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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one to one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined by Joanne Lipman, editor-in-chief for USA TODAY. Joanne began her career as an intern at The Wall Street Journal, rising to become deputy managing editor, and presiding over three Pulitzers for the newspaper in the process. She joined Gannett in 2015 as chief content officer and editor-in-chief of the USA TODAY Network, and subsequently became editor-in-chief of USA TODAY. Her book, *Strings Attached*, which she co-authored, is a bestseller, and she's a recipient of the National Magazine Award, the John Hancock Award and the Matrix Award for Women in Communications.

Joanne, thank you for joining me.

Thanks for having me!

So, Joanne, you've actually got a new book coming out as well, haven't you? We were chatting before the recording started, it sounds incredibly interesting. It's called *That's What She Said* in the US, but it's got a different name in the UK, is that right?

That's right. It's coming out in the UK under the name *Win Win*. It looks at sexual harassment and unconscious bias and the issues that women face, but what's really interesting about this book is it's written for men. The full title is *That's What She Said: What Men Need to Know (and Women Need to Tell Them) About Working Together*.

Well, that couldn't be any more topical or timely at the moment. Tell us about the genesis of the book.

Sure. So the book started out because I noticed that women talk amongst ourselves all the time about the issues we face. Every women knows what it feels like to be marginalised, overlooked, interrupted, all sorts of things. And we talk about it, and there's conferences for women, and there's books for women. But what we don't do is talk to men about it. And there are two unfortunate side effects from that. One is that we unintentionally demonise perfectly good guys, and the second side effect is that because we're not talking to men about the issues we face, they're sort of

clueless. They don't know what the issues are. And so a couple years ago I wrote a piece that ran in The Wall Street Journal, it was called Women at Work: A Guide for Men, and that piece went viral. And I realised that there was a hunger for this kind of information, and so that in turn led to the book.

And it sounds like there's an incredible demand for it because it's leading to changes in terms of your own career, isn't it?

Yes, it is. So what's happened is –this is something that I felt strongly about all along – I've been working on this book for about three years, but certainly in the last few months what happened is that interest has exploded. So much so that the publisher has been inundated with requests, speaking in, working with companies and all that sort of thing. They moved up the publication date – it was supposed to be in February of next year, of 2018, it will now be in January – and the reason is because with all of this conversation around sexual harassment and sexual assault, it's led to an increased understanding that this is not a female issue. This is a male issue. It's an issue for everyone, and we all need to be part of the solution, and that's entirely what the book is about. The book is women talking to each other can at most solve 50% of the problem, and we really need men to join the conversation. And a big part of the book is looking at success stories. I crossed the country and I went to both in the United States and abroad, and talked to men who have had success in trying to close the gender gap. So the book really is very proactive and solutions oriented, and does not demonise men. I actually say that like right in the first chapter: there's no man bashing in this book!

And you think those people will presume some man bashing right in the beginning even though they've not read the book? They won't even judge by its cover, they'll just judge it by the fact it exists, and condemn you.

Well, any time that you write or speak about gender it becomes very controversial and politicised. The point is it shouldn't, right? This as an issue for all of us. And I think one of the positives that has come out of these last few months of turmoil about sexual harassment in the workplace, is that men are really stepping up and understanding that this is an issue that they need to really own themselves as well. And also, the stories that we're hearing are horrendous and they are far more frequent than I think most people realise. At the same time, the vast majority of men are not sexual predators. The vast majority of men want to do the right thing. They want this for their wives and their daughters. The economic case for women in the workplace is that it is indisputable. Study after study shows that adding women to work groups makes them more successful, more creative, financially more successful. So there is a business case for this, in addition to just the social case, although the social case should be strong enough as it is. But there is certainly a powerful business case for equity, for women's equality in the workplace.

It's great that you're being so proactive about this and being part of the solution, but do you feel a tiny bit of disappointment that you're still having to make these arguments in 2017 going into 2018?

Yes. That's something I talk about in *That's What She Said*, is this idea that when I graduated from college, we thought the problem was already solved, and that was several decades ago. We're talking about the 1980s. We figured that this issue had already been solved by the women who came before us, and that we were going out on equal footing into an equal world, and it was a shock to see that we're still talking about these issues. And not only are we talking about them, but our daughters are facing similar issues, which is really remarkable that that would be happening in this day and age. I think part of the issue is that it's a very intractable issue in society. Part of the issue is that we have had decades of what's called 'diversity training' that's backfired. There is really interesting research out of Harvard that found that... there's a researcher named Frank Dobbins, who looked at 30 years' worth of diversity training at hundreds of companies, and found that for women it actually made things worse. And the reason was that diversity training, historically, basically was geared toward white men, and as a diversity trainer told me, he said, "Basically what we did, it consisted of us beating men over the head with a two by four," and men came away feeling guilty and feeling defensive, and it really undermined the message of diversity training. And they came away with a message that it's all your fault, and that's what my book, *That's What She Said*, that's what we're trying to get away from. It's not us against them. We're all in this together. And a big piece of this also is unconscious bias, which is a phrase I'm sure that many people are hearing more about, which is these biases that we all have – men as well as women – that are buried so deeply inside of us that we don't even realise that they exist, and they are... there are biases against a variety of people, but among them are working women. And in fact, there's a thing called the implicit bias test that you can take online, and I took the test for working women, and even I came out as moderately biased against working women. And so the key here is just to be aware of the issues, aware of the biases, so that we can counteract them. You cannot eliminate your unconscious bias, but you can take actions to ensure that you're aware of it, and that you can consciously counteract that.

It seems to me to be quite a multifaceted problem, but even though you're right to not to demonise men, because you want a constructive dialogue with them, it is about men ultimately taking responsibility for their own behaviour and their own unconscious biases.

It is. So men as well as women need to take responsibility. And of course, the real issue here with men is that men are in most of your power positions. You interview media leaders across the industry, and my guess is most of the people you're interviewing are men, and that perpetuates itself. There is a really interesting computer-generated study that said if you take a company that hires absolutely equally, 50-50, male-female, and if you programme in just a 1% bias against women, that by the time you get to the top of their company it's two thirds male. And it's just at every level, women are something like 15% less likely to be promoted than men. And so it's these very tiny biases, and they often come out in things like, "Well, she's not a great cultural fit." That's one of the things that you hear. "She just doesn't fit." There is a reason she doesn't fit – it's because it's a bunch of guys, and she's a woman! She's different. So there are these issues that we need to overcome. There are also issues in meetings. The dynamic that you see in meetings. Really, meetings are essentially the killing fields of a woman's career because men are much more likely to interrupt women than to interrupt other men. This goes for women at every

single level of their careers. In fact, there is a study of Supreme Court justices that found that female Supreme Court justices in the United States are interrupted three times more frequently than male Supreme Court justices. So this is something that is endemic throughout. I've heard Christine Lagarde, the head of the IMF, talking about this, and talking about how, in meetings, when a man talks everybody snaps to attention, but when a woman speaks you hear the shuffling of papers, you know, people are looking down, maybe they're looking at their phones. There's just less attention paid to the female voice. And so once we become aware of these issues, we can all do something in order to make sure that we are aware, and can change our own behaviour.

What kind of impact do you want to have with the book? What do you want the reader of the book to take away? Is it for them to become more aware of their own conscious and unconscious biases? Is it societal change? What are the practical things that you argue for in the book?

Yes, so practically speaking, I actually give different tips about things that you can do to even the playing field, and these are tips that are taken generally from men who have been quite successful in doing this. And so what I really like to come away from is to depoliticise the conversation, and to make this a conversation where men and women feel equally comfortable talking about the issue. Right now, if women start talking about this issue in a mixed group, the men just clam up. And you talk to the men and they are scared to death of speaking up about this issue because, first of all, they're afraid that they might say the wrong thing, they're afraid that they will get shunned, they're afraid that it's not their message, that they don't have a right to speak about this issue, but they do. They do. They are a part of this issue just as much as women are. And so my hope, in the big picture, is that this becomes a conversation that's completely acceptable to have in mixed company, and then we can start to work together to really solve these issues that I had thought were solved 30 years ago. So we could finally get on a path toward solving these issues that have been just so endemic in society.

It seems to me that there'll always be the kind of Harvey Weinsteins of this world that are sexual predators, that have gotten away with it by a combination of a variety of factors, but one of which is that society just didn't seem to have a coherent response to them. Whereas now, with the increased awareness of these kind of predators, it seems to me – and this might be naïve, you might disagree with me – but it seems to me that a Harvey Weinstein of, say, 20 years from now won't be able to get away with it in the same way that he did 20 years ago.

Yes. I think what's really important is that women not be ostracised or penalised for coming forward. The reason that sexual predators in powerful positions have gotten away with this before is because the women who came forward were not believed, they were slut-shamed. They faced consequences. They couldn't get employment. And so what's happened is in a lot of these companies where there have been cases such as this, where you have a powerful man where women have come forward, you end up with the women being paid with these settlements that they have to keep silent. And what we need to come to is – and what we're getting closer to – is a

society where it's okay for the women to come forward, because they will be believed. And the reason so many have kept silent is they'll take the money and keep silent because they're trying to protect their own reputation, and be able to get employed again. There should not be any sort of penalty for women to come forward and to expose this behaviour.

How do you think that this topic will play out over the next couple of years? Is this something that's going to take a generation to solve, or do you think given the speed of social media, the speed of our ideas, that this is going to at least take significant strides forward to a solution reasonably quickly?

So the idea of That's What She Said is to present solutions. It really is about solutions to the broad issue, not just of sexual harassment, but of inequality of women, and the lack of women in leadership, and how do we come to a more equitable workplace, and a more equitable society. So I would say that right now we're focused on what is the problem, which are these harassment cases and the men getting fired that we're hearing about every single day. The next step will be focusing on solutions and bringing men into the conversation, which is what That's What She Said is all about, is being what is the solution to this, and how do we bring men into this conversation. Then my hope is that this becomes a lasting solution that we're going to continue to work and move forward on this. I think what we have to be cognisant of is that we in the past have thought that the problem was solved, and the problem has continued. So if you think back to 1991 with Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas, Anita Hill is the person who brought the phrase 'sexual harassment' into the mainstream. It really wasn't a phrase that people used, and it really wasn't something that women thought about a lot, because before Anita Hill, in the '80s and the '70s and before, working women being discriminated against was sort of part of life. Working women getting hit on was just part of life. Whereas Anita Hill brought this attention that this is wrong. A lot of people thought that that would solve the problem. That was in 1991. So we're talking more than 25 years later, and we are still experiencing exactly the same issues. So my hope is that maybe this time we will have a more lasting solution.

Does it make you a little bit though, as a citizen, that presidents of the USA recently, within a generation, still have a problem here? You look at Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, the talk at the time seem to be whether he lied in his deposition and no one seemed to give adequate focus on the fact that there was a huge power imbalance between the President of the United States and an intern. You then fast forward to Donald J Trump, the president that we currently have, who de facto admitted to sexual assault in a tape before he was elected, and yet was still elected. That must give you some pause.

So, what I take away is, yes, we've had this with our presidents, with both Clinton and with Trump, you're talking both parties. What I take away, however, is on the positive side, which is that men are responding, and men are responding really forcefully. I had my own situation as a very young reporter. One of the first interviews I ever did with a businessman, he had me come up to his office and he locked the door, and he stripped down to his underwear. And I was 22, I was a very young reporter, I had just started my job, and I was not sure how to act. This is pre-Anita

Hill and I didn't know what to do. So I was like, "I'm not going to let this guy rattle me," so I pulled out my reporter's notebook and I interviewed him in his underwear. Now, I went back to my office and I told my editor of this piece about it, and the editor laughed. And he thought it was hysterical.

That's a breathtakingly inappropriate response on his part.

Well, but at the time it wasn't. That's what I'm saying. At that time, pre-Anita Hill, he was like, "You go, girl. You're tough." Like, "You showed him." So that was a different time. And so my point being if that happened now, that would be a breathtakingly inappropriate response now, and I don't think any male boss or female boss would react in that way. Now, they would call the police, right? So I view that as progress. Even I, at that time, I didn't think of it as sexual harassment. I thought of it as a source who was trying to get me rattled. And it was just part of life. It was part of going to work. Whereas now it's not. And no boss would react in that way now, including that guy. So I view that as progress.

But also that situation at the time wasn't your fault in any way. You could have reacted any way. You were the victim there. He should have taken responsibility for that. That's unbelievable behaviour.

Yes, it was terrible behaviour. But at the time, it was like, look, I survived it. The guy didn't attack me, and it was not that unusual. At the time, I actually wrote about this in USA Today in an editorial, and I was really surprised by the response because younger people said to me, "Oh, my gosh, what a horrendous experience. Did you have counselling? Did you have post-traumatic stress?" I'm like, "No, actually I didn't. I really didn't think much about it until recently." But older women, older reporters who have been around for a while, one of them came up to me and she said, "That was hilarious! Like, who didn't that happen to?" It happened to all of us back then. And that's just one of the things that women put up with at that time. Now, I think there's an awareness that that is incredibly inappropriate behaviour, and that there are repercussions for that, and I don't think there is an executive in the land who would laugh that off. And so that I think is an important change in society, and I think that's a very positive change.

Well, you steered the conversation there very expertly toward the beginning of your career. Might we just dwell on that for a little bit? Did you always want to be a journalist? When you started out, what were your ambitions?

So... I did. I always wanted to be a journalist. Actually, the first thing I wanted to be was a spy, because I read a book!

You might well still be a spy, but I can't ask you that!

I read a book when I was seven years old called Harriet the Spy. It was a fabulous book, and she walked around with a notebook, and she took notes on all of her neighbours. And so I started doing the same thing. And that led to just, you know, I had insatiable curiosity and I loved to write. I'd love to ask questions, and then I realised there was actually an outlet for that, which was the school newspaper. And

so, since I could write and read, basically I wanted to be... I didn't even realise it at the time but wanted to be a journalist. And so, my career, I did a variety of different media as a young person in school – the newspaper, the magazine, the literary magazine, the radio station – you name it, I did it. But when I was in college, I had an internship when I was 18 with a magazine called Saturday Review, which sadly no longer exists. But I would commute into New York City from New Jersey where I grew up, every single day, with my dad, who was a businessman, and this is before the iPhone was invented. And so I was really bored on the commute on the bus, and out of sheer boredom I picked up my dad's Wall Street Journal, which he read on the way to work every day. The Wall Street Journal had come to my house every single day since before I was born and I'd never looked at it. And out of boredom one day I picked it up and I was hooked. It was black and white with no pictures at that time, and I started reading it, and I was absolutely transfixed by it. On the front page, the reading was the best writing I had ever read. And then on the inside, what I realised were what I thought of as boring stories, when you started reading them every day they were these mini dramas. It was like a soap opera every single day; you're seeing the next episode of what's happening inside these companies. And I was absolutely in love, and I said, "This is my dream. Someday I want to work at this paper." And the Wall Street Journal had an internship, and throughout college I worked on the school paper, I was at Yale, I worked at the Yale Daily News, and I really focused on... there was an internship at the Wall Street Journal for college juniors, and that was my goal, was to get that internship, which I did. And after the internship, which was just a fabulous summer, I was fortunate enough that they hired me for after graduation. So I started there right when I graduated, and then spent the next 22 years there, starting as a reporter and then ultimately I became a columnist and then an editor on the page one desk, and then I created Weekend Journal, and created Personal Journal, and I became deputy managing editor overseeing a lot of that content, including creating the Saturday paper, and it was phenomenal. I just loved my time there and learned so much. From there, I was wooed away. I actually never expected to leave.

So you were going to be a WSJ lifer.

I was going to be a lifer. I was very happy with what I was doing. But I was approached by Si Newhouse, who unfortunately recently passed. But I was approached by Si Newhouse, who owned and ran Condé Nast, who asked me if I could come over and start for them a business magazine that would fit into the family of Condé Nast publications, which includes Vanity Fair and The New Yorker and Vogue, and just started asking me, and at first the conversations we had were just like, you know, I said, "Well, let me just tell you about the magazine I would like to read." And the magazine I would love to read is a business magazine that really tells those great juicy stories, but connects the dots between the executive who on the one hand runs a major hedge fund and on the other hand is a Broadway producer. And if you read the New York Times you'll read about the business guy in the business section, and the producer in the art section, but nobody connects the dots. And I wanted to be able to connect the dots.

Because both are business stories.

Exactly. And they're the same person, right? It's the same person, different facets of their life. And I said, "I want that complete story. I want something that is delicious to look at, with great photography that you would see in these Condé Nast publications, and great storytelling and writing." And he said, "Well, why don't you come here and create that magazine?"

That's an irresistible offer.

That was irresistible. That was irresistible. So I went over and created, and was editor-in-chief of Condé Nast Portfolio business magazine. And I was there for several years, and it was a phenomenal experience, it was also a wonderful experience to be able to work with Si Newhouse, a really legendary owner of magazines. I don't think that that type of media mogul exists in the current world.

I would have loved to have got him on this podcast. Obviously we can't now, sadly, but he would have been great.

Oh, it was a remarkable experience. But unfortunately, we launched shortly before the financial crisis. We had great coverage of the financial crisis, including our cover story by Michael Lewis. The cover story became the seed for his book and then the film *The Big Short*.

Love that film.

It is a wonderful film. Great book. It started with a cover story in Portfolio Magazine. But Condé Nast, after the financial crisis and advertising fell apart, had to close a number of magazines, so sadly it doesn't exist any more. But it was a wonderful, wonderful experience. And since then I've written books, and consulted with a variety of companies, went several years ago to Gannett, and this has been a phenomenal experience as well.

Because USA TODAY is just an incredible iconic brand.

It's iconic. And Gannett is a phenomenal company because it owns USA TODAY and 109 local properties.

It owns The Press, which is York's local newspaper through Newsquest, one of its divisions.

Yes. And Newsquest, I was in England recently, visiting with the Newsquest folks, which is a terrific organisation. What had happened was, about two and a half years ago, Gannett, the company, split in two. It used to own a whole bunch of broadcast stations as well as these legacy print products which, by the way, are now overwhelmingly digital. This really is a digital company. So the company split in two and the broadcast properties went into a company called Tegna, and Gannett was these 110 properties, including USA TODAY. And the new CEO, Bob Dickey, who had been with the company, became CEO of Gannett, overseeing all these properties. And Bob had this kind of genius idea, which was these properties, all these properties, and that includes not just USA TODAY but the Detroit Free Press,

the Cincinnati Enquirer, the Arizona Republic, they'd all been run essentially as silos, as individual properties. And Bob Dickey had really a stroke of genius to say, rather than having these individual newsrooms, let's create the USA TODAY Network with USA TODAY itself as the flagship, and then working with all of these local properties.

It's one of these genius ideas that after the fact you think, "We all should have thought of that," but at the time it was quite difficult.

I think people had raised the concept before, but Bob was the guy who actually got it done. So he brought me in as the first chief content officer of the company to actually oversee and create the USA TODAY Network. And it's been phenomenal to see, because we went from what was essentially a 110 individual newsrooms, each one of which, like every newsroom, has its own constraints, to an organisation of more than 3,000 journalists across the entire country. We are in red states and blue states, we're in big cities, small towns, suburban areas, rural areas, and we really represent all of America, and it's very different than any other national news organisation, because most of your big national news organisations are based primarily on the coasts. You're talking New York, DC, LA. In fact, somebody crunched the numbers and found that one out of every five journalists in America is based in one of those three cities.

One of the Coasties, as they're called.

Yes, exactly. And so we crunched the numbers ourselves, and we found that for the USA TODAY Network, it was one in 39 journalists based in one of those coastal cities. In other words, the vast majority of our journalists are spread out across the country, the whole country, and we can bring the perspective that's quite different than any other national publication. And then we can also, whatever happens, wherever in the United States, we can cover both locally and then nationally. So if you look at just this past year with the hurricanes, Hurricane Harvey touched down in Corpus Christi, Texas, where we owned the Corpus Christi Caller-Times. And so, the Corpus Christi team there was able to lead hurricane coverage, to get help from sister properties when needed, you know, people came from other surrounding properties, from Arizona or from other properties, can come and help, but able to then feed that coverage to the national desk at USA TODAY. USA TODAY then can distribute that across all 110 properties. In a sense, we act almost as our own AP, like the Associated Press, by being able to cover things on the ground. And we've also been able to do all sorts of really interesting and very innovative things in the digital sense. We trained up 10 of our properties in drone journalism, we have been very active in virtual reality, we created the first virtual reality news programme, and again, different properties are able to contribute to this programme – it's called Virtually There. We've been very, very active, one of the leaders in various areas of social media and video, so it's really been phenomenal and exciting to see how all these journalists from across the country are working together. And in a way, when I first joined the company – I mean, I think this is sort of indicative of how we work now – when I first joined the company, the singer Natalie Cole had died suddenly, and USA TODAY actually had an obituary in the bank and was able to alert on her death and have an obituary ready to go. And kudos to them for doing that. But the next day, I was looking around at some of the other properties and saw that they had ran

AP copy because they didn't know that USA TODAY had this. Well, that was more than two years ago. That would never, ever happen now.

It's a needless duplication in terms of resources.

Exactly. There was duplication across the properties that now just doesn't happen. So now there would be coordination. Now, there's coordination across all sorts of news and feature areas. And in fact, USA TODAY Network this year was a finalist for the investigative Pulitzer Prize for a series that we did on abusive teachers, in which we had our data journalists, who are phenomenal, at USA TODAY look across all 50 states at what happens to teachers who are fired, you know, some of them for abusing children physically or sexually, and found that there's this broken system of tracking these teachers, and so therefore teachers were able to get fired in one state and show up a few weeks later in a different state in front of a classroom. And we were able to do that by... the great data journalists at USA TODAY did it, but then they distributed that data to all of our local properties.

And completely localised it.

So they could each localise that story for their own local area. And at the same time, USA TODAY ran a big national series, and it's phenomenal kind of journalism that others can't do. We did a very similar series, very similar kind of a way of reporting, looking at, in the wake of Flint, which had the water crisis, we said, "How many other communities are facing crises like this?" And we found that there were more than 2,000 communities spread across all 50 states that had toxic levels of lead in their tap water. And again, we were able to write a big national series, and at the same time spread out that material, and there were more than 80 localised versions of that story that appeared throughout the USA TODAY Network. So it's an incredibly powerful journalistic organisation.

I see that as a reader when I read USA TODAY, you've got much stronger regional and local coverage that can come to the national attention. But similarly, when I read it one of the local newspapers here when I travel around the US, you've got the page that says, "Here's what's happening nationally via USA TODAY," and it's got that strength of the national resources. It strikes me that it's also good from the regional journalist's own career point of view, because if something breaks that's big in their region, rather than USA TODAY, as you've just said, recycling AP copy, they've got a chance to be nationally heard on that.

That's right. And it's really exciting for, you know, if you're working in... because any one of our journalists in any newsroom, no matter how small, is able to break news and to see, when they write a great story, it shows up on USA TODAY and it can show up on the front page of the print version of USA TODAY. So that is something that's it's a great opportunity for local journalists, it gives them a really great career path. And because we have these properties that go from very small all the way up to USA TODAY, there is a great career ladder throughout the company that you can go from a smaller to a medium to a regional to a big metro right up to USA TODAY, and there is also the ability for people like me to get exposure to our senior editors

and our senior corporate staff, even to get exposure to journalists from very small markets, and to see some of the great work that they can do.

It's the kind of thing that I think, even a decade from now or a few years from now, that kind of management organisational people at Harvard will study to try and see how this is the best of both worlds. You've empowered both sides of the see-saw without alienating the other.

Right. And it's really worked so smoothly. And I've said this before internally, but it's just come together faster than I possibly could have imagined. And to me, what it shows you is that the power of the network is so strong, and only getting stronger every day. It's very exciting.

You're editor in chief of USA TODAY, you had 22 years at The Wall Street Journal. Do you feel a slight bit of melancholy that those two iconic American brands that, in the new chapter of your life, you'll be moving away from?

Well, I'm very excited about the new chapter because that is something that I feel passionate about, and that I've written about over the years, and now have an opportunity to really explore and to hopefully make an impact. You never know, but so far the interest that we're seeing shows an opportunity to perhaps be a change agent. And as a journalist, what you do is shine light on dark corners, to be able to hold the powerful to account. To effect change for the good. And so this is an opportunity to hopefully be a change agent on a very different platform, which is, to me, just very exciting.

Will you miss in any way the kind of day to day life of being a journalist, of being an editor?

I have no doubt. Look, I love a newsroom. I love the energy, and I love being able to work with really smart journalists, and to shape the culture. I think the thing that really excites me in journalism and that I've done throughout my career, is to kind of look for the white space, look for the place where others aren't looking, and to create something that people say, "I didn't even I was looking for that but I really want that," right? And so this, to me, is a very similar move to what I'd done when... you know, I was very happy at the Wall Street Journal, but took that week to go to Condé Nast, and took another leap to come to Gannett and USA TODAY. And so I have an appetite for sort of creating new things, and so this is, to me, part of a how my entire career has been, and it's been very exciting.

Do you think journalists are born or do you think they're made? It sounds to me like from the beginning of our conversation that this was right from the beginning. When people start out in your newsroom, do you have a gut feeling whether they're going to succeed or not? Is there a characteristic of being a journalist, like you said a curiosity or something, or do you think it is something that people can start off and then excel at if they try hard enough?

I have to say, I truly believe that journalism is a calling. It's something that you have to do. I mean, the best journalists I know would basically do it for free. Like, you

know, don't tell employers that. But it's what they do, it's who they are. And in the same way that when you talk to people who are dancers or actors who just... or in religion, religious leaders, right? It is a calling. And the reason I believe that is, and certainly I felt it as soon as I learned how to read, essentially, and to write, but I see it also when... you know, I guest teach journalism classes at various universities, and I see it when I go and teach these students, because without question our industry now versus when I started is under extreme financial pressure. We're in the midst of transformation, radical transformation, and we don't know exactly where it's going. It has never been harder to make a living in journalism than it is now. There are many, many outlets. There are many, many more places where you can be a journalist, but many fewer places where you can actually earn a living doing it. And yet, when I go to these classes at universities, the students have got the fire in their belly and they're just as excited. And so you see that it's not... these are students. Anybody who's really good at journalism, is a great journalist, could easily be a great lawyer or doctor or investment banker or consultant. Anyone who's really smart and good at journalism could easily have chosen another easier, more lucrative career path, but they haven't. And there's a reason for that.

They've chosen penury and pain.

My father used to say... my first book, *Strings Attached*, was a music memoir, because as a kid I was very involved as a musician. In addition to writing. And my dad used to say to me when I was going to college, he used to say, "You're either going to be a starving writer or a starving musician." And I said to him, "I don't care, because I'm going to do it for love. Because that's who I am." He would say, "You're going to starve," and I would say, "So what?"

But it's good that you've found a career where I imagine you're not starving. At least you've got food to eat.

I have to say, it's all been gravy. Like the fact that I've been able to earn a living as a journalist has been just such a gift. It's incredible.

Do you feel sorry, or do you admire journalism students starting on their career now? Because in one sense, and we've touched upon this in the podcast before, that the Internet has given them all the more opportunity and outlets to be discovered, you know, they can do their own podcast and their own blogs, so that in one sense the ability to make a name for yourself is easier. But on the other hand, like you've just said, correctly, there's so few people in newsrooms these days, so few jobs, that the likelihood of them not being able to eat is much more so now than it was than perhaps when you started out. Would you agree?

Yes. Look, I think it's a tough way to make a living, but again, you still see young people coming in, I'm still hiring young people, and I'm very impressed with the work that they're doing and their work ethic. And so I do think that, as I said, it's a calling. I wouldn't say like, if you're looking at, you know, should I be a doctor or a lawyer or should I be an accountant, like if it's just sort of like one of your long list of things you

might want to do, it's not the easiest way to make a living, but for those who are passionate about it there is still a pathway. Absolutely.

What advice would you give to someone then, in that situation, that's starting out in a career in journalism? What specific things should they do to get on the radar of someone like you? Because I imagine you must have a pile of CVs – or résumés, as we would call them in New York – how do you stand out when there's 50 other resumes in that pile on your desk?

So there's a few things that I tell young people. The first thing I tell students is make sure you know how to code, take classes in coding. One of the things that's incredibly valuable, because everybody now is a digital producer, so there are very few people who are, and certainly none in this organisation at USA TODAY Network, there is nobody who just sits and writes. I mean, we think constantly about different forms of digital media. We're thinking about what's the social play, you know, what's the video that goes with this, what sort of podcast might we be doing, you know, what's the drone footage. There's always something that we are thinking about as we are writing stories. So it's not just about the words. And so, understanding multimedia is very important, but coding, I think, is particularly important, because so much of what is digitally produced now is being produced by the people who are doing it from soup to nuts. And older people, and generally the people running the newsrooms, who are a generation or two ahead of these people starting out, may not know how to use these skills, and they certainly didn't grow up with these skills. So these digitally native skills are incredibly important. So that's one thing. And then the other thing that I tell young people is, talk to everybody you can. Keep in touch with them, and when you're doing something new, just send out an email. You might risk being a little bit of a pain in the neck but on the other hand it's just good to keep people informed about what you're doing. There are people who I hired right out of college at the Wall Street Journal 20 years ago who faithfully kept in touch with me just to let me know what they're doing, and now they're are superstars in various other industries, and it's a lot of fun to see. There is something very gratifying to see people who you mentored when they were younger, and seeing how successful they are now. You see that they're mentoring a whole new generation of people, so it's great.

What is it you look for when you hire people?

You certainly look for raw talent, by which I mean there's writing talent, but there's also the curiosity piece of it. You look for someone who is scrupulously honest in how they answer your questions. If you ask somebody, for example, "What's the salary where you are now?" and they give you a number that is inflated, you're going to find that out. That does not speak well of them. But I think there is a curiosity factor. They ask a lot of questions about how does that operation work. Because, you see, that's how the reporter brain works. And years later, I found out this is how I got the internship at The Wall Street Journal actually. When I went in for an interview – this is when I was in college – I went in for an interview, was a finalist with a dozen people for this Wall Street Journal internship, and they invited a dozen students in. And I got there, and was completely intimidated, because I'd only written for my college paper and my hometown newspaper in New Jersey – I hadn't done anything

fancy. And these people had interned at places like Time and Newsweek, and some of them were in law school and graduate school.

I'd have been intimidated there as well.

I was totally intimidated. And I got there and I said, "Okay, I clearly don't have a shot." And because I was so sure I didn't have a shot, I was very uninhibited. And the day that I was there was actually, there was a lot of activity in the newsroom when they were giving us the tour of the newsroom, and there was a lot of excitement. The bureau chief was giving us the tour, and I asked him what was happening, and he said, "Well, there is a big decision that came down, AT&T is being broken up." And I just started asking a ton of questions, because I didn't understand. Like, "Can you explain to me?" "Why is that?" "What's going on?" and "Why would they make that decision?" And, "What are the issues and what might happen?" And I asked all these questions, simply because I was so sure that I didn't have a shot, I may as well just like...

You've got the curiosity gene.

It was just the curiosity thing. I was just really curious about what was going on. I later found out that that was one of the key reasons I got the internship, was because I asked all the questions. And one of the biggest issues among journalists, and this was particularly true in business journalism but I think it's true in journalism generally, is there sometimes is a tendency for the journalist to not want to admit that they don't understand what somebody is talking about. And particularly in business journalism, executives will try and pull the wool over a journalist's eyes by using a lot of MBA-speak and a lot of jargon, with the expectation that they can kind of blow you away with the jargon, and you have to have that gene that says, "Wait a second, I don't actually understand." And there's some humility that you need there to say, "I don't understand what you're talking about. Can you please unpack that for me and explain that to me?" And you have to keep digging down to like, "Can you please explain in plain English?" And as a reporter, you would see executives who were trying to do this, which would sometimes be very patronising. They would say, "Well clearly, you're not up to your job, if you don't understand." And they were just basically trying to obfuscate. And so it's very important to have no fear and to have the humility to say, "I don't get it. Please explain." And that was what they saw in me, was this curiosity and this just keep asking questions until you get it to me in plain English, because if you can't explain it to me in plain English then I cannot explain it and write about it in a news report, because then my own readers are not going to be able to understand it either. And that's how some of the biggest corporate scandals of our time unfolded, because of a lot of the doublespeak of some of these executives. If you think about things like the Enron scandal, that was a big piece of it.

And yet without being overly pompous or precious about it, I do feel that journalism has a unique place in society. Because although it is a business and it has to be commercial to be sustainable, you are calling out people. You are calling to attention behaviour and things that are happening that those people might not necessarily want to do. So there's this is unique tension between interviewing them, because if you are a journalist you cannot be

intimidated. Then you also have the commercial pressure as well. Lots of people say, “Well, this company advertises in your magazine, therefore you have to either go easy or go hard on them.” You often go where the story is, don’t you?

Oh, absolutely. You have to go where the story is. And any good publishers, and I have to say that Gannett and USA TODAY have been absolutely exemplary in this way, that you go where the story is. That is our role as journalists. It’s incredibly important to democracy that we are there to call the powerful to account and to go where the story takes us, without fear or favour, and that role has never been more important than it is today, that is for sure.

What are the stories that you’ve worked on in your career that you’ve been most proud of?

Gosh!

There’s obviously been quite a few!

Well, I’m thinking about the stories that I have worked on myself, but I’m also thinking about stories that my publications have worked on that I’ve edited.

Because as an editor you have a shared sense of pride, don’t you? In fact, in a sense you can even be more prideful because you’ve created a culture and an organisation that actually uncovered that particular story. Has there been a story you’ve worked on personally that’s not necessarily been important to society but that you’ve had such a good time on?

Going back to the start of my career, as I mentioned I was a musician growing up, so one of my favourite stories, probably ever, was one of the very first stories I ever wrote, where I became a street musician, and it was a first person story about being a street musician. This was definitely not the most monumental story ever written, but I have very fond memories of that one. The headline was something like, “Our reporter makes more money as a street musician than she does as a reporter!”

It’s probably still true now!

I was a kid when I wrote that one, but that was fun. I’ve been involved in coverage that really has helped change the conversation, which I think that’s incredibly important. The coverage that we did at Condé Nast of the financial crisis, and leading up to the financial crisis, I think was both important and shed a lot of light on the issues of the time that led to the crisis, and that in some ways we were able to kind of flag the coming crisis. And so I’m very proud of that work. And here at the USA TODAY network, I am just so proud of the coverage that we have done on incredibly important issues like the abusive teachers, the toxic tap water. We did a phenomenal series called Trump and the Law where our data journalists were able to... I asked a very simple question, which was – this was at a time before the election – everybody called Trump litigious. And the question I put to them was: how litigious is he? Can we find out? And our data reporters are phenomenal. And they

were able to put together a database of more than 3,500 lawsuits that the now President was involved in. And then we were able to sort of look at what these suits for, and we found a very large proportion of them were for non-payment to the little guy, to the painter and the plumber and the guy who lays the carpet, and that became an incredibly important part of the dialogue leading up to the election. And since then, this same team of reporters has done some terrific work on Trump's real estate holdings. Again, something that's been very private, but they found that there were more than 400 Trump properties worth more than \$250 million dollars, which are in a trust, which has a sole beneficiary, which is the President. And then they further looked at what's happened to sales of those properties, and they found that 70% of the sales of those properties have been by LLCs, which are shell companies that essentially hide the identity of the buyer, which is really quite significant, because you don't know who the buyer is. Are they overpaying, are they trying to influence a sitting president? We've never had a situation where that is the case before, where you've had this business relationship where private individuals or countries could come in and shield their identity and pay for property that is then directly benefiting a sitting president of the United States. So we've done some very important work along those lines. We did a phenomenal series this year called Rigg'd, where one of our reporters found that there are truckers in California who are forced to take on these 'lease to own' trucks from their employers, with leases that are so onerous that these truckers, most of whom are immigrants, many who don't have a very strong command of the English language, and they're forced to sign these leases where they're so onerous that they often end up owing money to their employers at the end of the week.

I remember it. It's basically exploitation. It's servitude. Slavery in all but name.

It's very much like indentured servitude. And we reported on stories of these truckers who were working 20 hours a day, sleeping in the truck, to try and pay off these leases. And it's led to calls for legislation. We had another series on the VA, the Veterans Administration, which has had doctors who basically committed malpractice and were let go from the VA but with a clean record and then go into private practice. That's led to calls for reform. So we've done, just in the last year, a whole variety of investigations that have led to crackdowns, to calls for congressional action, and really have fulfilled our role of shining that light in dark corners and really holding the powerful to account.

That's incredible. I was always raised to believe sunlight is the best disinfectant.

Absolutely.

Does it ever frustrate you as a citizen, never mind as an editor and as a journalist, that sometimes you shine a light, for example, on President Trump's activities, and they are seemingly ignored? We've got this whole fake news agenda now where the president is himself retweeting video of him physically fighting a CNN person, you know, that computer generated thing. He seems to want to poison the well of journalism itself.

Yes. And to me, that makes the role of journalism even more important. What we just have to do is keep doing what we're doing, which is pursuing the truth, and reporting aggressively, and reporting accurately. And that is... that's our role, and that's what we'll continue to do.

Joanne, it's been an absolute pleasure talking to you. Thank you ever so much.

Oh, thank you for having me.