

Camilla Tominey
Associate Editor, Daily Telegraph
Media Masters – November 21, 2019
Listen to the podcast online, visit www.mediamasters.fm

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 Camilla Tominey, associate editor of the Daily Telegraph. Previously the royal editor of the Sunday Express, for the last 15 years she has reported on all of the major stories from the House of Windsor, from Prince Charles's marriage to the recent engagement of Princess Beatrice. An in-demand commentator worldwide, as well as covering the Royal beat she's a prominent political reporter and commentator and is known for her pro-Brexit views.

Camilla, thank you for joining me.

Thank you.

So politics is in your blood as well, isn't it? It's quite an unusual beat.

It is a bit of an unusual beat. Politics and royals. Sometimes they intermingle.

They do! I did GCSE history...

Yes. They have historically intermingled a hell of a lot! More recently with Brexit of course, we've seen the Queen dragged into a 'constitutional crisis', as the papers put it.

It's crazy.

So it has been an overlapping beat. But I got involved with politics because I covered the 2015 election, and then I got involved in the Brexit coverage when the referendum took place in 2016. And then while I was at the Sunday Express, I was royal editor and then deputy political editor at the same time. And then for a period I was royal editor and political editor and a columnist at the same time, which was quite challenging.

So did you have some kind of camper bed in the office and just never went home?

Well, I mean I went home but I was working at home most evenings. It just became too full-on. And actually, when I was poached, I suppose you could call it, by the Telegraph to cover politics and royals, I thought, "Well, it's still a huge workload, but it wasn't going to be that I had editorship of either of those two beats." So at the Telegraph, we have a political editor and we have a royal correspondent, and I kind of provide some overview and analysis of events rather than doing the everyday events myself, if that makes sense.

And if you had to choose between one beat... or is it like children where you couldn't choose and you just have to try and work both at the same time?

To be fair, politics has been irresistible journalistically for some time, and probably three and a half years to be honest, and I love covering major royal events, and equally there have been some good royal stories lately. Obviously there's this huge narrative going on about the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, and whether there is a rift between Harry and William, and whether...

And is there? Come on, tell us.

Well, I think...

We've got very few listeners.

I think Harry himself has admitted that there have been some tensions between him and William, saying that they're both on very different paths, so that's been quite intriguing and interesting. It's been a bit of an antidote to some of the chaos and confusion that had been reigning in parliament until it was dissolved for the election.

I mean, he can't separate from the Royal family can he? This is the problem when it's the professional and the personal, isn't it?

Well, he could. He could give up his HRH title and go and live a quiet life in Africa and not take any public funding. He could do that. That is an option. Royals have exiled themselves. We saw it on a much more subtle basis with the Duchess of Kent, who withdrew from royal life. You'll remember she was the lady who always presented the trophies at Wimbledon, and she decided she wanted to do something different, and she was involved in teaching children. And so she kind of retreated from the limelight. It could happen, it might happen.

And is it a bit like a Clark Kent in Superman II where he disclaims his powers, then realises he wants them back? And at the end, goes to the Fortress of Solitude and gets them back?

I really hated Superman II; in that period where the powers were relinquished, it didn't feel right, did it?

But do you remember he returned to the diner and beat the crap out of that guy who bullied him?

That is obviously the best thing. He swung him around on that swivel chair.

He did!

And I think he then also pushed him along the bar and he crashed into a jukebox at the end. Can you go back to it? Maybe you can. At the moment, what's interesting is for the next six weeks, that couple are going to have a break from public life and spend time with their baby Archie, and maybe members of the public can appreciate that. If you need a break, if you want to say, "Stop the royal train, I need to get off," because there is intense media scrutiny, thanks to people like me and my colleagues on the royal beat, then perhaps no one begrudges them that.

Do you feel a bit sorry for the Queen at the moment? I mean, she had David Cameron saying to someone, I think it was Michael Bloomberg, that she "purred down the phone" at the referendum result, and then Boris has taken her up to the hill and back down again on proroguing parliament. She must think that these prime ministers, the modern ones, aren't a patch on the old ones.

Well, I think she may have had some periods of reflection over recent years. I know for instance, that she was equally – well, I can't attribute, we never say that the Queen is angry because at the end of the day we don't converse with her directly – but the palace voiced their displeasure at the idea that David Cameron had said inappropriate things about the Queen in his autobiography, and tried to reflect on the referendum with her in that context, and it was all a little bit awkward. So I'd say it's not been another "annus horribilis", but it's probably come quite close.

Yes. I mean, I'm not a particular supporter of the monarchy – I'm a sort of closet republican, really – but I couldn't help but feel sorry for the Queen because her whole *raison d'être* is to be above the fray.

I think she has, to be fair, remained above the fray, and by comparison, politicians seem to be, I would say, not quite as stalwart, as we have grown used to her being over the last six or more decades. And that is her USP, if you like, isn't it? This ability for her to transcend the nonsense going on in Westminster and try and keep a cool head. It's interesting when you read the royal accounts, there's always this kind of chapter which sums up what the Queen's role is. And they describe her as Mother of the Nation. That calming, steadying influence where everybody around her appear to be losing their heads. And I think we still see that now. At 93, there's less of an inclination for her to get too involved and to start troubling herself with these sorts of affairs of state. She does rise above. She keeps calm and she carries on. I mean, she is the epitome of that tea-towel slogan and it's interesting you say you're republican. I bet you say you're a republican, but do you have a bad word to say about the Queen?

Absolutely not. And that's the problem, because it undermines the argument, of course. As a republican, you'd say, we're choosing our elected head of state due to the genetic lottery of the Windsor family, and it's got it right this time. A

stopped clock is right twice a day. It's Charles I object to, all that homeopathy and busy-bodding and talking to plants.

Although...

Off with his head!

That's an interesting way to characterise the Prince of Wales' career to date.

Yes indeed.

As the longest serving heir apparent in history, of course, he's better prepared than most to be King. He does have wisdom and experience on his side.

So do I. Why can I be King?

Well, do you Paul? How old are you? If you don't mind me asking.

I'm 44. But I've aged badly, so if you think I look older than that, that will be understandable.

I don't, but at the same time he will be an old man when he takes the throne. Whether that's appropriate or not. There's all this talk about skipping a generation to William, the Duke of Cambridge. Although we may see in the next five years some sort of informal kind of regency with Prince Charles taking over more responsibility. But there's always that talk about will the Queen abdicate? No, she won't, because abdication is still a dirty word in her vocabulary and has been since Edward VIII effectively landed her father, George VI, in it, a man who initially wasn't really capable of public speaking or had the confidence to take the throne. Of course, the Second World War and his relationship with Churchill, as exemplified in the film *The King's Speech*, took him to a higher plane. But I think there's still a sense that the Queen blames her uncle for her father's very rapid demise and for his premature death, because it was too much pressure to put on him because of Edward's relationship with Wallis Simpson causing him to relinquish the throne.

I mean, you're clearly fascinated by the royal beat. What was it that attracted you to it?

I wasn't really attracted to it! It was quite funny, really. In 2005, I had been on the *Sunday Express* for quite a few years, probably about three or four years, just covering news and features. I was on the showbiz beat, which required me to sort of hang around at strange clubs late at night trying to pick up celebrity gossip, which I didn't particularly enjoy, I've got to say. And I think Charles and Camilla's engagement was announced, and there was going to be a changeover of staff. And so my editor at the time, Martin Townsend, called me into his office, and I think he said something along the lines of, "Camilla, now you are called Camilla, and you dress quite nicely, and I think you might be a good person to cover the royals for the newspaper." And I said, "Well, if those are the only qualifications needed..."

I was going to say, yes.

And I don't mean to sully Martin's reputation in any way by couching it in those terms, because, as a male editor, he has historically championed female journalists, and he certainly has been an absolutely stalwart influence in my own career. And he was the one who kind of pushed me onto ever greater things at the paper. He was the one who encouraged me to take on this ridiculous triumvirate of roles in doing the royals, politics and a column. So he's ever been very much somebody who I've looked up to in the industry. But the way he couched it initially was quite funny. I think he was saying it in the sense that he was trying to make out like it wasn't a big deal, but of course covering the Royals for a paper like the Express *is* a big deal. And I didn't know then, in 2005, just quite how the beat would be revitalised. Back then, I think, was William in university? It was all a bit quiet. The Charles and Camilla story was massive as you can imagine. And we had a couple of years of the Duchess of Cornwall's rehabilitation in public life. She had been absolutely vilified. She was a hate figure, particularly among Sunday Express readers.

Don't know why. She seems a nice lady.

She is a nice lady, and I love doing jobs with her, and she's extremely friendly.

I'm sure she is.

And her ability and her strength in rising above all the criticism has been quite something to observe, to be honest.

She obviously loves Charles very much, because she did have a choice to marry him. She didn't inherit that job.

No, that's right. But if you remember back at the time, the dialogue, I think one of the quotes was, "She was the laziest woman to ever have been born into the 20th century." She was a hate figure. We had a huge appetite for Diana news on the Daily Express. They were covering the inquest ad nauseum, and actually we had to transcend the reputation that the papers had at that time for covering, many will think, far too many Diana stories after her death, and try and repackage a new Royal family. And that wasn't just Charles and Camilla, of course. It was also as Kate Middleton, as she was then known, came onto the scene, managing our coverage of that relationship through to the moment where they got engaged. And I think from the moment they got engaged in that winter of 2010, the entire royal beat exploded and it's really seen a complete renaissance.

And what have been the key memories and the highlights of your time as a royal correspondent and a royal editor. I mean, you memorably brought the world exclusive news of Prince Harry's relationship with Meghan Markle.

Yes, that's right.

How did you get that?

If I told you that I'd have to kill you, Paul!

Do it. Do it.

Yes, it was nominated for Scoop of The Year at the British Press Awards.

Well done!

But it did not win. No, it lost out to the Times' story about Angela Leadsom criticising Theresa May because she didn't have children. But then press awards generally do look down their noses at royal scoops. And yet it was followed up around the world, that story. And what was interesting about it was just obviously you're given a name and then you start Googling. And ordinarily with royal girlfriends, they may be somebody with a double-barrelled surname that's appeared in the back of Tatler, and you're scraping around trying to get an image of this person in order to make the story work. And of course, in Meghan Markle's case, all of these images came up, her own website, 'The Tig', as it was called, she had a blog, she had an Instagram feed.

She's a modern young woman with a social media profile.

Modern young woman. And also she just looked amazing, and because she was an American, that was really exciting. So yes, the editor, Martin again at the time, he had this expression, if he liked a story, he would say something along the lines of, "Oh, I've just felt a gust of wind going up my trousers." In the sense of this is going to be great. This is going to be a really big scoop. But one of the funniest experiences I had, going back to the Cambriges, was their engagement. Because I was on maternity leave with my second child, and I was sitting in a GP surgery with an ill baby in my arms. I think Harry, my son, had a cold. He wasn't named after Prince Harry, can I just caveat by the way, if anyone thinks that. I've always liked the name Harry. And suddenly my phone just ... obviously when you're on maternity leave you're keeping an eye on things but you're somewhat out of the loop. And the engagement announcement came on the phone at 11am. "We would like to announce the engagement of William and Kate." And I literally just had to – bless his heart, I hope he forgives me for this now – leave the doctor's surgery, dump my ill child on a friend, where I was living at the time. Quickly went home. I thank my lucky stars now I'd put a face of makeup on in the morning because you have to be camera ready in my industry. Threw on a dress, rushed to Buckingham Palace. We then found out there was going to be an engagement interview in the afternoon, and that we were going to have a chance to question the couple. So I rushed up to St James's Palace, managed to get accreditation. They divided up all of the questions among the dailies and the Sunday. So I got to ask the Sunday question, and I think the question I asked was, "Clearly you two know what love is" – which was a reference to Prince Charles, his famous quote in their own engagement. "Whatever love is." – "What is it you love about each other?" And they answered that question. Kate's there in her...

I've been married 17 years. I think my wife would struggled to answer that even now.

Well, indeed. This is the kind of nonsense journalists have to... when you're a journalist, never be afraid to ask a bloody stupid question. And Kate there in her blue Issa dress. And everything goes on and they then say, "Right, the couple would like to have a cup of tea with you after they've done this press conference." So I'm standing there – I mean, bear in mind, I'd been in a GP's surgery earlier, like was sitting there with – standing there with a cup of tea, and I turned around, and there was Kate. So I said, "Oh, hello. Congratulations." I said, "Oh, can I see your engagement ring?" And she held up this ring and of course, it was massive.

It was Diana's wasn't it?

It was Diana's, and I did recognise it, but I kind of didn't want to say because in that scenario...

It's the human moment.

They hadn't even talked about that in the press conference, and she just said, really coolly, you know what I mean, not as in without emotion, but just very calmly. "Yes, it was William's mother's, so it's very special." And I was holding her hand looking at this thing. I was like going, "Yes. Wow." And then just out of nerves, I think I started rabbiting on about wedding planning and how she should get an accordion file and have different...

Couldn't you have whipped out your smartphone and taken a picture?

I hadn't at that point, we weren't really in the year of smartphones. You weren't, no.

Of course.

This was 2010. But no, I started...

They were the good years.

They were the good years.

I think smartphones have ruined our lives.

They were the years when, as a journalist, you could retain a news line for the following day's paper without some imp putting a line on Twitter. "Just seen Kate's ring, #bling #Diana." And I just remember rabbiting on in a panicked fashion about how she should do her wedding planning, sort of missing the point that she might have a couple of people to do that for her. And it was only later that I got on the train, and everyone had a copy of the Evening Standard out, which obviously had splashed on the story, and I sort of felt like saying, "I've just been with them!" Because it was quite exciting. And it was only when I got home and looked in the mirror that I realised I actually had my dress on back to front.

We've all been there.

We've all been there! And I actually had some of my support underwear from being pregnant showing. I mean, I basically looked like a complete mess, but like who cares? I mean, I had to be at that moment in time.

That's what Photoshop is for.

That's what Photoshop is for. I mean, nobody, frankly, at that point in time, gave two hoots what I was wearing. But it was an interesting lesson in kind of working motherhood, and I then basically had to cut my maternity leave short and go back to the office. But it was worth covering, and people might frown at that. You know, "How can a story be more important than your real child?" He only had a cold, thankfully, and he was in very good hands.

I'm sure. I won't be ringing Childline.

Yes.

Just yet.

I think he'll be listening to this and then ring Childline himself.

He might retrospectively report you.

Although I should point out that my child does have a father, and his father was then around after work to take up the reins. Lots of people, because I've got three children, lots of people say like, "How do you do this job?" Or if I have to go away on a royal trip or anything, they're like, "Who's going to look after the children?"

That's what the local orphanage is for, surely?

No, but I was like, "Their dad..." Like do people sometimes think women in journalism, like they're just abandoning their children.

So sexist.

Like, well, we have a job to do. It is quite rare to be a mother of three who is still doing day-to-day reporting and reacting to live news events. Often mums, and I can completely understand this, they go and do features, or they are more office-based, because I am in a scenario, particularly covering elections, where anything can happen and suddenly you're phoning logistically trying to organise children because... Boris for instance, the other day had just filmed a new campaign video and we needed 500 words on it. That's just the life of a journalist.

Was that that ridiculous one where he was walking through the corridor? Past the photocopier and things like and he said the dog had had a poo?

Yes, it was the Vogue 73 questions-style thing, and I had to quickly watch that and then write it up in quick succession, but that's fine. That's my life.

It's horrendous, isn't it? When you see politicians making a gaffe right in front of you whether you support them or not? I mean, whether ...

Is that a gaffe, to say he took the dog out for a poo? I thought you were going to say it was a gaffe because he put the milk in his tea last. People thought it was controversial because he made this cup of tea and left the tea bag in and then put in the milk and then didn't take the tea bag out until afterwards. Can I just say, I make a tea like that and I often say, people talk about the nation's divided over Brexit. "This is a nightmare. We've never been more divided." And I use tea as an example. I say the nation's always been divided between those on the left and those on the right, those who are pro EU, those who are anti, those who put their milk in first and those who put their milk in last.

But let's finish off the Royals if we may before we sort of go into politics. What's your relationship with them like? I mean, do they kind of just tolerate the media? Have they developed a kind of working relationship now? Is it they see it as a necessary evil or do they embrace it? I mean like Meghan Markle, or the Duchess of Sussex as she is now, had a huge following before she became a Royal. So it's not like she's doing it to court publicity.

No.

But they need the media to highlight the work they're doing. Otherwise who will see?

Well I'm glad you've said that Paul. Sometimes you do think that they don't realise this, especially when Prince Harry releases statements attacking *all* of the media when he's got issues with individual stories. And you do feel like saying, "Well, you've done all of this great work on projects like Invictus and the mental health campaign, but would it have had the rocket fuel it had, were it not for people like me and my colleagues on other newspapers fulsomely covering it all and traveling out to different places to watch Invictus events?"

Sorry to interrupt, but do you think that statement was a mistake?

I think it should have perhaps been a bit more qualified. We knew about the claim against the Mail On Sunday, and they may well have a good claim, because I think if you're publishing personal correspondence, there's probably a breach of copyright issue there, but I've always said about this issue of royal privacy. My generation of royal correspondents have never respected royal privacy more. This isn't the eighties and nineties where we go about chasing royals on their private holidays and photographing Meghan or others in bikinis, as was the treatment of Diana, and people can have their own view of that. I also didn't like the way that history is rewritten, as if the press had always vilified Princess Diana. The press *loved* Princess Diana. Princess Diana also loved the press. And this lack of awareness, or perhaps unwillingness, to accept that both Diana and Charles, during the so-called "War of the Waleses", both briefed the press. They fuelled the stories because they were both individually phoning journalists to put their side of the story forward, and I think

they made mistakes in that respect. When it comes to the personal relationship with members of the Royal family, we have to have a relationship with the press office, obviously, and that is a balance to be struck. I think royal reporting goes wrong when journalists get red carpet fever, and think it's important to be liked by the royals. You do see this a bit, people caring that the royals know their name. I mean, with the greatest respect to the 'principals', as they're called, within the household, I really just couldn't care less whether they know who I am. I'm there to report. We're there to report without fear or favour in a balanced way what is going on, and what we're told by sources that we can substantiate and that hold up in a newspaper. If we get it wrong, we're not just subject to a complaint by IPSO, the Independent Press Standards Organisation, but also to legal sanction, and therefore we are under an obligation, quite rightly, to report responsibly. There is a difference between a headline that is untrue and a headline that the royals don't like. Inherently they would rather there was nothing in the papers that they weren't able to control. But I'm afraid that's not possible because Royal correspondents to speak to people who aren't necessarily under their control or indeed aren't necessarily attached to the press office. Gyles Brandreth once said about the royals, "One should never confuse friendliness for friendship." We're not their friends. They might say hi to you on a job, and I suppose that's great, but I've always tried to distance myself from it – and you have to, in a way, be the same when you're covering politics. Of course you've got a personal relationship with some MPs, because you get on with them, and you see them, and they give you stories and all the rest of it. One's always got to look after contacts, but I think when you're being a journalist you've just got to play with a pretty straight bat, really, and not be affected by the notion of, "Well, what will the royals think of this coverage? What might the Queen think?" The question should be, "What does the reader think about the coverage?"

I mean, because Prince Andrew's taking a real hammering at the moment with the Epstein stuff. I imagine a lot of journalists have been crossed off his Christmas card list. But of course the only form of accountability that the royals can have in theory is the press, because I mean he's not a member of a regulatory body that can censure him like my doctor or dentist would be, or even PR people.

Well, he was censured when he lost his role as a trade envoy. And also, I suppose you are censored, when you are a royal, by public opinion. And, of course, that means that the relationship between the palace and the press is a delicate one because one doesn't want vindictiveness to be unfairly expressed against any member of the Royal family because it can substantially affect their public standing. And I think that's also harking back to the Harry point about what he perceives to be an unnecessary vilification of Meghan. Whether that has actually been the case or not, it's difficult to know really. And a lot of online coverage has got mixed in with mainstream media coverage, which means that everyone's been tarred with the same brush. My argument from the point of the press pack is, well, because of the reasons I said earlier about IPSO and the law, we have to publish responsibly, whereas online people publish with impunity. It's not a fair comparison. And also, we can't take responsibility for trolls and these morons that go online and just say vile things. We can try and call them out, and I've written a few pieces calling them out, but funny enough then got trolled for it. But on the Duke of York, yes, he's in a difficult place – and I don't know what, from a reputational point of view, he can do

about it, because this case is still going on and on, and more and more paperwork is being produced. But yes, it's difficult. Reputationally, where was he before all of this happened? Probably not in a great place, and neither is his ex-wife.

I mean, I know you're not an academic by trade, you're a journalist, but if we got a big piece of paper out now and drew some Venn diagrams of overlapping circles, there's the master brand of the Royal family. How many 'sub-brands' are there in terms of overlapping? Because all of this negative stuff with Andrew certainly doesn't affect, say, Meghan and Harry. Then there's obviously the Prince Charles and Camilla, and then William and Kate, and you know, how many sub-brands are there? What are the main ones?

But that's interesting. You've hit on something there which basically sums up the Royal family as a dynastic institution where, historically, each household has had to protect itself. And that's interesting when you think back to what happened in the eighties when the Prince and Princess of Wales's marriage was falling to pieces. There is this sense of kind of like the other households insulating themselves. We've seen it recently with the Sussexes. In this sense, I think Meghan said in the ITV documentary to Tom Bradby, "No one's really asked how I am." Sometimes if one part of the Royal family is in trouble, the rest sort of double down and create a cocoon around themselves. Somebody who worked in the Royal household put it to me recently that it didn't do any harm to the likes of Charles and Camilla at Clarence House to have the spotlight on Harry and Meghan, because that kind of made their life easier for a while. And equally, if the Cambridges are seen as being hugely supportive of the Queen and doing their duty, then that's good for their optics compared to Harry and Meghan that are seeming a bit tricky and difficult. So yes, it's a family, but there are these subsets who are all trying to protect their own slice of the pie. And there is an awareness of individual branding. Somebody close to William said to me once, "William is very aware of the Cambridge brand, but he's also respectful of his role in the hierarchy and that the Cambridge brand can't overshadow his father's brand too much." And of course, the boss: the Queen. What's been interesting lately with all of these different characters on the royal scene is some overlapping of royal diaries. The Cambridges go and do something and then suddenly the Sussexes are doing something at the same time and, oh, they've released photographs on the same day. The images of George on his birthday have been released.

Tony Blair used to have a grid at Downing Street wanting to make sure that DWP didn't have an announcement the same day as the transport department did it.

There's still a grid. Do the Royals have a grid? Yes, of course. All of the households speak to each other, but there have been some unfortunate overlaps. And you've got to be careful.

Deliberately unfortunate? Is there spin-war between the siblings?

Look, as you know, in reputational management, if you're employed by a principal to spin for them, you're going to spin for them. You're not spinning for everybody else.

Some principals' people get on better with other principals' people than other principals' people, and these people are human beings... so it's been an interesting time.

You follow the royals on overseas tours. Are they as exotic for the journalists as they seem on the TV?

Oh look, I mean I can't grumble. I've got an amazing job, and it's a privileged job. Effectively to be flown around the world by a newspaper to cover royal events is not, I'm not going to start complaining about long hours. I mean, for goodness sake, people would give their eye teeth to do the same. I do fewer tours now because I'm not the actual royal correspondent of the paper. I recently went out to Cuba to cover Charles and Camilla there, which was interesting because I'd never been to Cuba before. It's not as glamorous as it seems from a logistical point of view.

They stay at the ambassador and you're at the Holiday Inn a couple of miles away.

Yes, exactly, and we have to get on a coach at three in the morning to be in position at seven, and then wait behind a rope for two hours for security clearance, whereas they just breeze along in a chauffeur-driven car in a motorcade, go to the engagement, and then leave. So of course we've had some long journeys. I remember we did a journey on the Cambridges' trip to India where we were in this coach going from Delhi to, no, it must have been Akra. Somewhere up north. Oh, my god, we were on this coach for *hours*, and like, you know, the typical scene of cows in the road, are we all going to die? I've been on strange, small, light aircraft flying to the middle of the Guyanan forest with Prince Harry. I've been on other planes going to Yellowknife in Northern Canada where the sun never sets. Been to some bizarre places but my god, I mean, what an experience. I'm totally delighted and privileged to have been sent.

And what actual contact do you get with the Royals when you're over there?

You get quite a lot. So when you're on jobs you get quite up close. So the way it works is on any job, they will have what's called a pool of journalists. So one broadcast, one print media, maybe the Press Association, and a stills photographer, and those people will follow them around individually, and then share their images and their copy with everyone else. You can't have the entire press pack following around, especially if they're visiting a hospital or somewhere confined. And then you have a fixed point, which is basically a rope outside so that you can watch them going in and out. And so if you're on a pool, you get quite up close and personal with them. I'm thinking about that Guyanan trip, and I was on the pool, and Prince Harry was going, "Camilla, come upstairs. You need to be part of this conversation," and I was sitting there with my notebook out. You can have dialogue like that. One of the best foreign trips, because it was amazing to go there, was Borneo. William and Kate went to Borneo to see orangutans in the wild and as a consequence, of course, if you're following them around, you also get to see orangutans in the wild. We got to go up this canopy, up into the rainforest, the top of the rainforest. I'm afraid of heights so it nearly killed me doing it, but the couple had done it, and for journalistic reasons,

I wanted to see what they had seen in order to write it up. But what was also quite astonishing during that trip is we were in the middle of nowhere, and it was the weekend that the topless photographs story hit the press. Kate had had photographs taken via a very long lens by a French magazine while they were staying in the South of France.

Which to be fair it's a disgusting invasion of privacy.

It was wrong. Of course it was, and they were staying at Lord Snowdon's house where they had an absolutely cast-iron expectation of privacy. They were within the confines of a private property. It'd be different if she was on St. Tropez beach topless. But it was interesting because lots of people were flapping. The royal aides were flapping, and I just watched Kate, and she was really quite cool about it all, and it taught me something about her that day. One got the impression that William had gone absolutely mental, and that she had been the one actually saying to the men around her, "Everyone just calm down." The press spokesperson was just irate and almost close to tears as he was briefing us. And I kind of reflected on it. I thought, in a funny way, of course it was a grotesque invasion of privacy, but she had been topless, and I think she'd been smoking. And I personally thought at that point, it was some of the best publicity she'd ever had – because women were looking at her going, "I didn't know." Who knew that "Waity Katie", as she had been known, this kind of very safe woman that had been wrongly, by the way, depicted as kind of a doormat and somebody that just towed the line, actually in real life, she's got a lot more character and is much more mischievous than she seems, perhaps, in her public persona. And it was kind of like, "Oh, who knew that she would sunbathe topless and have the odd Marlboro Light" I think it was. So in the end, I mean, there was a massive storm in a teacup. Journalists went mad because there was no reception in the middle of this forest, and we were trying to file this story. I've never seen a pack of journalists lose their minds to the extent that they did when we finally got to the hotel to file, because the newsdesks were all trying to get in contact with us for hours, and they couldn't reach our mobile phones, and we're filing copy last minute and all the rest of it. So it was quite an exciting story to be on.

You're a Royal expert to US viewers on NBC, and in Australia as well, I think. What's the perception of the Royals over there?

Well, the Americans love the Royals, and love anything to do with them and are endlessly fascinated by kind of how they live on a day-to-day basis. I've covered two Royal weddings for NBC, Cambridges and Sussexes, and my goodness, they plough so much resource into these events. I mean for the Cambridges' wedding, we were outside Buckingham Palace. I was co-hosting it with then host Meredith Vieira and Matt Lauer, the historian Andrew Roberts. Martin Bashir was one of the punters, because of course he had done the Panorama interview. It was interesting, because the Americans initially didn't really know what they were getting into, and they were sort of like, "What's all this about?" And suddenly people started filling The Mall, and they couldn't quite believe by the end of it that royals on a balcony could create this massive groundswell of interest and physically people on the streets. I suppose it would only be comparable to an inauguration or some State of the Union moment, so that was interesting. And then the Sussexes in Windsor, again, NBC rented the rooftop of this hotel that had a birds-eye view of the chapel. They loved that wedding.

They love Meghan, of course, because she's one of them, one of their own, an American princess marrying into the British Royal family. I mean, they absolutely loved it from start to finish. And it was a great colourful wedding. I mean, Bishop Curry and all of the celebrities that were there, it was absolute fodder for the American audience. I mean, they lapped it up.

So moving onto politics now, on the political side, do you get threatening calls from spin doctors or angry politicians? Is that how it works behind the scenes when you write something that's a less than favourable?

Not really threatening calls. Obviously, people express their displeasure if they don't like what you've written. But invariably that's confirmation that what you've written is absolutely spot on. And again, it's a bit like treating the royals without fear or favour. You've got to keep your head and not be too influenced. You've got to question what you're being told because in politics – this is the interesting differential, actually – when you're covering the royals, they don't have anything to promote really. They're just there to make sure that they seem relevant to the public still, and as the Queen says, "We'll be around for as long as anyone wants us to be around." With politicians, they've always got something to promote. They've got a policy to promote, or themselves to promote, or an ideology to push forward, or an attack line, and therefore you have got to add some scrutiny and a pinch of salt to that when you're covering politics.

There's been a lot of vitriol in this particular election, hasn't there? Like the way that the campaign has been conducted on both sides isn't particularly gentlemanly or cordial.

Look, election campaigns are never gentlemanly or cordial. Let's remember times when eggs have been thrown, and poor old Gillian Duffy was branded a bigot by Gordon Brown, or incidents where politicians have come unstuck on the airwaves or on TV. It's quite brutal.

Gordon went to her house like five times or something.

Yes.

It was just an insane overreaction to try and curry favour with her. It was almost embarrassing.

Remember the footage of him with his head in his hands as he was replayed, I think by Jeremy Vine, what he had been caught saying?

Yes.

Do you know what? The brutality of politics never ceases to amaze me. This sense that one minute you're covering somebody at the top of their game, and the next they're confined to... I'll give you an example, actually. When I was coming back from the Tory party conference, I think two years ago, I was on a standard carriage of a train just coming back into London, and Tony Abbott, the former of Australian Prime

Minister, was sitting opposite me. The last time I'd seen Tony Abbott was when I covered the Cambridges in Australia when they took Prince George, and he was the prime minister, and he was absolutely at the forefront of the trip, surrounded by security detail in a massive motorcade. He was *the man*.

And there he was in standard class?

Yes, with a cup of tea. And I kind of said, "I'm sorry, but I am a journalist, and if you don't mind, I just wanted to introduce myself. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions as we've got an hour or so together?"

Did he put the milk in after the tea?

Do know what? I think it was ready milked, so I can't confirm.

That's all I care about.

To his credit, he quite happily had a chat. He had an aide next to him. We talked about that trip, because I was on it, and how he found the royals, and how he subsequently found Prince Harry when he visited a couple of years later – he found Prince Harry "easier", by the way, if anyone's interested, which I thought was quite an interesting insight – and he said, "Yes, political careers never end well." I think he was quoting somebody else when he said that. I can't remember who came up with that phrase initially, but of course they don't. One minute you are the boss and the next you're an irrelevance.

Brutal, isn't it?

It's terrible.

He's a member of The Ivy Club. I'm a fellow member, and I sometimes...

Oh, are you?

Yes, I am indeed, and I sometimes see him and William Hague. They seem to be regulars there, and you catch a bit of a snippet of their conversation. It's incredibly mundane and normal. You'd think they'd be talking about matters of great importance.

What are they talking about?

Just like what normal human beings would talk about.

Hopefully not how many pints William Hague drinks.

Well, yes. How many pints did he say? Was it 15?

I don't know. I have no idea.

It's incredible, isn't it? I remember John Major's autobiography. That was my first big autobiography that I read. When he lost to Tony Blair, and he goes to see the Queen to relinquish whatever it is of the state of office, and the footman shows him into meet the Queen. He says, "This way, Prime Minister," and then they have a little chat, and then the same footman comes up to him and says, "This way, Mr. Major," and it really struck him at that moment that he wasn't the Prime Minister.

Yes, that is brutal.

And he got out of an armour-plated Jaguar and got into some sort of like a Vauxhall Vectra.

Yes, well, we witnessed that as well when there was the reshuffle and some of the rebel 21 lost their seat. They were removed with the whip, and therefore they lost their cars literally within a half an hour. They arrived in their state car and they left on the foot.

It's brutal, isn't it?

Yes. It's interesting, isn't it, that Major thing in the sense of actually – and this is true of all journalism, really – what we're interested in when it comes to these high profile figures is the human story at the heart of all of these experiences. Charles Moore's biography of Margaret Thatcher, which is now in its third volume. Obviously I know Charles because he's a titan of the Telegraph Group. Some of the most interesting aspects of that are Thatcher's early conversations with her sister. Charles found this cache of letters in the sister's loft, I believe, at the very last minute, and introduced them to the first volume of the book, because they paint a picture of her as a person, as a woman. She's obsessing about what clothes she wears to different Conservative events. And she discusses her early courtship with Denis, and there's some other guy, I think he was involved in the golf club, that is trying to date her. It's astonishing, you know, to put the human being at the heart of every story. Regardless of whether they're a prince or a pauper, I think, is a lesson to be carried forward when you're covering anything really, because that's the nitty gritty that people really want to know.

What I find most fascinating about Margaret Thatcher amidst it all is that even when Prime Minister, she cooked her husband Denis a full cooked breakfast every single morning, because she saw that as her wifely duty.

Do you know what somebody who was an aide to Theresa May told me when I was doing a piece of analysis about how she was at home... it was an analysis about her relationship with Phillip May, her husband, and somebody told me the anecdote that they during the election, and I think she had to do a regional press call, so basically you're sitting at your kitchen table, and it's all been set up, and you've got to speak to the BBC Radio Lincolnshire, and then you've got to speak to Manchester, and you've got to do this whole thing. And this was all teed up, and she was really agitated, and the aide said, "Prime Minister, sorry, you seem a bit distracted." And she's like, "I

haven't made Phillip any lunch. How long is this going to go on for? Because he will expect his lunch at 12 o'clock." And the aide went, "Do you want to make him a sandwich now, and then we'll move on?" And to be fair, I don't think this is a reflection of girl jobs and boy jobs when she made that remark about Phillip taking the bins out. This isn't to talk about her and kind of like gender stereotyping, but I think there was a sense of, "I need to maintain some normality in my own life here." And politicians, like royals – shock, horror – are human beings at the end of the day, and they have these experiences. At the moment, we're in this debate about whether it's right Harry and Meghan aren't going to Sandringham for Christmas, but this is the time of the Christmas conversation. Who can fail but to identify with this awkward conversation that all couples have with, "Right, are we going to go to your parents or mine this Christmas?"

One of the things I like as an observer of the May's marriage is there seems to be a lot of warmth and affection there, and love, whereas with Tony and, say, Cherie, obviously there is incredibly media managed and that didn't seem to be... there might have been an authentic marriage behind closed doors, but there was a performance I thought which wasn't there with Theresa and Philip. It seemed real.

Well, also what's interesting is the optics around politicians who appear to love their wives or their partners. David Cameron, perhaps not popular with huge swathes of the population, but still a man who I think we can all conclude loved his wife, and was trying to be as family orientated as possible in a difficult situation. Equally, yes, I think that strength of relationship between Theresa and Philip May, there was a time when, I think it was when the first meaningful vote was defeated by that historic 230 votes. We looked up to the gallery. She looked up to the gallery. Who is she looking at? It was her husband. Because I think in that moment, it's so isolating at the dispatch box. You're there facing brick backs. It was a political humiliation. The press gallery is full of people with their notebooks armed and ready to absolutely go to town on this dismal failure, and of course who can provide comfort in a moment like that? Only someone near and dear.

And how do you feel about the number of women who have stepped down as MPs, citing sort of social media abuse and threats? Is it switching off female voters as well?

I feel sad about it, and, funnily enough, I've been asked to write a piece about that, and about women in politics with a view to the 100th anniversary of when the women get the vote, which I think is at the end of this month, the end of November. I do feel sad about it, but I also think that MPs need to take a long, hard look at themselves, how much they earn, and what a privileged position they are in to represent the public on the political stage, and perhaps toughen up a bit. Is that unfair? I get relentlessly trolled. I get trolled by the left because I work for a right-wing publication. Get trolled by Remainers because I'm a Leaver. Get trolled by Meghan fans just because anyone who covers the royals gets trolled by these so-called 'Meg-ulators', or 'The Sussex Squad'. But who cares? Who cares?

Do you block, do you mute, do you ignore? Do you engage?

Just block, mute... sometimes I engage just for a laugh. If you're willing to have a constructive conversation with me, and put forward ideas that I might not agree with, and you might not agree with me, but you're willing to disagree agreeable, then bring it on. I like nothing better than having great conversations with people who I don't agree with. There's nothing more refreshing than that. And, news flash, I have a great many friends on the left, I have a great many friends who are Remainers, and we've managed to maintain our friendships because we're actually grown-ups who can respect other people's opinions. I don't like actually this idea that people are giving into these morons who seem to have the theory that if you don't agree with me, then you're not only wrong, you're actually wicked. For god's sake, have a bit of sophistication and intelligence to you. If you're reduced to personal insults, then, as Thatcher said, as you've lost the argument. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to belittle female MPs who have had death threats, rape threats, dog poo sent through the door, all of this horrific stuff, but they're not going down mines. They are paid a lot of money. They have a very, very privileged job. It's a difficult job, and I appreciate that, and we need to be doing more to encourage people into politics, quality people. But let's get some sense of perspective. If you don't want to be on Twitter, get a member of staff to deal with your Twitter account, or just don't be on it. Twitter is an echo chamber. If you care what Westminster thinks, or what other journalists think, or what other politicians think, you go on Twitter. If you care what the public think, go on Facebook. Yes. Should the social media companies do more to regulate against relentless trolling? And if we see the really serious end of this wedge, it's a childlike Molly Russell killing themselves because of cyberbullying, right? That is a hugely important story that merits coverage, and we must hold these internet giants to account. But a politician needs to take the rough with the smooth. Sometimes I think they fuel it. We've seen performance politics lately, with this sort of narcissistic, "I am going to say something in Parliament that's going to go viral later." Politicians clipping videos of themselves frothing at the mouth, shouting across to the opposition benches because they want it to play online. Well, don't dole it out if you're not willing to receive it. Act responsibly and don't take the criticism too seriously. Politicians fail to realise that they don't need everyone to agree with them. They just need 40-odd percent, right? There are loads of people who are never going to agree with me on a number of things, and loads of people who are never going to agree with you on a number of things. Okay. It's a free country. You're entitled to your opinion.

Are newspapers still influential over voters in elections, given the speed stories spread on social media?

I think so, because sometimes people seem to forget that people say, "Oh, well, it's Facebook now. It's Facebook and Snapchat. They're influential," and actually Facebook, Snapchat and these other platforms are just the new newsagent's shelf. The content is coming from us. We're providing the content, and the era of fake news has done mainstream media huge favours because people can actually separate the wheat from the chaff, and make a decision as to whether they want content that's been created by real journalists who are out there with the access speaking to the people that matter and reporting back on what's been said versus nonsense that's been dreamed up online with a view to getting clicks and likes. Clicks and likes, I suppose, are quite important when it comes to disseminating a story, but first be the best, then be the first. There has been this complete obsession with online,

particularly with journalists that are standing and tweeting on royal events. "The plane has landed." Who cares? Who's in the plane? Or is there a story to be said about what went on in the cockpit? Not the event itself because you've got a video. Journalists need to get back to the basics of the story rather than this inane coverage of moving, breaking events. In politics people are like, "I understand." "My source tells me that X has happened." Oh, no, you've just received the same email we all have. There's a bit of showboating that goes on with journalists as well. The few journalists, broadcast journalists, lately I think have been becoming the story. Don't become the story. You're just here to report on it. Yes, of course there are people in broadcast that have a profile, but never forget you're the messenger here, and I think sometimes people's egos do get the better of them. Take the work seriously. Don't take yourself too seriously because actually no one really cares.

Does the Telegraph have a line on Boris Johnson? What's it like to have a former columnist as Prime Minister? How do you deal with that?

Well, it's kind of a unique situation admittedly. Do we have a line? No one's ever tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Camilla, everything you write must be positive about Boris Johnson."

"Go easy on old Boris."

Exactly. First of all, that would be impossible. If you've read our sketch writer, Michael Deacon, on Boris, I think you'll agree he doesn't give him an easy ride. He doesn't give anyone an easy ride. And quite rightly. That's the beauty of sketch writers, to kind of take these people down a peg or two, and tell the truth of what really is going on. And at the end of the day, I think people misunderstand journalists if they think that we're willing to sit on stuff. People say this with the royals. "Oh, you must know loads of stuff you've never put in print." Well, obviously I'm bound by legal restrictions as to what I can write, but the idea that a journalist worth their salt would sit on some explosive story to curry favour with the establishment, who cares? Get the story out. If I stumbled on some horrendous story involving Boris Johnson doing something absolutely appalling, I'd be pitching it to the news desk before you could say, "Where's my notebook?" And I would apply that to anybody in public life. If there's a legitimate story to be said there and it's negative, bad knock. We're meant to be a critical friend to people who are putting themselves forward for public office, or perhaps are people who are born into royalty. If you do great things, great, we'll celebrate that. Prince Harry, you've come up with Invictus. That's amazing. You've changed the dialogue around disability because of this initiative. We're going to champion it. But, oh, I'm sorry, you decided to go to a fancy dress party dressed as a Nazi? Not sure the public would agree with that decision making. We know you were young, but could we just address this? Oh look, here's the photograph. Should we publish it? Yes, I think we should because it's in the public interest to know that at the time he was third in line to the throne, had made that decision. They then have a right of reply. That's how it works. So yes, you've got to take the rough with the smooth.

How many general elections do you think we'll have next year?

Oh, my goodness. Well, that very much depends on the majority or not that any party is able to summon. We did some polling, which suggests that at the moment the Conservatives are on course for a 100-plus majority. I think that's ambitious. Boris Johnson's message of this campaign, which has been slightly hidden, is that they're only trying to win nine seats. They just want a majority. It doesn't need to be thumping. So the polling is leaning towards a Conservative majority, but of course there's still a spectre of a hung parliament. Brexit's changed the narrative around where people lie politically. It's muddled the waters. You do have Labour Leavers who find Corbyn's prevarication over a second referendum anathema. They don't want to bring themselves to vote for the Tories. So this is the big question.

I'm naturally Labour, but I couldn't bring myself to vote for Jeremy Corbyn.

Well, exactly. And our people who are Labour going to be able to square voting for Boris Johnson by saying, "Well, I'm not voting for the Tories. I'm voting for Boris because he's a Brexiteer?" That's a big question mark over this election.

What a mess.

What about Liberal Democrats in the south west for whom they're voting yellow because there's a sense of fairness about the Liberal Democrats arguably, and also they're the type of people who can get the bins out. Do you know what I mean? They can get the bins collected, and they are good on a local government level, and yet there are people in the south west who aren't like mad London Remainiacs who want a revocation. They actually think that that's an aberration, and it's not liberal or democratic. And, therefore, where are they going to go? Are they going to place their votes with Corbyn, a man who is seen by many as an extreme leftist? So yes, there is everything to play for. Will there be more elections next year? I think maybe not.

There won't need to be if he gets a tub-thumping 60-seat majority.

Also, I just think the popularity of an election next year, what, next May with the public ... Brenda from Bristol would no doubt voice an opinion, "Not another one."

So after Christmas, then after the election, presumably you're going to have a long rest. What are you going to do next?

Well, after Christmas, will we have a rest? We'll be back into a new government with whomever it is. I think we can probably safely agree that it might be more predictable if it is the government under Boris Johnson continuing with his Brexit deal, and moving into future trade talks with the EU, which is going to be spicy again from March. Can it be done in time? Is there going to be another conversation about 'deal or no deal' in December 2020? Less predictable will be a situation where Labour's got a minority and forms a government with the SNP potentially. Jo Swinson's ruled herself out, although will she change her mind if she does get a lot more seats on December 13th, and decide that she can be a power broker? Put it this way, regardless of what happens on December 12th, I can't imagine politics is going to be quiet for the next 12 months. Equally, on the royal front, who knows what might

happen? Could there be the pitter-patter of tiny royal feet again with another Sussex baby? Could there be another Cambridge baby? Could there be a bigger...

He does seem to have Netflix, does he? They keep churning out these kids.

Historically, royals have liked churning out kids. I believe Queen Victoria had nine children.

Well, she didn't have a telly either, in fairness.

She didn't have a telly, that's true, and she did very much love her husband, as we know. So I don't think it's going to be quiet on the royal front. And also of course there's... one doesn't like to talk about it, but there's also the spectre of a major royal event of a different kind, a less celebratory kind that is... I'm not suggesting for one minute on the horizon, but it's in the back of every royal correspondent's mind.

That Andy gets arrested?

Indeed. That's it. You've got it spot on there.

I said it, not you.

That doesn't mean it's covered by any legal privilege, I think.

I think it means I have to go to the Tower and not you.

Possibly.

Last question then. What's the best bit of your job? Other than the individual stories and the people, what is the thing that gives you the most joy?

I just love meeting people, and I love speaking to people. I love campaigns like this, and I'm kind of itching to get out. I'm not one of these reporters that likes being in the office. In fact, I carry my office on my back, and when I moved to the Telegraph, they said, "Do you want a desk then, in the lobby?" I said, "No, not really. No thanks." I don't want to be in an office. I am more at the moment because we're involved in a great amount of coverage, and it all needs to go online, and it's a constant minute-by-minute production line of stories because of the situation we're in. But I like nothing better than being dispatched up north to cover a rally somewhere where I can just speak to people and find out what do they actually think? Because the public generally are legends, and come up with the most profound stuff, and are often about two steps ahead of the politicians anyway. There's been this huge convenient and hugely arrogant dialogue around Brexit and Remain that people don't know what they're voting for, and the general public are idiots. The general public are generally extremely well-informed. They're really engaging, and they want to have the arguments. And it's great to be out and about. I have a job where I'm able to do something different every day, and I find it quite exciting. Go out with an empty notebook, come back with it filled. I still get a ridiculous thrill from getting stories. It's

probably a bit childish now, I've been a journalist for 20 years, this idea you get a scoop. We all want scoops! That's what it's all about. I like getting stories. I like getting stuff that other people haven't got. I like to see my name on the front of the paper still. I get a thrill if I get a splash. "Is it going to be the splash?" Which probably sounds a little bit infantile, but that's what motivates me.

Camilla, it's been a hugely interesting conversation. Thank you for your time.

Thank you very much.