

Profiles 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]

Okay. Today we're going to be talking about making a living as a journalist.

Dan Wakefield: When I got back from Israel, The Nation made me a deal to write two articles a month and get \$75 a week, which was great. But I realized I needed to do more than that. If I was going to make a living writing for magazines for a while, I needed to write the Big Four.

The thing that journalists wanted to do, that writers wanted to do was called the profile. And Esquire was the leading place where you wrote these great profiles. And it was the beginning of the New Journalism because you could say I. You could use the first person singular. You could do funny things. You could do quirky things.

So I had no contacts at Esquire, nor did my agent, who was a very nice guy. And he dealt in books and didn't have magazine contacts. So I just wrote something on [inaudible] for Esquire. I can't remember. But it was something about Hemingway. And, God, Esquire had Hemingway himself. So I don't know why they would have taken mine. But I knew it was good. And some young assistant are passed on to the articles editor, who was a great guy named Harold Hayes. So he didn't take that. But he said they'd be interested in anything I had to suggest.

So I did a lot of research. And I proposed writing an article on Adam Clayton Powell, Jr, who was the main Black leader probably in America. This is before Martin Luther King. And so I got the assignment. And it was really a big deal to be doing that. And Powell was a very interesting guy, very arrogant, which his constituents loved. They loved that he out-arrogated [phonetic] the White people.

And so I followed him around. And I remember he was going to take me to dinner. And, first, it was going to be— he said, "Oh, yeah, we'll go to dinner and talk." And he suggested a really good restaurant in Midtown, a high level one. And then the last minute, he said, "Oh, no, I had [inaudible]. Let's go to this place in Harlem." And it was obvious he wanted to be seen as a guy frequenting and supporting Harlem. It was also obvious that he hardly ever been in this restaurant. And then you were so shocked to see him. And they were bowing and scraping and all, "Oh, Congressman, what can we do for you?" you know. And he ordered liver. And we're eating our dinners. And the maitre d' comes over and says, "Congressman, how's the liver?" And Powell looks up him. And he says, "It's liver." And they're like, oh, God, he deigned to taste their liver.

But the part of it, luckily for me, because I love covering trials. And trials, you know, was better than an Off-Broadway play. And the drama was all there and the characters and everything. Well, Powell had to go to trial for tax evasion or that's what was alleged. And he got the greatest lawyer of that era, who was Edward Bennett Williams, who was a lawyer in Washington. I forget. He was the lawyer of the time. And so I went to this trial. Murray Kempton was covering the trial.

So it ended up that I would have lunch with Murray Kempton and Adam Clayton Powell and Edward Bennett Williams. Two of us had three names. But

anyway the most dramatic moment of the trial was when Williams was cross examining the government witness.

So this was a witness who worked his whole life for the income tax or the IRS. And Williams started out speaking in very genial manner with him and just going over certain points and questions and answers. And jury is watching fascinated. And then Williams says, "Mr. So-and-So, I'd like to read you a key passage from the Internal Revenue Service Handbook. This is one of the passages being cited for trying Congressman Powell for tax evasion. Let me read this passage to you." So Williams reads this passage, which is practically incomprehensible. And then William says to the expert witness, "Do you understand what that said?" And the court guys said no. And as you looked up, there was one of the big clocks that the minute had moved when a minute was up. And it goes click. And it looks exactly at noon. And Williams says, "I move we recess, Your Honor, for lunch." And there was like this great moment.

And so we go to lunch. And Powell is just ecstatic. He says, "Oh, man, boy, great job. You ruined that guy." And Powell says, "Listen." He says, "There was one one woman on the jury whose heart was breaking for that guy. Don't get excited." And you saw Williams is seeing everything, you know. Powell, like me, is seeing the dramatic moment. But Williams was great. And he got Powell off. Powell had, you know, he was cleared of all charges.

And, in fact, later Edward Bennett Williams asked if I would want to ghostwrite his memoir called One Man's Liberty. And I went down to Washington and sat in the basement of his house and read this manuscript. Actually, I thought it was pretty good. But my agent, James Oliver Brown, a great guy. And he didn't want me to—

Susan Neville: He had three names, too.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. And he looked like a guy with three names. And he didn't want me to write this because he wanted me to get going and write a novel. And so he said, "I would do it for 50% of the thing," which was outrageous. And Williams wrote back a letter and said, "Under the terms you propose, your client would do better than I would with this book." So that was the end of that.

And the profile was called Adam Clayton Powell, The Angry Voice of Harlem. And everybody liked it. And he liked it. By the way, in the course of that, I went

to some meetings of his church. And at one of the meetings of constituents, he's very dismissive even of his own constituents. Yeah, you know, hurry up. What you have to say, you know, won't work. But there was one man he was completely honorable to, that he respected. And he gave this man total respect. And it was a young man. And I remember that the young man wore boots that came up to his knee and a regular jacket, not a tie and jacket. And all I knew was this man was named Malcolm. And I only later learned it was Malcolm X.

Susan Neville: Malcolm X. That's great.

Dan Wakefield: So I did get to see Malcolm X. I wish I had gotten to hear him speak.

But at any rate, so coming off the triumph of the Adam Powell profile, I proposed to Esquire that I do a profile of William F. Buckley, Jr. And at this time I'm trying to think of the exact year, it must have been 1960 or 1961. And Buckley had just a year or so before published his first book, *God and Man at Yale*, which caused a huge storm of love or hate or controversy, which he was charging that Yale, like many elite institutions, was loaded with liberal who distorted the history of America and everything else.

So and there should be more God at Yale, not these dismissive atheists. So that caused a big stir. And right after that, he started his magazine, *The National Review*. So at this point, he was looked at as a real sort of fringe guy and wild man character. He was not at all, you know, he later became really part of the American establishment. But at this point he was the wild guy.

I remember I called him up. And I said, "Mr. Buckley, this is Dan Wakefield. I've been assigned by Esquire to write a profile of you. When can we first meet?" He said, "Tell me, Mr. Wakefield, is it to be a profile or an assassination?" And he knew that I wrote for *The Nation*. And I said, "Oh, profile, sir, profile." And I said, "You can even ask Murray Kempton. He'll tell you that I'll be fair." Buckley says, "Oh, getting out the big guns at once."

So the whole thing was like that, sort of jousting repartee, which was Buckley's forte. And I remember one embarrassing thing for me was he proposed that we have lunch at the yacht club. And I remember I had had a pair of white pants. And I wore those to the yacht club. It's the middle of winter. And I felt like a fool.

But anyway but Buckley was very interesting. He was really a lot of fun to hang out with. He was a very nice guy. I got to meet his sister, Priscilla, who was the managing editor of The National Review. I liked her a lot. And at that point Joan Didion and John Dunne both wrote reviews for The National Review. That's how they started getting published.

And then I later sort of compared notes and said basically me writing for The Nation and then for The National Review was not so much political. But we just wanted to get published. But anyway Buckley, we went over all the points of his ideology and his controversy. And I wrote this piece. And I was really trying to not make fun of him or put him down, write a real piece.

And one of my things I was most proud of, afterwards, he wrote me a long letter. It was two or three pages, I remember, on yellow paper. And he said, well, I got this nuance wrong. I didn't quite understand the role of this guy or that guy. But ended up saying, "I appreciated your fair mindedness." And I was very happy about that.

And so Buckley became like a journalistic friend. I would see him, you know. As a group, we always just see each other at rallies and political events. It would be me and Murray Kempton and Buckley and Joan Didion, who Kempton referred to as the correspondent for Vogue. And she always had a raincoat and a fashionable scarf, a very pretty scarf. And I remember once meeting Buckley at JFK for President rally. And I had a little JFK pin in my lapel. And Buckley, who's a tall guy, looked down at my lapel and saw the JFK button. And he says, "Oh, I see your [foreign language]. So and he was very helpful.

And he was always somehow it came out sad that I was an atheist. And then I wrote *Returning, a Spiritual Journey* about my going back to church in Boston. And I sent him a copy thinking, boy, Buckley will be happy. He wrote back a very critical letter and said, "I'm very disappointed in your book. I felt it was insufficiently evangelistic." And I felt that was the strong point.

Susan Neville: Right.

Dan Wakefield: And I've always tried in writing about spiritual things to say, "This is what happened to me, not necessarily this is what should happen to you." Yeah.

Susan Neville: Could you just say a little bit about how you went about writing profiles? Did you have a method?

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. I determined early on that there were two kind of interview methods. And I thought of them as the knife method and the slob method. And the knife method, I learned when I was in Israel. And there was a government press conference after Israel had bombarded Gaza and claimed that it had only bombarded military targets. And one of the journalists there at the time was Homer Bigar.

Later in The New York Times, I think at that time, he was with the New York Herald Tribune. But he was a famous Pulitzer Prize reporter who famously stammered. But that didn't stop him from asking what I thought was the twist of the knife question. And so after this government spokesman said that Israel had only bombed military targets in Gaza, Homer Bigart gets up and says, "Was the bus station a military target?" And they squirmed around.

And so but he was really great at that kind of thing. And I had a friend a year older than me at Columbia named Jerry Landauer. He was the editor of the Columbia Spectator. That was quite a thing. That was the college version of the Shortridge Daily Echo. So a really good daily paper. And Jerry Landauer, well, the editor before Jerry, when I was a sophomore, the editor of the Columbia Daily Spectator was Max Frankel. And I remember he always wore a suit and tie to school. And I knew that he would someday be editor of The New York Times. And he was.

Susan Neville: He was.

Dan Wakefield: He became editor of The New York Times. And I interview him for New York in the '50s. But I was not good at that. Maybe I was too insecure or shy or something. And also just I never quite could see the way you twisted a knife.

So I did what I considered the slob interview, that I just wanted to get the person talking. And the longer they would talk, the more material I had. And I had a technique especially when I was covering stuff in the South, the Civil Rights stuff. And I'd be interviewing the White Citizens Council guys. And this is before tape recorders. So I was writing everything down in a notebook. And when they said something really awful, I would put my hand up like I was not

writing. And then as soon as they said something [inaudible], I'd write down the awful thing.

But I was doing that once with the head of the White Citizens Council in Montgomery. And I remember he said some really nasty bad thing about Black people. And I held my hand up like I wasn't writing it down. And he looks over at me. And he says, "Write that down, boy." So it was a different world.

But it's funny. The thing about taking notes, when I wrote in New York in the '50s, I was living in Boston. And I made a lot of trips to New York to interview friends from that time. And I remember I went to New York. I had dinner with Gage [inaudible], who was writing for Esquire. And there I was. And I sat down. This was a dinner but to be interviewing you for the book. And the first thing he said was, "I hope you don't have a tape recorder." Like to him, that was the new, not serious, not real way, where you wrote something down.

And, of course, it's true that when you wrote it down, you believed it was in your head. It was not like if you tape record something, you can be thinking about 40 other things. And when you were writing the interview, you couldn't do that.

Susan Neville: It seemed like, I mean, I did interviews not at that time but, you know, before people used tape records. And I loved writing things down because it seems like you focus more because you have to remember a lot of quotations in your head at the same time that you're listening.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. Yeah. And you either had to run back to the motel and type it up because otherwise you couldn't read your own writing the next day. And, you know, that was part of the whole thing.

Susan Neville: And sometimes your memory would fill things in as you were typing it up.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. And, by the way, when I first met Gage [inaudible], I had written the Powell. And I think we met at an Esquire party. He started writing some of the great pieces he wrote. And he said, "Let's go to P.J. Clarke's and have a hamburger and a beer." And so we went. No point of us going. At some point, he said, "Dan, when were you born?" I said, "1932." He says, "Oh, thank God." And I said, "What?" He says, "You're not younger than I am."

And he was one of the most competitive guys but in a nice way. I remember when there was a story. He had a party at his house. And he was saying that he could write a better review faster than anybody else. And there was a Black guy there, a Black young reporter, who said, "Well, I can do it better than you." And Gage said, "Well, we'll have a contest. We'll see right now." And he brought down two typewriters. And he staged the whole thing, you know, so that he could do it faster and better.

But he really was terrific. And one thing that I will never forget that I'll always love about Gage [inaudible], when I wrote my first novel, *Going All the Way*, and it did well. It was a Literary Guild Selection July of 1970. And I was in New York for a publication party. And [inaudible] invited me for a drink at his house. And we sat out on the little terrace. It was on East 61st Street. And he brought me a gin and tonic. And he held it up. And he said, "Well, here's to you." He said, "All kind of guys, all kind of reporters say they're going to write the novel. And they never do or it isn't much good. But you really did it. And I honor you for that." And it was a genuine and great thing. I don't think anybody else said that, any of my contemporaries.

Susan Neville: Do you think if you had taken on that Ed Williams book that you would have written *Going All the Way*? It's probably a road not taken unfair question but.

Dan Wakefield: Oh, it wouldn't have been that big a deal.

Susan Neville: Yeah?

Dan Wakefield: And I think in the end I wouldn't have done it because I couldn't see what more I could do than what he had written. It was really pretty— it just needed an editor. It wasn't like a project where you start from the beginning.

But then, well, I had a great relationship with Harold Hayes, the editor of *Esquire*. And, you know, what I've thought a lot about is these great magazine editors, to me, Harold Hayes of *Esquire*.

Later, Art Cooper of *GQ* was like that. Whatever I wanted to do, he would do with one exception. And Bob Manning at *The Atlantic* was like that. George Kirstein, the publisher of *The Nation*, was like that. The editor wasn't. I didn't get along that well with the editor. I mean, we didn't have it out. We just weren't on the same wavelength. But the role of these editors were to say, "Hey, I love

your work. I believe in you." The real editorial advice I got that was worthwhile was from other writers, the first being Murray Kempton. When I showed him I had written an introduction to *Island in the City* sort of saying how did I get there, how did I happen to live in the neighborhood, blah, blah, blah.

Susan Neville: That was Spanish Harlem.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. Spanish Harlem. And I knew the introduction wasn't right. But I really didn't know why. So I went down to see Kempton in Princeton, New Jersey. And we sat one Saturday afternoon. And he read it. And he said, "Well, let's have a beer." And so we had a beer and then just talking about other things. And he says, "Here's what you do with the introduction. Take out of it everything that didn't happen to you while you were living in the neighborhood." And that was like magic because I had all this rhetoric, all the plight of the Puerto Ricans, blah, blah, blah. And that [inaudible] just eliminated all that bologna. And that was one of the greatest.

The other great editor was Kurt Vonnegut. And when Sam Lawrence, who's the publisher who, as Vonnegut said, saved him from smithereens and gave him a three-book contract for *Slaughterhouse -Five* and the next two books, which, by the way, had been turned down by Vonnegut's three previous publishers. And Sam Lawrence had a one-room office on Beacon Street in Boston.

By the way, he had been a great— when he was 28, he was the publisher of Atlantic/Little Brown. And he made his fame by rescuing the writer— who was it who wrote *Ship of Fools*?

Susan Neville: Katherine Anne Porter.

Dan Wakefield: Katherine Anne Porter, who was a great short story writer. But for 25 years, she had been trying to write *Ship of Fools* and had all these different contracts and never fulfilled them. And everybody had given up. And Sam Lawrence, at age 28, went to her. And he said, "Listen, I believe in you. I want you to write this novel." He took her to little inns in New England. He would go visit on the weekend, made sure she was drinking milk and not drinking too much booze. And, by God, and *Ship of Fools* came out.

And it was published by Atlantic/Little Brown. And he went to Little Brown and said, "I want a piece of that, you know. I made this happen." And that was

not done in those days. And so he quit. And he wanted to start his own publishing company. Well, then he got a job as Vice President of Knapp.

And he always wanted to live in Boston. So he went to Knapp three days a week. That only lasted for six months. And he didn't really like it because he was in writing contracts or something. He wasn't dealing with writers, which is what he loved. So he went to visit J. P. Donnelly. He first published Atlantic/Little Brown.

And he's bemoaning the fact that he wants to have his own— that's the way he's only going to be happy, have his own publishing company. And he can't do it. And Donnelly, he says, "Why not?" And Sam says, "Well, you know, I don't have any money. My wife has stocks worth \$50,000. You can't start a publishing company like that." Donnelly, he said, "Listen, all you need to start a publishing company is a room, a telephone, and a writer. And I'll be your writer."

And Sam started Seymour Lawrence, Inc and got Delacorte to be the printer and distributor of the books and had a great list of writers, including Vonnegut and Jim Harrison and Jayne Anne Phillips and Gish Jen and, God knows, Tim O'Brien. And he had his writers be— and so when—

Susan Neville: How did he get all those writers? I mean, you just listed the kind of great writers of that era.

Dan Wakefield: He did it because he loved writers. And he would go to them when nobody else cared about them. That was the story. And I remember, you know, there were many— almost all of them, Jim Harrison was like that. Oh, and the famous one was Frank Conroy. He published Stop-Time, one book. It was widely hailed. He never published since. He was like 15 or 20. So [inaudible] Frank and Sam Lawrence with him and says, "Listen, you're a great writer. I want to publish you." And Conroy had written like two short stories or something. And there were three or four that weren't published. And so Sam publishes them. But he did that with Kelly Olson [assumed spelling]. Nobody else cared about her.

Susan Neville: So he basically recognized genius when he saw it.

Dan Wakefield: And he would, like I remember, he had to take a helicopter to visit Kelly Olson. She was in some mountain town in California or something. But he loved this.

And, you know, and that was the best thing writers could do is to have a publisher say, "We love you. We think you're good."

Susan Neville: Right.

Dan Wakefield: So but when I finished *Going All the Way* and on Vonnegut's recommendation and Sam really liked the book. And it even made his wife laugh. And so and he gave me this good contract. I said, "Well, so who is my editor going to be?" meaning I thought there would be somebody at Delacorte who'd come in, you know. And Sam said, "Who do you want to be your editor?" I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "Well, I'm a publisher. I'm not an editor. And I like my writers to be editors of other writers. Would you like Kurt to be your editor?" I said, "Well, that would be great." And he said, "Well, okay, I'll get that." And he called up Kurt and said, "I want you to be Dan's editor for *Going All the Way*." And Kurt said, "Well, that's a professional job. What am I going to get paid?" Sam said, "What do you want?" Kurt said, "I want an Eames Chair."

[laughs]

And he said, "Okay. That'll be the deal." And Kurt wrote me this great letter, which I probably don't have somewhere. I wish I had had it to send to the Loyola Library. But he had ten suggestions. And he said, "Don't do any of these because I told you. Only do them if they ring a bell with you, if they seem right." And I'm sure I did seven of the ten.

And one I remember, he said, "You should have Sonny do something where he physically stands up for Gunner or he puts himself on the line, not just intellectually. So I created this whole scene where Sonny and Gunner go to a party. And there's this drunk guy who's jealous of Gunner and wants to start a fight. And Sonny stands in-between the guy. And nothing happens. But it's like he showed he was willing to stand up physically for Gunner. And that helped. And everything he said, I'm sure, helped. So—

Susan Neville: So it was basically his editing was a letter with suggestions. When you say editor, I always think of line by line copy editing and.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. And you know what's funny? I had an editor on two books who was a very nice guy, very smart guy. And he was one of these guys that put all kinds of yellow stickers and tabs in it. But, you know, the books weren't very— I mean, there was something lacking. I mean, yeah, it's really a strange thing.

And I remember once telling C. Michael Curtis that Vonnegut was the editor of the book. And he got very upset. "What do you mean, the editor? He went line – " No, no, not that. And he said, oh, he was the conceptual editor. Yeah, that's right. No, he didn't do the line by line stuff.

But sometimes the guys who can do the line by line stuff don't have any vision or way to inspire you to the next level. And so it was the confidence. It was like Bob Manning's confidence to say to me one day at his house in Cambridge over a cookout and drinking martinis. He was frustrated that it's hard for a magazine to cover the Vietnam War because it's always changing. And then another drink. And maybe we should have a guy write about what the war is doing to this country and travel around America with that in mind. And then another drink. And how would you like to do that?

And that became Supernation at Peace and War. I do remember I ended up in Washington D.C. to write it. And he had arranged for me to interview Hubert Humphrey and Dean Rusk. But I remember he came down to— when I had written the introduction, he hadn't seen it yet. But he wanted to come down and talk to me and see how this was beginning, how it was going.

Susan Neville: Can I interrupt you for a second? Did Supernation at Peace and War took up an entire issue of The Atlantic and did you know when you started to write that that they were going to devote a whole issue to it?

Dan Wakefield: Yeah, that was the idea.

Susan Neville: So that was the idea from the beginning?

Dan Wakefield: That was the idea. And unfortunately we told the idea. Atlantic Harper had a sales coordination. And we told the idea at a sales meeting the previous fall, when Willie Morris was there. And I know that gave him the idea to have a whole issue of the Harper's for the same month that Mailer wrote called The Steps of the Pentagon, which then became the book The Armies of the Night. And a little known fact is The Atlantic outsold Harper's on the newsstand in March of 1968. So let that be somewhere in the record.

Susan Neville: So let the record show.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. But then what I remember was Manning came down. I remember sitting in this little— I had a sublet apartment on Capitol Hill. And he read this introduction. And I remember the introduction started out something like, "I've just been traveling for four months through a country that is at war with itself," or something. I don't remember. But I remember Manning finishing. And he said, "This is so much what I hoped for." And that felt great, of course.

And then that night he took me to dinner with— there was a dinner at the home of Tom Wicker of The New York Times. And David Brinkley was there. And I remember Manning said to me, "Wakefield, it would have taken you ten years to get to this dinner if it hadn't been for me taking you there."

And Brinkley was quite nice. And I remember he drove us back to Washington. And Manning had introduced us. He said something like, "Well, David is an old friend." And Manning was in the back. And Brinkley was driving. And he looked back. And he said, "Yeah, some people," he said, "you've been friends so long it doesn't even matter if you like them anymore. You're just friends." But that was great.

But also then interviewing Humphrey and Rusk was an education because I had started out thinking I would like Humphrey and I wouldn't like Rusk. But Rusk was sort of thought of as the architect of the Vietnam War, blah, blah, blah. And it ended up just the opposite. That I remember I took a plane trip with Humphrey and talked to him and interviewed him. And it was just like you didn't get anything original. It was just proforma boiler plate kind of language. And Rusk was very personal. And we sat in his office. And he talked about the U.S. justifications.

And then at the end, he walks me to the door. And he says, "I hope you don't think I'm Presbyterian as all that that I sounded." And I said, "No, no, thank you." And he said, "You know, a lot of people don't know this. But during World War II, I dropped parachute supplies for Ho Chi Minh." And it was sort of like he was saying, "I'm really a good guy."

It was a really amazing moment. And I didn't put that in the piece, which was stupid. But I had to submit because he was part of the administration. It was like interviewing [inaudible]. I had to submit any direct quotes. And so I felt, well, he's not going to like that. But he probably would have. So I'd love to—

Susan Neville: For anyone who doesn't know, could you explain or just say a little bit about who Dean Rusk was?

Dan Wakefield: Well, he was Secretary of State. And he was Secretary of State during the Vietnam War. So he had to be making all these policy statements. I don't know how much he had to do with the decision making.

Susan Neville: Right.

Dan Wakefield: I think it was Nixon and LBJ and, you know, whoever was President but.

Susan Neville: When you worked on that article, where did you actually travel?

Dan Wakefield: I tried to go to places where I knew people. So I came to Indianapolis. And I remember I had breakfast with [inaudible]. I interviewed Miss Grub [assumed spelling], the advisor to the Shortridge Daily Echo. And I said to her, "Is there any student I can talk to that's smart who would talk about this?" And she said, "Yeah, there's this great guy who's President of the Student Council named Pat Nolan. And I interviewed him. He was very nice and smart.

And he said, "Listen, you know, my dad's a lawyer. But he's a writer, too. And he's really a great guy. I wish you'd come home and meet my dad." And it was so shocking to have a student in 1967 want you to meet their dad that I did. And then Alan Nolan became a great friend. He was a great man in Indianapolis and in the country.

Susan Neville: He was a great historian.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah, great historian. He wrote The Iron Brigade about the Indiana guys who fought in the Civil War. And then more interestingly, he wrote a book called Lee Considered about Robert E. Lee. And he said he called it that— he couldn't call it Lee Reconsidered because nobody had ever really looked at Lee objectively. They just regarded him as a superhero. And Alan really critically looked at his conduct, the war, and his statements before and afterward. And it was so strong that it was a selection of the Civil War book club. And they had a Civil War book club at Atlanta recommended that the book be burned.

Susan Neville: Really?

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. Advised all the book club members. So and Al Nolan, I remember I was not there. But I remember hearing about this from Evans Woollen, the architect, who was from here. And he was one of his clients. And for some reason, Evans Woollen had to testify before some committee in Washington. And Alan went with him as a lawyer. And Evans is telling me this story, that the Senators or whoever were on this committee were questioning Evans. But they weren't paying any attention to Alan. And at one point, Alan stood up. And he said, "I am not a potted plant."

[laughs]

"I am here as Mr. Woollen's attorney." And so they started asking him questions.

Susan Neville: I'm not a potted plant. That's great.

Dan Wakefield: Oh and a thing that's important. In that era in the '60s when I was writing for Esquire and so we and my friend, Brock Brower, who's always been underestimated and always makes me mad. He had four or five daughters and one son. And several of his daughters work for magazines. I know one was editor of Redbook. But they're all over the place and very smart. And he wrote some of the best pieces for Esquire in those days. He wrote a great profile of Alger Hiss after Alger Hiss was out of the government and was working as a stationary salesman.

And Harold Hayes, this was one of his great ideas as an editor. He said to Brock, "I want you to write about Alger Hiss but not about the case. We don't want to drag out the case again. So it should be called Hiss Without the Case." And it was a great piece. And then he wrote a great profile of Mary McCarthy. And I remember the way it began was Mary McCarthy has the nicest smile. She can talk through it. She can eat through it. She can give lectures through it. She could even smile through it.

[laughs]

Susan Neville: That's great.

Dan Wakefield: And he wrote a great piece on a man here in America who had fought in the Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War with guys who volunteered to fight for the government in Spain. It was fighting Franco and losing.

But many Americans went. I knew one of them. In fact, Vonnegut knew him, too, a guy named John Murrah [assumed spelling], who when I knew taught at Vassar and was a great guy.

And anyways so the piece Brock wrote about the Americans who fought in the Lincoln Brigade was called Other Loyalties. And he had a collection of pieces published called Other Loyalties. And he was one of the great journalists of that era unsung. He later wrote a novel that got some acclaim called The Late Great Preacher. And it came out of Esquire had assigned him to do a profile of Peter Lorre and Hollywood. And somehow out of that was the idea of this novel. It was published just about five or six years ago republished in Germany. So thank goodness for that.

But what I wanted to say with all this is that Gage Talese's wife Nan said to me – and I think when I reviewed him for New York in the '50s and I interviewed her. And she said, "You know, the great thing was in that era you all read each other." And that was true, you know. We all knew each other. We knew what we were doing. We were judging our work and others' work. But we paid attention. And we respected each other.

Susan Neville: So you think that was kind of a critical mass, you know, like Paris in the '30s, where because you were all together one time discovering the New Journalism and approaching magazine profiles as kind of a high art, do you think you all were better for that?

Dan Wakefield: Yes. Yeah, and we were better for Harold Hayes giving us the confidence to do that and giving us the financial backing, you know. Talese wrote the great profile of Sinatra. In fact, that was voted the best story ever in Esquire called Frank Sinatra Has a Cold. And he did a great profile of Joe DiMaggio. And both of them refused to speak to him. So he had to stay out in San Francisco or L.A. And one way that he got to write about Joe DiMaggio, he got a job as a caddy caddying for DiMaggio.

Susan Neville: Oh, so he wasn't officially writing the profile as far as the person he was covering was concerned. He had to—

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And then—

Susan Neville: That's so interesting.

Dan Wakefield: But also this is an amazing story. I was back in New York in '92 to '95. And my agent was Lynn Nesbit. And she was like the most powerful agent in the world. She represented Madonna, among other people. And she kind of took me under her wing during that three-year period.

And at one point she called up and said, "Listen, Dan, what are you doing Thursday night?" I said, "Well, I don't know," because I never knew. And she said, "Well, there's a woman friend of mine. She really needs to get out. She's gone through a very bad breakup, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I want you to do just— I told her she needs to get out. It doesn't have to be— just have dinner. And you meet us at Elio's." That was and still is the restaurant. "And I'll be with Mia. And then this other writer and you will be our [inaudible]."

So that was the way I met Mia Farrow. So it was very interesting. And she's very bright and entertaining. And after the dinner, the four of us are outside. And me and the other writer are going downtown. And the two women are going uptown to get a cab. So I say goodbye to Mia. I said, "You know, that was really nice, truly appreciated meeting you." And she leans over and whispers, "Why don't you give me a call?" I said, "Oh, Jesus. What am I supposed to do?" So I call up Lynn the next day and said, "Mia said to give her a call. What am I supposed to do?" She said, "Well, you call her up. Here's the number. You call her between 4 and 6 Thursday afternoon and just take her to dinner." I said, "Well, where should I take her to dinner?" She said, "Anyplace. Where do you take anybody to dinner?" So I go, "Well, I'll just do that, you know."

So I used to take people to a little French restaurant in the village near where I lived. So I got Mia. And I took her down there. And, of course, I'm bent on the fact of not saying the word Woody.

Susan Neville: So it was the breakup with Woody and not the one with Frank.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah, that was the breakup. So in this little restaurant, people were very nice. Nobody made a big deal. But there was a table empty next to our right, and then

one table with a young couple. And they kept looking at us and smiling. So I didn't think much of it. And the next day, a friend calls me up and says, "Have you read Page 6 of the New York Post today?" That was the society gossip column. He said, "Well, you better go get it."

So I got it. And it said, "Mia Farrow was seen last night at the such-and-such French restaurant in the Village with an unidentified companion." So I always thought that would be a great title for my memoir, *An Unidentified Companion*.

Susan Neville: That's a great title for your memoir.

[laughs]

Dan Wakefield: But anyway so Mia and I had this series of dinners. And they were very pleasant. And she liked it because wherever I would take her, there were never any paparazzi because they weren't that kind of restaurants. But at the end of the date after about five or six, I got to introduce her to somebody. Who do I know? And the only people I could think of who like rank and prestige were the Talese.

So I arranged that the four of us meet. And that I wish I had a tape recorder for because we sat down. And I said, "Mia, this is Gage Talese." She says, "Oh, yes, you wrote that mean piece about Frank." He says, "Yes." He says, "He wouldn't speak to me. Do you know why he wouldn't speak to me?" And she says, "Well, sure, because you're a reporter." He says, "Oh, no. That wasn't it. He wouldn't speak to me because I'm an Italian. And I don't work for him."

[laughs]

So then—

Susan Neville: So wait, is this Frank Sinatra Has a Cold, the article that he wrote while following Frank Sinatra around. That's so interesting. Because it's, you know, I was thinking you mentioned the word paparazzi, you know, how different that is from what we think of as like National Enquirer paparazzi or somebody, you know, going around with a camera or something. But still there's something sort of similar to, you know, trying to get the overheard conversation when the person's not aware of it.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. Well, no, I mean, Sinatra was well aware that Talese is writing this. But he wouldn't speak to him. He knew that Talese was interviewing everybody he could and following him and looking. There was no secret about it.

Susan Neville: There was no secret. It's just good.

Dan Wakefield: No, none whatsoever. And it wasn't like he was getting some scoop that, oh, some terrible thing Sinatra did. No, it's just like this is the guy he is. And this is how he— sort of like if you've been watching *Jordan Rules*, you know, like this is the main guy and whoever is around him is not the main guy. And at any rate but part of that story that night, after I was terrified the evening is going to explode or something and somebody will walk out, then Mia started telling Frank stories. And she liked him.

And, oh, evidentially they were always congenial. But some other thing came up about, well, how did they break up or something. And she says, "Well," she says, "I was with Frank in Vegas one night. We had been drinking a lot. He had been drinking a whole lot. And I was with him on a golf cart. It was about 3:00 in the morning. And he was driving the golf cart straight ahead through a plate glass window of a hotel." She said, "And I was thinking I better make a plan."

[laughs]

So that was a great evening.

Susan Neville: That's great. So how did you make the turn? I mean, it sounds like there was a period of time when you were primarily living as a journalist really. And did you make a decision to leave New York and to leave Boston and to no longer kind of live in that world? Was it the novel or did— it wasn't like that?

Dan Wakefield: Well, it wasn't like that. I [inaudible] live in that world. All this time, I'm trying to write a novel, all the time when I'm not writing articles and when I have a weekend or a night or something. And none of it's working.

But then, see, after I wrote *Supernation*, I was a guest professor at the University of Illinois Journalism School for one semester, Spring of '68. And that's when *The Atlantic* piece came up. So anyway, I'm sitting there in my office. And I'm talking on the phone to Joan Didion and John Dunne. And I've gotten to know Joan well in New York. And then when she married John, I got

to know him. And I knew she wanted to write a novel. And I wanted to write a novel. And so I'm calling him up. I said, "Listen, I've got some money coming from Supernation. It's going to come out as a book. And I've got to write the novel. This is it. Now or never. And I don't know where to go."

Well, Joan said, "Well, come out here. You can house sit for us. We're going to be in Hawaii for two weeks." And then John said, "Yeah and then I can find you an apartment in Venice, California." And I said, "Okay. I'll do it." So I went out there. I housesat while they were in Hawaii. In fact, it happened to be I got there the night that Bobby Kennedy was shot. And I remember there was some kind of rioting and flames over the city. And I'm thinking, oh, God, how am I going to defend their house?

Anyway, I also for the record I remember that so it's this empty house. And I go up. And I look in the bedroom. That's where Joan works. And she's got a typewriter table set up in the middle of the room. And there's one page in it about three-quarters done. And I go over and look. And the first sentence says, "Some people ask why Iago was evil. I never asked." So that was the first page of what became *Play It as It Lays*. And I went and [inaudible]. I thought it would be cheating to read any further. But I knew she was starting her novel.

So anyway, they got back. John got me this great apartment in Venice on Ocean Front Walk. Then forwarded to me magically from Boston address to The Atlantic to Illinois to the Dunnes is a letter from the Rockefeller Foundation saying, "We want to give you a grant to write a book. Tell us what the book is." Well, I knew they were inviting me to do that because of Supernation. So I figured I can't ask them for a grant to write a novel. So I made up a thing. And I said I would go to Paris and write about the student revolt. So anyway, they said, "So okay. You have to have the proposal. And then you have to give us a budget." So I made up a budget of what it would really cost me the way I live.

And so I showed it to the Dunnes. I'll never forget it. They called me into the John's basement office and said, "Wakefield, you're never going to get this grant." And I said, "Why not?" They said, "You're not asking for enough money." I said, "Well, how much should I ask for?" They said, "Double that." So I did. And I got the grant. That really enabled me to write *Going All the Way*.

So I lived in Venice until about January. Then I went to Boston. I wrote at an office in The Atlantic Monthly. I would go in every morning when everybody else went in, have lunch when everybody else did. And then I would leave with the janitor closing up. Go with him and have a pizza and a beer, Joe Internicola. And then get up the next day and do the same thing. That's all I did and finished at the end of the summer.

So I can show you in there on my wall the wonderful woman who was Manning's secretary made me took a page with Time Magazine with the October, I think it was, 5, 1970 Time Magazine Best-Seller List in Fiction. Play It As It Lays was Number 7. And Going All the Way was Number 10. So—

Susan Neville: You really have had, knock on wood, a charmed life. You really have.

Dan Wakefield: Yes. Yeah, yeah. It's been amazing.

Susan Neville: Getting that grant right when you needed it when you didn't even really have to ask for it. I mean, it was a great thing. And even just, you know, having met all the people that you talked about this hour.

Dan Wakefield: And then coming back here and doing these.

Susan Neville: Yeah. It's amazing. Let me just ask you one more thing from that era. I don't think you've talked yet about Billie Jean King or Joan Baez or Jimmy the Greek, if you want to.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. The person I least enjoyed interviewing was Joan Baez. And she at the time, she was in New York to do some recording of songs, which she did wonderfully. But interviewing her she traveled at the time with an older guy, who was like her political consultant. And I had been assigned to do this by Redbook Magazine. So when I met her, I had just published a book of articles called Between the Lines. And I gave her a copy of the article I wrote. And she was very dismissive. She referred to me as Mr. Redbook.

Susan Neville: Mr. Redbook.

Dan Wakefield: And every time there was a question over her head, she would have her advisor tell me. She was a real jerk. And I loved the piece Joan Didion wrote about her. She had some little phony peace camp in California. And Joan's article was

called Where the Kissing Never Stops. Anyway, yeah, that was the only person I interviewed that I came away thinking was a real jerk.

Susan Neville: That's too bad.

Dan Wakefield: But Billie Jean King was fascinating. And it took me a long time to realize why she was very cool during several interviews. I didn't know until recently when a guy writing for some advertising magazine called me up and wanted to ask me about writing the Billie Jean King piece because it was based on that I had seen her in a full-page ad for Colgate Toothpaste. And I thought she looked very sexy and attractive and interesting. And so I went to Harold Hayes and said, "I want to write about Billie Jean."

Well, I didn't know Harold had already figured out the title. And he told her manager getting me the interview that the title was going to be Dan Wakefield's Love Affair with Billie Jean King. So, as I say, I couldn't imagine why she was — now I understand. And reading a piece, I evidently interviewed her twice, once when I was out writing a script of the novel Starting Over, which didn't get made and a scrappy movie got made instead.

But anyway that article, I couldn't believe it. I just read it a couple months ago. And, well, for one thing, I loved it in the sense that you could tell, well, when a writer who writes for Vanity Fair named Lili Anolik interviewed me for a piece about Eve Babitz and then wrote a book about Eve Babitz. And she described when I met Eve Babitz, I just published Supernation and Going All the Way.

And she said, "And Dan Wakefield was riding high. Yes." And just reading that article, I thought, oh my God, that was me. I mean, I was so confident. It was amazing to read. And in the article, I said all kind of things that I'd be put in jail now for. I mean, I said I had gone to a party. And I went up to two or three people, men and women, at the party and said, "Hey, I'm doing this piece on Billie Jean King. I want to ask you something. Who would you rather sleep with, Evonne Goolagong, Chrissy Evert, or Billie Jean King? That's in the article.

Susan Neville: That's in the article. It was kind of, I mean, that era.

Dan Wakefield: Yes.

Susan Neville: It's just sometimes when you look back at some era you've lived through, you think how in the world could I have become, you know, that person then?

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. You might have wondered that in later eras. But you not only wouldn't ask it. The idea of putting it in a magazine and of the magazine publishing it—

Susan Neville: Publishing it.

Dan Wakefield: — was crazed.

Susan Neville: Completely crazed.

Dan Wakefield: Oh, but one of my great memories of during that piece is that I went to the Billie Jean King-Bobby Riggs match in Houston. And I had gotten to know a Boston reporter named Bud Collins, who became a nationally known tennis writer. And he took me and some other journalists to dinner at whatever was the fancy restaurant in Houston. And we're all very impressed because across the room a guy waves at him and then sends a bottle of champagne to our table. And it was Jimmy the Greek, the famous gambler. So we were all impressed. And then we ordered more champagne of the kind. Give us another one of those bottles. Well, then we realized Jimmy the Greek had something going on with the restaurant because it was a very expensive bottle of champagne. And like fools we ordered more of the same. But, yeah, that was like a circus that whole match and.

Susan Neville: I remember that.

Dan Wakefield: Yeah. But that was a lot of fun. So I guess that's everything I know.

Susan Neville: Thank you.

[Music]

Thanks again to Mr. Wakefield and thank you to our listeners for listening. Naptown is taped at Butler University's Irwin Library with the help of Megan Rutledge-Grady. Funding for Naptown was provided by the Ayres Fund, National Endowment for the Humanities, and Indiana Humanities. This is a Dominique Weld [assumed spelling] and Rory Dashmer [assumed spelling]

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

[Closing Music]