



PRESIDENT'S AWARD

for impact on media

DECades INTO
AN AMAZING
CAREER,
PIONEERING
JOURNALIST
AND
PRESIDENT'S
AWARD WINNER
LESLIE STAHL
STILL LOVES
WHAT SHE
DOES

BY BETH BARRETT

Pouring Her Heart into '60 Minutes'

SIXTY MINUTES correspondent Leslie Stahl is being honored with the Los Angeles Press Club's prestigious President's Award for her extraordinary journalistic accomplishments from Watergate, to White House correspondent covering three presidents and host of *Face the Nation*, to the author of hundreds of segments for the broadcast news magazine.

Stahl's four-decade career continues as dynamically as ever, driven by her dedication to news and her conviction that tough, fair journalism matters in an Internet era where information has become increasingly splintered.

"I'm still in love with what I do," Stahl said in an interview. "I loved it before I got to *60 Minutes*, I found it addictive. One reason I continue to be enamored of it is *60 Minutes*, where fundamentally we choose our own stories. I'm never working on a story, a person, a policy I'm not committed to since I've chosen it. It's one reason I still find I haven't gotten burned out or tired. I wake up almost every day excited to go to work. It's still a joy."

As CBS News White House correspondent covering the Carter and Reagan presidencies and part of George H.W. Bush's term and a *60 Minutes* correspondent since 1991, Stahl has consistently broken the big story. Her scoops include beating the competition on Al Gore's decision not to run again for president, as well as an interview with American hostage Roy Hallums after his 10 months in Iraqi captivity. She spoke with Nancy Pelosi before

she became the first woman speaker of the house, and with the families of Duke University lacrosse players exonerated in a high-profile, racially tinged rape case.

A multiple Emmy Award winner, including a Lifetime Achievement Emmy, she most recently was honored for her 2006 interview of ex-Hewlett-Packard Chairwoman Patricia Dunn.

Stahl has won the respect of bosses and peers alike with her coverage of stories ranging from the assassination attempt on President Reagan in 1981 to the Gulf War to her insightful reports on election night and from national political conventions.

Stahl joined CBS's Washington bureau in 1972 as part of the wave of affirmative action women and minority journalists sweeping the industry. Her expectations were initially low, but she jumped at every opportunity until she was juggling an impressive, if "insane," schedule of daily White House reporting duties, *Face the Nation* on Sundays, marriage and motherhood.

"I look back and say, 'How did I do it?'" Her answer: "I have a really nice husband [author Aaron

Latham, whose Hollywood screenwriting credits include *Urban Cowboy*. And, I had a mother [the late Dolly Stahl] who, while she ran my life, kept telling me I could do it all... She gave me permission over and over. She wanted me to have the career she hadn't had."

Stahl thought of herself not so much as a trailblazing woman journalist in the nation's capital, but as a hard worker scrambling





Stahl takes a stroll with Mark Zuckerberg.

to prove herself. That she succeeded so brilliantly only burnished the Women's Movement. Her assessment today is that women journalists have arrived, with the exception of securing top news division leadership positions.

She has moved gracefully through her career, from a tough, no-nonsense correspondent with a tightly teased and sprayed hairdo working with the likes of Walter Cronkite and Dan Rather, to the deeply human interviewer with a stylish haircut on *60 Minutes* where she lavishes so much time and emotion on her segments they come to seem like "children" among whom she's hard pressed to name a favorite.

"One of my first human interest stories was about a brain surgeon who himself got cancer," Stahl recalls. "I just adored him." But, after reviewing the footage she was certain the segment couldn't air. "I went to [60 Minutes founder] Don Hewitt and said, 'You can't run this. There isn't a frame where you don't know I just love him.' Hewitt said, 'This is the place where you can show you love someone.' It was thrilling to me I could show the public what I was feeling."

Stahl is optimistic *60 Minutes* is on the right track under Jeff Fager, chairman of CBS News and executive producer of the program, saying he's sharpened the venerable news magazine to focus

even more on the "big story" of the moment, such as Steve Kroft's exclusive with President Obama in May following the killing of terrorist leader Osama bin Laden. Stahl is less sanguine as to what's happening in journalism as a whole.

"I'm unsure when people ask me," she admits. "I'm a little pessimistic, a little uncertain about the future."

Coming from the "golden age" of broadcasting where the nightly network news was a unify-

Stahl interviews George H.W. Bush and First Lady Barbara Bush for *Face the Nation*.



PRESIDENT'S AWARD LESLEY STAHL



Above, Stahl interviews Justice Antonin Scalia for *60 Minutes* in 2008.

Sen. Scott Brown (R.-Mass) is interviewed for *60 Minutes* this past February, right.



Stahl interviews Gen. Raymond Odierno in Iraq about the eventual U.S. pullout for a 2010 *60 Minutes* segment.

ing force in the country, today's fragmentation of Internet-driven information introduces both a level of confusion and presents opportunities, she says. Stahl has her own web presence, [wowowow.com](#) (*The Women on the Web*), created with other influential women as a place to share thoughts on modern life.

"I wanted to be on the web, I knew it was the future. I wanted to be an entrepreneur, and thought running a new company would be wonderful, and I wanted to start a business with women."

Stahl doubts the new Internet technologies will spawn as many famous journalists. Then again, that's not necessarily a bad thing. "There were too many celebrities in the business anyway."

What eats at her is whether the smartest kids in the class will be drawn to journalism as they were in the post-Watergate days, a time when the craft had a certain romance to it, and drew idealists who wanted to pursue an honorable and important career.

She's also troubled by the growing number of outlets broadcasting slanted versions of the news, be it from the right or the left.

"Too many people get their news from a biased place where they always agree with the position and don't listen to the other side," she said. "The information people are getting is tilted and I'm not sure that's healthy for the country."

At the pinnacle of her profession, Stahl says she may someday write a follow-up to *Reporting Live* (Simon & Schuster, 1999), but for now her heart is with *60 Minutes* and each of the 20 or so segments she pours it into each year.

"I love getting up and going to work, the stories I cover," she said. "I still have the idealism in what we do. I love the people I work with. It's all terrific."

And, she has another scoop: a new grandchild.



Soviet leader Boris Yeltsin in 1992.