Fund, National Endowment for the Humanities, and Indiana

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Again, this is your host, Susan Neville. See you next time in Naptown.

[Closing Music]