a lot of it. Over the years I've become much better at remembering, once I really understand my story. When you're going out for the first time, you had better use a tape recorder *and* take notes *and* try mightily to remember, because you probably still won't get everything you need.

GAY TALESE

I do not use a tape recorder. I espouse patience in listening, trying to capture what the other person is thinking, trying to see the world from that person's view. I don't necessarily want word for word from their mouth. The exact words people say don't necessarily capture their view, especially when you have a tape recorder working.

The tape recorder was not popular when I was at the *New York Times* in the 1950s and 1960s. Journalism has become too much Q & A. The tape recorder has created a sort of talk radio on paper, a first draft from the minds of important people. It's all verifiable, yes it is, and the lawyers are happy about that. But when I'm getting to know people, hanging out with them and listening to them, I'm making them into verifiable characters.

Interviewing: Accelerated Intimacy

ISABEL WILKERSON

I don't do much interviewing in the Mike Wallace sense of the word. In a story about a ten-year-old, the goal isn't nailing the kid to the wall. You don't go up to a ninety-year-old and say, "Isn't it true that on November 18, 1942, you got a parking ticket on Forty-third Street?" My work involves spending a lot of time with ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. It requires a different kind of interviewing, a different kind of relating to the subject.

I need to create what I call accelerated intimacy. We can't write the beautiful narrative stories that we all dream of unless we can get some things from the mouths of our sources. They must be comfortable enough to tell us *anything*. In journalism school, no one called the interactions between journalists and sources *relationships*, but that's what they are.

In thinking about these relationships, think also about your role relative to the subject's role. To help win the subject over, I try to make the most of my own traits and define a natural relationship between the source and me. The average age of the people I'm interviewing for my book is eighty-six. I come to them as a granddaughter.

To achieve accelerated intimacy I only do formal interviews when essential. I do everything I can to make my subjects feel comfortable enough to talk with me. I still ask questions—lots of them. I try to be a great audience. I nod; I look straight into their eyes; I laugh at their jokes, whether I think they're funny or not. I am serious when they're serious.

I think of these as *guided conversations.* The overall interaction is more important than the particular questions. I try to make the interaction as enjoyable as possible. No one wants to be grilled for hours on end. A formal interview isn't conducive to soul baring.

People often compare interviewing to peeling an onion. Though it's a cliché, the metaphor is instructive. Picture the onion. Its outer layer is dry and brittle. You tear off the outer layer and throw it away. The next layer is shiny, rubbery, limp, and sometimes has a tinge of green. You won't use it, either, unless it's the only onion you have. You want the center of the onion: It is crisp and pungent and has the sharpest, truest flavor. It's the very best part. It requires very little slicing because it's already small, compact. The size and quality are so perfect that you can just toss it right into whatever you're making.

The same goes for the interview process. The first thing out of a source's mouth is often of little use. It's the outer layer. Whenever we sit down with a person, we want to get to the center of the onion as fast as we can. That's accelerated intimacy. Every interview, every relationship built with a source, has a predictable arc. That arc progresses through seven phases. Each phase holds pitfalls. If we want people to tell us what's really on their minds, we need to make sure we don't give up before the seventh phase.

Phase One: Introduction

It all begins with the introduction. You flag a person down on the street, or you call and explain what you're doing, or you walk in the front door. You pull out your notebook. The person is busy. The person doesn't want to talk. The person wants to get rid of you.

Phase Two: Adjustment

You are feeling each other out. You ask the basic introductory questions to start the ball rolling. If you're on a deadline, you're thinking: "Am I getting what I need?" The person you are interview-

ing is thinking, "Do I really want to talk to this person? Do I have the time for this?" The source is getting used to the note-taking. He or she is looking at your notebook; you're looking at your watch.

Phase Three: Moment of Connection

You must make a connection with this person to accelerate getting to know her. You know you're making that connection when the person puts down the briefcase and leans back in the chair. The subject thinks, "Maybe this won't be that bad. I'll give it a little more time."

A lot of interviews are cut off at the very first stages when the interviewer isn't getting much. The subject hasn't yet set the briefcase down. You might think you already have a serviceable quote, but the first thing out of someone's mouth is rarely worthwhile. It is difficult to be interviewed, so give people a chance to get their thoughts together. Sometimes people need three or four chances to get it right. That next try can create poetry.

Phase Four: Settling In

In this settling-in phase the person finds that she is kind of enjoying the interaction. You both settle into what could be a very short-term relationship.

Phase Five: Revelation

At this point the source feels comfortable enough to reveal something very candid or deep. The source can't believe she's saying this to you. It is a very good sign, but not necessarily in the way you might expect. Often, what the person says is important to her but has no meaning for you. It has nothing to do with what you're writing about. Still, it suggests a turning point in the person's sense of trust. It's a sign that the reporter may now be able to get what she really wants.

Phase Six: Deceleration

Things begin to wind down. You may feel you already have the best you can get from the interview. You try to bring closure. You put your notebook away. And what happens? The source doesn't want the interview to end, because the two of you have a contract: You're a reporter, and you listen to the source.

Phase Seven: Reinvigoration

The source feels free to say almost anything and now makes the very best revelation of the interview. Suddenly, with the notebook closed, the source has grown to trust you, without even realizing it. In this final phase you have that person in the mood to actively cooperate. You have reached the center of the onion. Make the most of that moment—it's fleeting. If you get back to the newsroom and realize you should have asked something else, it won't be the same if you call back. The relationship will have changed.

This entire exchange, this seven-phase arc, can take five minutes or five hours or five months. It is the same whether you are working on a daily article or a book.

How does the reporter handle this fast-developing candor? Don't ever lead your sources—that really gets you in trouble. If you are leading and think you know what the story is, and you write it and it's not right, it will come back to haunt you.

In the ideal interview, the source feels comfortable enough to share with me all the details of an experience. I just listen. That is the ideal, but it's rarely that simple. Just as you have motives for doing the interview, your subject does, too. No one ever talks to the press without some ulterior motive: a celebrity promoting a movie, a candidate running for office, or someone seeking catharsis.

We must have tremendous humility as we interview, and also understand the enormity of what our sources are doing when they talk to us. Sometimes they don't even realize it themselves. For my book I plucked people from relative anonymity. I feel a tremendous responsibility and obligation to tell their stories accurately—and not just accurately but in a fair and balanced way. Your own sense of integrity, honesty, and empathy matters more than anything. Empathy is the balance to power. Power without empathy leaves you with manipulation—a horrible thing.

There is a tremendous power differential between the reporter and the ordinary individuals we write about. I can't even imagine what it must be like to have your life story displayed across the front page of the *New York Times*, above the fold, on a Sunday, with over a million people having access to your most intimate thoughts. Most of us wouldn't submit to such a thing. I have tremendous gratitude for the people who do that. It is important to honor the people who allow themselves to be representatives of something larger in our society. Their return is very small compared to what they give us.

The Psychological Interview

JON FRANKLIN

The psychological interview is a journalistic adaptation of the history-taking process that a psychiatrist completes with each new patient. Though they might not use the term "psychological interview," writers have been using these interview techniques for at least a century. For narrative writers this type of interview answers the question: *What made this character into the person she or he is?* Subjects have much more patience for this type of in-depth interview than you might think. I begin by asking about the person's earliest memories and then progress step-by-step through adolescence. The whole process takes two to four hours.

At no point should you ask the person to pay attention to you. This is key. Do not talk except to encourage your subject. You can begin by asking, *What is your first memory?* A first memory is a story; it has a time, place, subject, character, and mood. First memories are not random. When someone tells you a first memory, it's likely an essential story. It may not have happened exactly as told, but what the person remembers is *truly* what they think happened.

Even if someone's first memory isn't germane to your story, it opens a door. Once a person has told you his or her earliest memory, you can ask all sorts of other things: *What was your family like? Were you the first, last, or middle child? Was your family well-off or poor? Did you know? What happened at family holidays? Did your parents raise you together? Did you have a pet?* I'm interested in knowing all these things and also whether the family experienced any crises.

At this stage in the interview, you are poking around, discovering both *what* a person remembers and *how* it's remembered. Ask about the person's experiences and thoughts—not about their feelings or opinions. Through a person's stories you can begin to discern personality. Follow the person's story through to adulthood. *What do you remember about first or second grade? Tell me about middle school. Did you do well in school? What subjects did you like? Did your family move around a lot? Were you popular? Did you have a lot of girlfriends or boyfriends?*

Why do people answer questions such as this, posed by someone they barely know? Because people are most interested in themselves. Other than a therapist, who can a person really talk to with complete

honesty? Your mother? You have to be kidding; she's made a career of manipulating you. Your spouse? *Really?* The truth is, nobody. It's a big advantage that you, the interviewer, have no stake in the character's life. Yes, it is in some sense an invasive process, but it is done with respect and with the subject's full permission.

This sort of interview gives you the understanding needed to empathize with the character and to tell a deep story. Once you have all this information, filtered through the person's subjective memory, you can compare it to public history and to information from other family members or friends. In the end, you will use very little of the information directly in what you write. The small amount you *do* use will be powerful, and the entire process helps you tell the story from your subject's point of view or from the perspective of the subject's world.

Every deep story involves a subjective person slamming into an objective world. Understanding both the subjective and the objective are crucial to knowing what happened.

Taken in sum, the responses you get in a psychological interview will give you a good idea of who the person is. Few people change their fundamental natures as adults. Traumatic events in adulthood can change a person, but in essence, most of us are junior high school kids who aged.

Participatory Reporting: Sending Myself to Prison

TED CONOVER

Anyone who leaves the comfortable role of the traditional journalist—the company of computer and telephone, newsroom and colleagues—risks embarrassment, awkwardness, even injury. At the same time, taking chances in research opens the door to insights not otherwise possible. If the reporter can walk in another person's shoes, why not do it?

I think some of my best work has resulted from immersion in someone else's world. As a college anthropology major, I learned about participant observation, in which a researcher visits a group of people and learns by living with them: eating their food, speaking their language,