

An Interview with John Hughes



Brigham Young University

School of Communications

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Getting Started in Journalism

My name is Robert John Hughes, although I very rarely use the Robert; everybody knows me by John Hughes.

I've just written an autobiography and when we were looking for a title, my grownup son, who's a marketing guy, said, "When you were a little boy in London during the blitz, during WWII, didn't you deliver newspapers?"

I said, "Yes I did."

He said, "Well, tell me about it."

I said, "Well, in London at that time, there were about eight major daily newspapers: *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *The News Chronicle*. If you were downscale, *The Daily Mirror*; if you were upscale, *The Guardian*. I delivered to people who wanted those newspapers. I got on my little bike and drove off and delivered. If you delivered the wrong newspaper to the wrong person, you were in a lot of trouble. That was my first lesson in journalism, that people have this terrible addiction to certain newspapers that they want.

Then I guess my future was charted because I went to a rather nice boy's school in England, and in the chemistry lab I had some unfortunate experiences that nearly blew the place up. Then in the science lab I had more experiences that nearly blew the place up.

My chemistry and physics masters said, "Really Hughes, we think there's no future for you in either of these disciplines."

However, my English master said, "Oh, I think you can write, and when we get through here, you should go to the London School of Journalism to be a journalist."

Well, I never did, because my father came home from the war—from World War II, three years fighting in North Africa—and said, "We're not going to stay in rainy old London, we're emigrating to South Africa," which he had visited on his way out to the battlefield.

So I went with my father and my mother to South Africa, and that's where I started in journalism. *The Natal Mercury* was about a 50,000-circulation morning newspaper in the city of Durban, South Africa.

I started as a cadet reporter at about age sixteen in Durban, and my first editor, the city editor, was a tall, bronzed, white South African—a handsome guy, just back from the war. War hero. He'd been a journalist—he *was* a journalist, a city editor.

He said, "Hughes, if you live *The Natal Mercury*, if you sleep *The Natal Mercury*, if you eat *The Natal Mercury*, if you think of nothing else in your life but *The Natal Mercury*, maybe we can make a reporter of you."

And that was how it was: you had to jump through hoops. I worked probably for about two or three years, maybe a little longer than that, at that newspaper, and then I went back to London to try my luck in Fleet Street. I worked for *The Daily Mirror*, which was the only paper I could get on, and which I didn't really like much, because it was a tabloid. It wasn't the kind of journalism I wanted to do.

I did a little stint for *Reuters* there, and then I worked for a freelance agency that sold its content to the big dailies. I did that for a couple years.

Then I got a telegram from my old firm in Durban saying, "Why don't you come back and be chief of the bureau we have in the state capital and run that?" I did that for a few years.

The Christian Science Monitor

Then I was freelancing; I did some freelancing work for a couple of the London papers, like *The News Chronicle*, but I became very interested in *The Christian Science Monitor* in Boston. My mother and father had become members of the Christian Science Church, and the Church had a newspaper, and like *The Deseret News* is owned by this Church, it was owned by the Christian Science Church.

The woman who had founded the Church in 1908, and was the leader of the Church, said, "I think my church should make a contribution."

She didn't say this, but she didn't think very much of the newspapers of the day.

She said, "I think my church should make a contribution by covering national and foreign news."

I wrote a bit for *The Monitor* in South Africa, and then determined that I would go work for it. So off I went to Boston, and got a job there.

I did about a year or two in the Boston office and then they said, “We want you to go to Africa as our foreign correspondent—in all the countries in Africa south of the Sahara.”

I’d gotten married; I’d wooed a young actress who was at the Boston University School of Drama, and off we went back to South Africa, based in Cape Town—I was never in Cape Town because I was always traveling—and I was there for about six years. I spent a lot of my time in South Africa, because of the Apartheid problem, the huge race problem there.

I never did meet Nelson Mandela. He was in Robben Island much of the time, and you can see Robben Island from Cape Town. But every time I asked white authorities to go and have an interview with him, they said, “No, no, no.” So for those twenty-four years, I never met him. Of course, later he came out with this fantastic outreach to whites and blacks: Let’s end all this racial antagonism and let’s all work together; let’s create a multiracial country.

I discovered a couple years later that he went to the United States, to the city of Boston, and he said, “While I’m here, I would like to go to the offices of *The Christian Science Monitor*.” He went and said, “I want to meet with your editors.” He did, and he said, “I’d like you to know that in all the time I was locked up in Robben Island, the only international newspaper I was allowed to read was *The Christian Science Monitor*.”

So he had read everything that I had written.

I also covered the Belgian Congo, when it blew up, and I did Ghana when it became independent. I did Kenya, the end of the Mau Mau Uprising.

It was fabulous. I just thought I’d died and gone to heaven.

I went back to Boston because I got a Nieman Fellowship to go to Harvard for a year; that was my year at Harvard. We also wanted to start a family, and wanted the child to be born in the United States.

I said, “We’d like to stay in Boston before going out on another foreign assignment.” So I was an assistant foreign editor for a couple years.

Then I was told, “We’re sort of grooming you for Moscow.”

I said, “Well, that’s fine; I’d like to go to Moscow.”

It so happened that during the Cuban Missile Crisis, we didn’t have a resident correspondent in Moscow, so they said, “You go to Moscow.”

So we did go to Moscow through the Cuban Missile Crisis, except I thought, *It’d be rather unfair if this whole thing exploded and I was killed in Moscow by an American missile. That would be very, very unfair.*

Anyway, back I came from Moscow—that was a short stint—and we had a new editor.

The previous editor had said, “We’d like to think Moscow,” but I now had a new editor, who said, “I gather you’re sort of scheduled for Moscow.”

“Yeah.”

“Well, how would you feel about Asia?”

“Oh, that sounds interesting.”

“Hong Kong. You’ll be based in Hong Kong, covering China, if you can get in. You’ll be the backup man for Vietnam.”

We always had a regular correspondent in Vietnam covering the war. So I’d be covering Burma—it’s not called Burma anymore; I only got into Burma once—and Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Taiwan, Okinawa.

I thought I’d died and gone to heaven again.

I was six years in Asia. I spent a lot of time in Indonesia—terrible, terrible carnage there. I got a Pulitzer Prize for my reporting there, so that was very nice.

Then the editor, out on a tour of Asia, said, “All right, well, let’s have lunch.” And he added, “I’ve got a new job for you.”

I said, “Well, I don’t need a new job. I want to stay in Asia.” I thought I’d died and gone to heaven in Africa, now I really was sure I’d gone to heaven in Asia.

He said, “Why don’t you come back and be managing editor?”

I said, “I don’t know. I want to stay here.”

He said, “Come back and be managing editor.”

So I was managing editor for about seven months. Then he was actually appointed to the Church’s board of directors, and I became editor of the paper. I was the editor of the paper for about twelve years.

Cape Cod, Washington D.C., and Maine

I didn’t take my wife or my child over to Moscow, because it was a short stint and it would have been dangerous. But in Hong Kong, yes. I’ve now got a grownup son by my first marriage, and a grownup daughter by my first marriage, and now a grownup son by my second marriage who’s a student at BYU; he’s just about to graduate.

I’m trying to remember what my schedule was after about twelve years as editor of *The Monitor*.

Oh yes, then I thought, *You know, I’ve run a big newspaper*—I mean *The Monitor*; when I was editor, it had about a quarter of a million circulation and five printing plants across the United States and a printing plant in London for Europe, so it was a big newspaper—but I thought, *You know, but I’ve never actually owned a newspaper myself.*

To cut a long story short, I bought a little newspaper in Cape Cod and bought or started about four or five others; they were weeklies on Cape Cod. We had a little printing shop there, and it was great fun doing that. Cape Cod’s a marvelous place for stories. I’d been writing a column for *The Monitor* all this time.

Then I got a call from a guy in Washington when Reagan became president, and he said, “I’m Charlie Wick, and I’m head of United States Information Agency, and I want you to come and be my associate director.”

I said, “Well, I can’t do that, you know, business here.”

He said, “It’s time for you to come and serve your country.”

So I went to Washington, and was USIA for a while.

Then they had a little trouble down at *Voice of America*, and Charlie Wick said, “You go down to the *Voice* and you fix it.”

So then I was the director of the *Voice of America*.

Then when George Schultz became secretary of state—I didn’t know him at all—he called one day and asked if I would go talk to him.

Well, when the secretary of state calls and says, “Can you come talk to me,” you say yes.

Anyway, he wanted me to be his spokesman and assistant secretary of state for public affairs, which I did. It was exhausting. I did the whole first four years of Reagan and we went to 45 countries together and all that kind of stuff.

Then I thought it was time to go back to my newspapers, which to my chagrin had done impressively well in my absence.

I went back there, and it was then that *The Monitor* said, “Okay, well you’ve got all this radio and television experience; we’ve got radio and we’ve got television with the newspaper, so why don’t you come do that?”

So I did that, and when I finished, I went back to Cape Cod.

But then an old friend of mine from *The Washington Post* said, “Hey, let’s go to Maine and have a last throw at the dice. Let’s start a little paper together or buy a paper.”

So we went to Maine, and brought the family of course, and we loved Maine, but the paper was not a success; there was a very strong newspaper there.

So we did it for about two years, and then said, “No, we’re going to throw in the towel, sell it.”

Coming to Brigham Young University

Then I was kind of wondering what to do, and a friend of mine ran a big foundation for Knight newspapers—Knight newspapers made a lot of money at that time; no newspapers make any money now, but in those days, they made money.

This friend wrote me and said, “How do you think we should spend this money that we’ve got on journalism?”

I said, “I don’t think we do a very good job of training journalists for foreign correspondence.”

You know, for *The New York Times*, that’s fine—you can send a guy to Harvard, he learns the language and he’s very experienced by the time he gets out of there. But if you’re the Cleveland Blip—whatever the paper is in Cleveland—and you say, “I’d like to dabble in foreign affairs,” you look around the newsroom, and there’s old Joe who’s done a good job up at the legislature, and so old Joe is sent to Cairo or somewhere in Syria, and he’s not entirely sure what country he’s in or what language they speak or what the religion is.

So I said, “I think at some great University, there ought to be an international outfit where the students who think they want to be involved in foreign correspondence would meet journalism school editors who would be brought from abroad and spend a time there together. We would establish internships to various countries during vacations. Everybody would benefit, the students would find out whether they wanted to really do this or not, and we’d all save a lot of time.”

But before he could reply, Dave Forsyth, who was chairman of the journalism department at BYU, called me. My second wife’s a Mormon, she went to BYU, got two degrees in journalism and worked as a reporter. So I suspect he called me because you know how wives are. Anyway, Dave had asked me to come out and speak to the journalism students before, which I’d done a couple of times, and not everybody walked out, so it was considered to be a reasonable success.

Dave said, “You know, we’d really like you to come out here and join the staff.”

I said, “Well, I just got this letter from this guy that said...”

Dave replied, “That’s exactly what we want to do at BYU! We’ve just had a faculty retreat, and that’s almost exactly what we said we wanted to do here.”

So I came to BYU to run the international media studies program. We sent students to Cairo and Kenya and all the rest, and got them internships with newspapers there. We also brought people from abroad, including a wonderful young woman from Kosovo who was a lead television journalist there. She came, she taught, she learned, she did all kinds of things.

I’ll tell you a little story: they’d had trouble coming out of that country, and so she had lots and lots of currency on her, in a wallet.

She came to me in tears one day and said, “Professor Hughes, a terrible thing has happened. I’ve lost my wallet.” It had several thousand dollars of her currency in it. She said, “Of course it will never be found.”

I said, “Well, this may be the only university in the United States, or even the world, where perhaps it might be found. Why don’t you say a little prayer about it, and see what happens?”

Five days later, I got a call from the lost property office and was told, “Professor Hughes, you’ve got a student, and we have her wallet here.”

I called her in, and she said, “Well, I’ll go get my wallet, but of course there’ll be nothing in it.”

I said, “Well, why don’t you go see?”

She came back and said, “Every penny was in it! The whole thing! What is it about this University?” Anyway, so I’ve been at BYU about twenty years.

The United Nations

Then—I didn’t know him—Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the secretary general of the United Nations, called one day and said, “I want you to come be director of communications.”

I said, “Oh, I can’t do that. I’ve got a job at BYU. No, can’t do that.”

He said, “Well, come for a year. For the fiftieth anniversary I’m making a big push here; come do that.”

I said, “No.”

He said, “Look, I’m flying from New York to Chicago next week. You fly to New York and fly with me on the plane and we will talk, and then you can go back to Salt Lake City from Chicago.”

So I said, “Okay, all right.”

We talked, and he was a very interesting man, a patrician. He had been foreign minister of Egypt. And he spoke Arabic, French, and English.

I said, "I'm not coming. I'm a tenured professor at BYU. Why would I come and do this?"

He didn't know much about BYU or the Church, but he said, "Well, I know about BYU, and I will call the president of BYU and get you sprung."

"No, you shouldn't do that."

"Well, I'm going to do that."

"No, you will not do that, Mr. Secretary General. You will not."

"Well, all right. I know that the university is owned by the Mormons. I will call the head of the Mormon Church, whoever he—or she!—may be."

"No, no, no, no. You will not."

Anyway, I did agree to go because I thought it would be kind of interesting. I'd seen the UN in action in various parts of the world in humanitarian work, and I thought it did pretty good work. BYU gave me a year's leave of absence to go there.

I'm not a member of the LDS Church, but I was actually able to do nice little things connecting the LDS Church with the UN—particularly President Hinckley, who was interested in translating books and documents in Arabic into English, so I got him set up. He came out and had a dinner with all the Arab ambassadors to the United Nations. That started a program at BYU, and then the Kennedy Center's got a big thing with the UN. So I did that.

The Deseret News

When I was at the UN, one of the general authorities had said, "Can you come back and talk to us about *The Deseret News*?"

I did that, flew back just for a day, and talked about what I thought about it. Then I went back to the UN. I had really no idea what they were doing at *The Deseret News*.

But when I got back, Glen Snarr, who was the chairman of the board of *The Deseret News* and had sat in on that earlier meeting, said, "Have you ever done any consulting?"

I said, "Sure."

He said, "Would you do a consulting job for *The Deseret News*?"

So I did. I was still at BYU, and took about four or five months to figure it all out and make a report with various recommendations—the principal one of which was that *The Deseret News* had to get out of the afternoon field, and get into the morning, and go head to head with *The Tribune*. Because *The Tribune* was eating their lunch.

I gave them my report, and about a month later, Glen Snarr called and said, "Well, you've made all these recommendations, and we want you to come be editor and come fix it."

I said, "Oh, I don't know about that."

He said, "Well, come and meet the board."

So I met the board and I had a lot of questions, and the board said, "You'd better talk to President Hinckley."

So my wife and I were invited to go see President Hinckley and his two councilors. We had a great conversation.

I asked all the questions I had, and then I said to him, "Well, President Hinckley, I know you're a very wise man, but might you not be making a terrible mistake appointing the first non-Mormon editor of the Church's newspaper?"

He said, "No, you've lived among us, you understand us, we trust you."

Well, it's sort of hard when the president of the LDS Church says that. You can't say no.

So, "Okay, all right." But I said, "You know, it's going to take us four or five years to do this. I'll be away from BYU, but I have tenure and I like the students, I like the faculty. So how do you see the arrangement there?"

He said, "How about leave of absence renewed annually?"

“President Hinckley, that sounds wonderful,” I said, “But you know, President Hinckley, I don’t know what the rules are about BYU’s leave of absence.”

He smiled and leaned in and said, “I have some influence down there.”

So off I went to *The Deseret News*, and we thought it was going to be about four or five years, but it took ten because we had this terrible, terrible legal battle with *The Trib*. It was owned at that stage by a Roman Catholic family who was intensely antagonistic towards the Church and towards *The Deseret News* and everything else. So it took a long time.

But I came back to BYU, and that’s the end of the story. I’ve been here ever since.

Pulitzer Prize

I guess the Pulitzer Prize moved me along in journalism faster than if I hadn’t had a Pulitzer Prize, and eventually all the time I was editor of *The Monitor*, I was appointed to a Pulitzer jury for several years. They bring juries in where they decide on the stuff, and they divide up the sections: investigative reporting, feature writing, editorial cartoons—about ten categories—and so I was appointed for several years on that committee. Then I got onto the board, which makes the ultimate decision—about twelve people. The other groups nominate three—you read about one hundred submissions, say, and you recommend three, and then the board chooses the best of the three. I was one of the board.

So I guess it’s probably one thing that moved me along as editor—I mean, I might not have been editor, but I might have been editor without the Pulitzer, I don’t know. That’s really hard to say.

But it’s nice to win a Pulitzer.

Changes in International and War Reporting

What’s happened is that the printed newspaper is in eclipse. We can see that with *The Deseret News*, and you can see it with *The Trib*. Many newspapers have gone out of business altogether. The advertising for print newspapers collapsed almost overnight with the web. The classifieds are the most profitable thing in print newspapers, and they went away because it’s all on the web. If you want to sell a car, you put it on the web for free. With the cutbacks that lots and lots and lots of newspapers have taken, some have gone out of business altogether, but lots have made cuts—*DesNews* is probably down to about a third of the staff it had when I was there.

The first thing that gets cut from big newspapers is investigative reporting and foreign correspondence. Investigative reporting is expensive because you’ve got to put a team of investigative reporters down in the basement of city hall for a month finding out whether the mayor is a crook, and if they come back and he’s not a crook, well, that’s expensive.

Then foreign correspondence is expensive: it costs about \$500,000 a year to keep a foreign correspondent abroad, because he’s got to have money to travel, he’s got a family there, his children have got to go to school, or whatever. He may not speak the language, so he’s got to have an interpreter; he may have to have a secretary who’s going to mind the store while he’s out traveling. There’s travel. It’s expensive.

So foreign correspondence and investigative reporting have been the two hardest hit units on what remains of print newspapers. This simultaneously has gone the same way with TV—whereas television used to have people stationed abroad, they usually don’t anymore. We call it “parachuting in.” You wait for a crisis, and then you send old Fred, who’s sitting there: “Fred, go to Laos.”

Fred’s there for about two weeks; he doesn’t have any contacts and he doesn’t have any sources, but he does a good job with what he can do.

That’s what’s changed with foreign correspondence. There’s much less of it that’s reliable, which is very sad, especially right now with all that’s happening in the world.

You have to be careful with people you send into a war scene. You usually wouldn’t force anybody to go unless they agree to go.

I’m on the board of a company in Boston that does freelance war reporting. A lot of it’s with video, but some of it with print still, and in the case of Mr. Rosen who was beheaded, he worked for that

company. I'm on the editorial board of that organization, but that organization was always secret. But they negotiated with the guys—well not directly, but through people that got us to the guys that had him prisoner in Syria, who said, “Ransom.”

The family and the company got three million dollars together and said, “How about three million bucks?”

The terrorists said, “Haha. Thirty million dollars.” And they killed him. That was sad.

That kind of work is very dangerous, and you need gutsy people to do it.

The Monitor had a reporter kidnapped for about five months in Iraq during the Iraqi war. That had a happy ending, and they got her out eventually.

I think foreign reporting is not as good as it used to be. I love *The Economist*, and *The Monitor* has a print weekly, and they do what they can with what they've got. But even *The Monitor* has probably cut its staff, certainly by half. So it's tough.

I do know that there are reporters who want to do foreign reporting. I do. There's one of the little tests I give, a routine thing—for example, I've got a Global Communications class and they do a little number: “Okay, if you had four correspondents that you could send abroad, where would you send them? Why would you send them? What would be their area? What do you see as the advantages, and what do you see as the disadvantages?”

There's still a lot of interest in classes here, still a lot of interest in becoming journalists. Heaven knows where they're going to work and what they're going to find, but bless their hearts.

Journalism really needs these students—journalism needs very good morals and ethics at the moment, and these students here have that, bless their hearts. I'm just grading some papers, and almost crying at how dear and sincere they are about ethics and principles and getting out there to serve mankind. They know you don't make a lot of money in journalism, but they're really dedicated to going.

They said, “Yes, yes, we want to be journalists, we want to go out there. Why? Because we can shed light on dark corners. We can make life better for lots of people.”

I keep telling them, “We need more Mormons in journalism; that's what we need around here.”

These are pristine students going out. They are the best. They're diligent. They do what you want them to do, hear what they hear.

Published Books

I guess my favorite book I've written is the last one, because it's all about me. It's also the newest.

The first one I did was on Africa—when I finished in Africa, a publisher in New York wanted me to do a book. Then after Indonesia and winning the Pulitzer, I did a book on Indonesia. I did a book on Islamic extremism for Stanford. Then the last and only one left is the autobiography. It's my marketing son who did this. He said the name has to be *From Paper Boy to Pulitzer*, and that's what it is. But I blush. Nevertheless, he's the marketing guy.

Common Threads to Success

You need to be ready to get out of tough situations if you're going to be in journalism, whether it's domestically, or certainly if you're abroad.

I went to Vietnam about thirty times; I was the backup guy. In six years I went to Vietnam about 30 times, and you need to be wise about where you are and who you're with. You look at the kind of troops you're going out with: are they Vietnamese troops? They're going out on a night ambush, and they're all marching out smoking cigarettes, and swinging their live chickens, which is their dinner, and chattering to each other, so you say, “Oh, I won't go with these troops. These are not my troops.”

Or in Hong Kong, when the Cultural Revolution was happening, there were British officers and the police—Chinese constables—and the Bank of China was blaring loud speakers down to the Chinese constables, saying in Chinese, “Sons of China, turn your guns on your British officers now and kill them.”

Well, you want to be behind the British officers, not out there with the guys that want to kill people.

You have to be wise.

Professor at BYU

I first came to BYU as a professor of communications, and was director of the international media studies program from 1991 to 1997. I've been here twenty-something years.

When you're retiring, they say, "How long have you been here?" They looked it all up, and I think it's about twenty-three years or something like that.

But I've been away, because I was away at the UN, and then I was away for what turned out to be ten years at the *DesNews*. I thought it would be about four or five years, but it was a very tough fight with the *Trib*, a huge law fight, and very expensive. But President Hinckley was fantastic.

He would say, "I know it's been tough for you guys, and it's taking longer than we all thought, but it's going to be okay. It's going to work out right."

And it did.

Ed Carter was one of my reporters at the *DesNews*, and Joel Campbell worked for me. I did the wrong thing with Ed—he was a terrific young reporter. He said he'd like to go to somewhere in Canada for a master's degree or something.

I said, "No, you don't want to do that."

He said, "Well, I really do."

"Oh, all right, we'll give you a leave of absence."

That was the end of Ed! He's a tiger. He's got degrees coming out of his ears, and he works like a dog. He's just an amazing guy.

Dave, I knew and liked, and we had a lot of fun together. Ed Adams—I know Ed, because I was editor of the *DesNews*; when I went on my leave, Dave was still here as the chair. When he left, Ed became chair, and used to come up for various things where we could cooperate and do things together. Those were really the two chairs during my time. There were a couple of others, but they were here for shorter periods.

We got some new professors, who I like very much, and I talk to their classes, and they've talked to my classes. But after my ten years at the *DesNews*, most of the professors with whom I had worked for four or five years before, were gone. They'd retired or were not here, and they were almost all new faces. But we get on pretty well.

Classes

For most of my time, I've taught a senior class in global communications. I've taught mostly journalism classes, investigative reporting, ethics and principles. I've taught some foreign policy, but mainly journalism.

I was in the HFAC when I started. I must have come back to the Brimhall Building after my leave, which was an amazing change. In the HFAC, we were working away, and there'd be grand pianos on the floor above and saxophones and what not. We're lucky we have an outfit that comes along with the credits and the department—which is no longer a department, it's the school.

They usually bring three professors from some other universities to visit, and the last group that came said, "Wow, compared to what other universities have for journalism, you guys are in heaven! You've got this beautiful building." They kept on walking out and photographing the mountains and saying, "What a fantastic place!"

Technology

I think some chairs over the years have done great things for the journalism school as it now is. It's very modern here—the advertising guys have got all the stuff that they do, and wonderful machines that do all kinds of things for you. The whole thrust now is towards the new technology.

I use technology in my classes when I have to. I'm too old a dog to learn all that stuff. It's a lot different now than it used to be. I have had a TV set here, which no longer works, but now we've all been given this thing—an ipad—that's very new. It's in its box still, and it's going back as soon as I leave.

On this old computer, everybody thinks this is all outdated, and then there was a time when you had to take your laptop to class—well, now you don't take a laptop, you take something like an iPad or a phone, something smaller! You've got the little thing in your hand; you look up the news and you send messages and I think it's terrible. My wife's got one of them. I can't stand them. But it's the new technology. It's here to stay, and it will be refined even more. But I'm used to seeing things on a laptop or on a computer.

In my time we've seen the shift—not shift but movement—from print to technology. I brought the first computers into the newsroom when I was editor of *The Christian Science Monitor*. The first computers—they had these typewriters before, like every other news publication. So we've gone from typewriters to something you walk around with and put in your hand. So that's changed a lot.

But the principles and ethics of journalism remained constant throughout all this period, and actually, are even more important with the new technology. What I tell the students is that the technology is wonderful, but the fact of the matter is that now anybody can get on the web and publish truth or fiction. Their jobs are to get out there and be good reporters and good editors: make sure that what you publish is always truthful.

Okay, journalists always want to be first. All right, do you want to be first or do you want to be right? You actually want to be first and right, but if it's a choice, you want to be right.

We've had terrible instances of totally erroneous reporting on the web. We had the report that a famous football coach was dead, and he wasn't. He did die eventually, but he wasn't when the flash came out. Then the congresswoman was shot, and the first report was that she was dead, but she wasn't dead; she's actually recovered. A woman governor down in the Carolinas—there was a flash story that she's been indicted, she's going to be in court. No truth to it at all. All that stuff's going out there, and so the journalists of tomorrow who are working with that—and heavens knows what else is going to be the new means of delivery—have a tougher job.

In the old newspaper days, you'd write your story and bring it back to the office, then it went to the copyeditor and got edited, then to the next bench and got edited, and four or five hours later, it was in the newspaper. It isn't like that anymore, and anybody can get on.

I like the *New Yorker* cartoon where there's the dog typing away at the computer, and he has a doggie friend sitting down who's just visiting with him. The caption says, "Once you're on the computer, they don't know you're a dog." And it's true. That's it.

You can do a lot of harm with erroneous stories—like with the whole Ferguson situation, which I use a lot with my students. So the victim already got shot, killed, and where does the first news come from? It doesn't come from any reporter who's on deck. It comes from a guy—well he doesn't use this old phone, this is almost unique now—but he's got a little thing in his hand and he sends a report, and it's out on Facebook that a police officer killed a black fellow, an African American, and it's out there. By the time you get a reporter there—if you're lucky two or three hours later, unless it's a very local guy, but I don't think they have a newspaper in Ferguson, they probably come from the nearest city—that reporter has to do his checking, then write his story, and then get it back to the head office. Even though now the newspaper can put it on a device like that and get it out there. So you've got all this false information floating around before the reporter writes the story that was truthful. That's a problem, the time factor, because everybody's sending and receiving news on this new electronic device.

Prominent Students

There was McKay Coppins. Several professors had him in class; I just had him in one class. He was editor of *The Universe*. Very bright. This department, now School, has actually a very good internship program out there, and we got him an internship at *Newsweek* magazine.

Before he left he came to see me and said, "What do you think?"

I said, "Well, what you've got to do is get out there—you know, you're only there for three months or so, so you need to make your number with editors there. You're going to be responsible to one editor, but you can meet other editors in other departments. Write stories. Submit them to those people. Go to those people, because they're busy, and ask, 'What can I do to help you? Can I cover something for you?'"

Can I do this thing or the other?’ Make yourself absolutely useful by writing and writing and writing for *Newsweek*.”

Well, little did I know that while he was there, *Newsweek* was to be sold for a dollar and its debt. But he had done so well there that when *Newsweek* was sold, they kept him on as a staff guy on their web operation with the new owners. He’s very successful. He became a contributing editor there.

When Romney was running for the presidency, there was a huge press pool—there’s a press pool you know, about fifty reporters following him around—and Coppins was one of them.

The reporters were always bugging Romney, saying, “We want to come to church with you. We want to come to church; we want to see what it’s like.

Romney, understandably, said, “I’m not taking fifty of you with all your cameras and stuff into my church.”

They said, “But we really need to see what happens.”

Romney said, “All right,” as sometimes happens in a pool, “Choose one of you to come to church with me. You can’t come in and you can’t bring your cameras and you can’t upset everybody, but one reporter will record what happens and we’ll come out and we’ll brief you.” It often happens that way when someone can’t take a huge crowd in.

Guess who they chose? They chose our guy from little old BYU. He came out and told them what he saw and heard, and that’s how the story came to be.

From time to time, you see him on one of the evening news channels; they invite people in to pontificate on that. He’s doing great.

Retirement and Family

I retire on August 1, 2015. I don’t know what I’ll do. My wife and I actually like to go to Maine. We don’t own any property there, but we rent a house up in the cheap part of Maine, way up north near the Canadian border. So we get that for two months, and we’ll do that.

My wife’s gone back to BYU; she was a BYU student, and she’s gone back to get her Master of Fine Arts, of all things. She’s over there in what they call the *studio*. I call it a factory. It’s machinery and dust flying around, and so there she is with her welder’s helmet and some boots and she’s welding and doing brass work and all this. She’ll be through in the middle of next year. She got two degrees here in journalism, in print and TV, and worked for a while as a journalist.

That’s not how I met her. This is my second marriage, and I met her when I was in Washington during the Reagan administration. She actually came to see me because she was in another—I forget which—department of USIA; she wasn’t very happy there. She came to see me when I was going down to *Voice of America*—they had some trouble. She had a radio operator’s license, but she had worked in DC—so knew the USIA whole pattern and everything.

I think she was in the division that brought in people from overseas to go around America and see how nice it was, and then go back to their own countries and say nice things about it.

Anyway, an assistant I had as director of VOA was leaving, and I said, “Oh, so you know a bit about radio?”

She had worked for *Radio Martí*, the government’s broadcasting operation to Cuba.

So I said, “Okay, all right, I’ll hire you as my assistant.”

I was already married at that stage. She worked for me for a while; I was only at the *Voice* about seven months, because George Schultz said, “Come, Come.”

So then I went, she stayed. Well, I guess she did *Radio Martí* after that. So she stayed at the *Voice* and then went to *Radio Martí*.

I stayed with Schultz until the end of the first term, and then I went back to my little newspapers that had done so well without me back in Maine. My two children, who were then both in college, both of them had worked in the Maine newspaper we owned, done different things there, but they weren’t going to be journalists. Then my marriage broke up; I divorced my wife.

About a couple years later, I guess—the next time I was in Washington—I called Peggy and said, “Why don’t you have breakfast with me?”

And she had breakfast with me. I knew she was a very nice person; I knew she didn't drink and all that kind of stuff, but I didn't know anything about her religious background.

That was a nice breakfast we had, and then about a month later, when I had an occasion to go to Washington, I said, "How about having lunch with me?"

And we had lunch together. Over the year or two, my visits became more frequent and we no longer talked about broadcasting and journalism and everything, but more pleasant topics, and finally we got engaged and got married.

We have a child by that marriage. He's here at BYU, and he'll be graduating in a few weeks. He did a mission in Spain; we went over and got him when he finished there. His mission president was President Hinckley's son, Clark Hinckley, and we knew Clark quite well. In fact, when we lived in Salt Lake City, during the time of *DesNews*, Clark came to some party or something at our house one night. Peggy was in charge of all the stuff you accumulate in case of a crisis—everybody does that and everybody has it in their house—and she was in charge of that in the branch we were attending.

Clark said, "Well, I have some advice for all you people who have food storage in your houses: forget about all that. All you need is a map to the Hughes's house, because Peggy's got every known instrument for getting people dug out and every known can of food that you're supposed to have."

Experience at BYU

It's been wonderful. It's been terrific. I just love these students. You should read some of their term papers that they're doing about their commitment to journalism and why they're doing it, even though journalists don't make a lot of money.

"Journalism is not being well paid, so why would we do this?"

They'll answer, "Because it's helping mankind. Because there are things that need to be done."

They're going to have wonderful, wonderful standards.

They say, "Well, what do you do if you get into a news organization where it's a little bit slimy and they're asking you to do bad things?"

I said, "Well, you leave. You want to work for a respectable news organization, an organization with principle. Maybe you can change the culture there. But if you can't, if they ask you to do improper things in journalism professionally, go work somewhere else where they have good ethics."

They're just tigers. I've thought about this and I've thought about not having any money, but this is what I want to do. They're an absolute dream to work with.