

## BAFTA A Life in Television: Sir Trevor McDonald 8 March 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

**Krish Majumdar:** Good evening and welcome to the Academy. My name's Krish Majumdar, I'm the Chairman of the BAFTA Television Committee. Thank you for coming out tonight for this very special event, Rathbones' BAFTA A Life in Television of Sir Trevor McDonald OBE. For me BAFTA's about two things, it's about excellence, and it's about inspiration, and Sir Trevor McDonald embodies both of those things. He's had an extraordinary career across news, current affairs and factual television. In a career spanning over 50 years, he's given a human face to newscasting and imbued his work with a profound humanity, and he's reported on global events, and interviewed world leaders, and witnessed the best and the worst of human progress and change. Trevor has conducted interviews with some of the most influential and controversial figures in the world, including Nelson Mandela, Saddam Hussein, Colonel Gaddafi, US Presidents Bill Clinton and George Bush, Tony Blair, and Prime Minister David Cameron. Heroes and villains.

[Laughter]

Sorry, I've gone slightly off script there.

[Laughter]

More recently Trevor has hosted a series of acclaimed documentaries including *Secret Caribbean*, *The Mighty Mississippi*, *Inside Death Row*, and *The Mafia*. Sir Trevor is a double BAFTA recipient: he's been awarded the Richard Dimbleby Award in 1999 for the year's most important personal contribution to the screen in factual television, and also he's been awarded the BAFTA Fellowship in 2011, which is the highest award BAFTA can give. He's also been awarded the Royal Television Society Gold Medal for outstanding contribution to television news, a National Television Award, and many others. He was named Newscaster of the Year in 1993, 1997, and 1999.

No evening is complete without the interviewer, and we are really lucky tonight to have Kirsty Young posing the questions. She's the much loved host of BBC Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs*, and also hosts a variety of television programmes, and she hosted BBC's

*Crimewatch* for seven years. And also I'd really like to thank our partner Rathbones. We're delighted that Rathbones Investment Management has chosen to support our strand of live events, A Life in Television. Rathbones has a long history of supporting arts, youth, and sports initiatives across the UK which nurture young talent, and is proud to help us celebrate some of the leading figures in British television, providing inspiration for the next generation.

Just on a housekeeping point, we are filming and recording this event so please don't record it yourself. And any other content requests can be directed to the Learning & Events team at BAFTA, at [events@bafta.org](mailto:events@bafta.org), and we'll respond quickly to you. And please, if you haven't done so already, go on our website, BAFTA Guru. We have such amazing content, like events like this, all the Screenwriters' Lecture Series, it's a real treasure trove of content, and it's what we do, we're there to hopefully inspire the next generation. So thanks very much from me, and welcome our host, Kirsty Young.

[Applause]

**Kirsty Young:** Well good evening everybody, and thank you for coming to this very special evening, BAFTA A Life in Television. We're going to talk to a man who, as we've heard, has half a century of television behind him, and I would guess, if his recent programmes are anything to go by, quite a lot of television to make in front of him. As you will all know, some of you I know know Trevor personally, but all of you will be familiar with Trevor's work. And Trevor's work speaks for itself, but I have to tell you as somebody who was for a time his colleague at ITN in the newsroom, unlike possibly anybody I've ever met in television, you would never, ever meet anybody who had anything but the nicest of things to say about Sir Trevor McDonald. He was a professional colleague, he was very good at his job, better than most, but above all else he was full of good humour and humanity, he was a delight to work with.

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Before we came on stage tonight, apart from the fact that he's, he's sort of rather disgusted by the whole thing tonight.

[Laughter]

The idea that we will come here and talk about his career and talk about his achievements, he's the sort of man who really finds that slightly distasteful, and again that only speaks to what a great guy he is. He's also the sort of man that when we were getting ready backstage, they were putting water on the stage, and I said, "I think it would be quite nice if we had a drink, wouldn't it?" And I said, "You know, of the many things I remember about Trevor when I worked with him at ITN was the fact that whenever anybody was to go to the pub, and it happened in those days quite regularly, Trevor would look at his watch and say, "Well it's one o'clock somewhere, isn't it?"

[Laughter]

It's delightful to welcome Trevor for tonight, and before we do let's just take a look at some of his work.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

It gives me great pleasure to welcome BAFTA Fellow, Sir Trevor McDonald.

[Applause]

Welcome.

**Trevor McDonald:** You've subjected the people to all that stuff.

**KY:** So Trevor just said, "You subjected those people to all that stuff."

**TM:** It's about time to go home.

[Laughter]

**KY:** Before we do go home, let's just start, why don't we start at the very beginning. Let's start at the point when you were a young man, and you became aware that journalism, that broadcast journalism was even a thing. Can you remember

that, when you thought that's actually a job?

**TM:** I do vaguely, because in a way it's always what I wanted to do. I was born on a tiny, tiny island in the Caribbean. And one of the curious facts of life is that, life in these tiny islands are not as introspective as you think they might be. People, you know, we look outwards. You know George Bernard Shaw said something about you know dreaming of things that never were, and you do in a small island. And more practically I listened to the BBC World Service, and heard all these guys reporting from Moscow and Beijing and Southern Africa and the Far East, and it seemed to me that they were getting front row seats at big international events. It also occurred to me, I must say, that somebody was paying for them to do this, and I thought this sounded a good deal I thought, and I wanted to be involved. But I, I must also confess, I did have a kind of interest in the business of the news. I thought in our societies, however they were structured, people survived on knowing what was going on. Do you know, you couldn't run any community unless there was this knowledge of what was going on, and therefore the news played an important part, and I thought that was a good thing to be in.

**KY:** I mean, can you just sort of paint us a quick picture of the background that you came from though, because those seem like pretty lofty ambitions. I understand what you say about looking out, but where did you, I'm wondering where you got the nerve?

**TM:** I suppose; I mean a lot from my parents. We were not, we never described ourselves as poor, but we didn't have any money. Nobody described themselves as poor in the Caribbean, but we were all broke. But your parents had these ambitions for you, they felt that the only way that you could achieve any kind of social mobility was by educating yourself and aiming high. And I can, you know I can write an entire book about the admonitions that your parents give you, you know, "Aim high," "Shoot for the stars." And my mother used to quote rather laboriously and knowingly, something from I think it

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was Robert Louis Stevenson saying, you know, "Lives of great men all remind us we can make our lives sublime." And I thought, I have no chance of making a sublime life, but these things were drummed into you, and you were made to aim high you know. So I thought this unlikely dream of working like all these correspondents in Moscow or Beijing or wherever was not in the end unattainable, I thought I could probably do it.

**KY:** And so it was 1969 when you came to Britain to work for...

**TM:** I came, yes, that's two centuries ago that seems.

**KY:** It was called the BBC's Overseas Regional Service, you worked as a producer...

**TM:** That was at Bush House, at Bush House. Yes, I was a producer.

**KY:** What were your jobs as a producer, day to day?

**TM:** I produced people interviewing other people, and I went to the editor once and I said, "Do you know, I have also done interviews. Why are we, why am I producing these people to produce interviews you know. I'd like to do some more of that." But no, I had a great, great time at Bush House, a wonderful, wonderful place.

**KY:** Can you remember the first time you sat in front of a live microphone?

**TM:** I did that in Trinidad, and I'm not too sure I can remember the exact time. But I, I was always consumed by terror, and I think it in some way, it helped me through. I was always terrified, I mean the idea that what you say in front of this would somehow be heard by all these people, I mean I think it's the most terrifying thing to do. And I feel the same way now.

**KY:** Do the nerves get any, I mean I appreciate there you're saying something amusing, but for many people that I interview they say actually, nerves can get worse as you get older.

**TM:** I don't think it gets any better. And you, I have one big failing: I've been a worrier. I worry constantly about everything.

**KY:** But that's what makes you good.

**TM:** Well I don't know whether it does or not, but it doesn't make me feel better.

[Laughter]

And you know I've done a lot of interviews recently on some of the documentaries we've done with Plum Television for ITV, and I sit up all night after having discussed enormously with my colleagues, and I still, and I can't, still can't help that, I can't.

**KY:** 1973 you went to be a reporter for ITN. We were just having a quick chat backstage, and it was very, very interesting that of course, because I was wondering about this, for people who saw you on television at that time, it would have been, 'there's a black guy who's a reporter'. For you...

**TM:** 'Who the hell is this guy?' Yes, I had sympathy with them for that.

[Laughter]

**KY:** But I'm guessing for you maybe, it was you just taking your next career step. Were you aware that this was emblematic, and maybe even totemic.

**TM:** No, I was not, I was not. I made a terrible mistake at Bush House, which I enjoyed enormously. I boasted to my colleagues who were just radio journalists. I said, "Do you know, I did some television in Trinidad you know, and I interviewed people in Trinidad on television you know," and I was terribly proud of that. And I probably boasted too much, and they called my bluff and they said, "If you think you're so good, why don't you apply to this place, there's this new place called ITN." I went to ITN; I was bludgeoned into doing it by my colleagues because I'd boasted so much. And I turned up at ITN, and I remember so well, I went to a book shop on the way there to buy a book because I thought I'd be kept waiting for a long time to do an interview. And I

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went up, and at the end of it I was kind of offered a job, and I said to the editor who was a man called Nigel Ryan, I said, "Look, can I go back and think about this? I'm not sure." I was absolutely shocked. And he said, "Yes, you can go back and think about it." I went back to Bush House and they said, "How did it go?" I said, "Well they offered me a job." And they said, "What did you say? When are you leaving?" I said, "No no no, I said I wanted time to think about it." And they said, "You bloody fool, would you call them up now and say you'll take the job." But I was quite, I was really quite surprised that I got it. Because I don't think I, I never thought I was that really very good about it really, but...

**KY:** Let's leave the audience to judge because we've got a clip of some of that early stuff. Let's take a look at it.

**TM:** Oh no, please.

[Clip plays]

**KY:** Sir Trevor, let's talk...

**TM:** All much too long. That line about 'what conglomeration of' whatever it was called. Oh, terrible, absolutely ghastly.

**KY:** That very first, first of all, I love the suede jacket.

**TM:** I hope they never come back in fashion!

**KY:** I mean that was a very tough gig. As your first gig as a reporter was to report on The Troubles in Northern Ireland, what are your memories now looking back at that, what do you remember?

**TM:** I was terrified. My point about doing Northern Ireland was for me very simple. I was, I never lost my shock at being employed by ITN. And so I made a condition, well I thought I made a condition, which was that I would do everything every other reporter did. I did not want to be a black reporter, I had no interest at all in that. I'm black West Indian, that's what I am, I can't change that. I did not want to live my life continually in that channel, to be seen as such. So I demanded to be sent on

everything that every other reporter did, and of course Northern Ireland was the big story. And I was absolutely terrified, I'd never been in a place where people shot at each other and were you know... I mean in Trinidad, you know there were rum shop rows on Saturday night, and people took to machetes and so on, but that was it, nothing like bombs and so on. So I found it very, very, very challenging, but it was my own fault in a way.

**KY:** What preparation were you given before you went to, I mean ostensibly a war zone in its way?

**TM:** Yeah, I think human resources might have something to say about that these days. But not a great deal, not a great deal. And you know throughout your career you're not really told very much, and you end up in these places without very much. I remember before going to the Middle East for one bout of you know crisis, there was a man who came and gave us a lesson about the gas which can you know kill you in seconds and so on. And you had to put on a, you know the clothes which would...

**KY:** A sort of hazard suit.

**TM:** All that sort of stuff. And I remember, I went to him and I said, "Do you know, I can't get this on in the required time," I had tried several times, "I just can't, I'm physically very clumsy about this." And he said to me, he said, "Don't say anything to anybody, but if this thing happens, you'll be dead before you can put it on anyway. So don't worry too much." And I've always thought that's, it's a very good thing. I mean you can be; you can be a little too careful. But my care was in cowardice, a hatred of guns and violence, I always ran away from anything that looked terribly dangerous, and I never found one of those places which I thought is somewhere I wanted to lose my life, so I managed to do it that way.

**KY:** What about the actual journalistic sensibility of reporting from, the Philippines there, and this was where Cory Aquino was challenging the power. To explain that and to try to communicate with people who are in

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their sitting rooms on their Dralon sofa, they've just had their tea, and why the hell should they care about the Philippines? What did you learn in those early days about trying to connect the audience at home with a story that you were telling from far away?

**TM:** You put it perfectly, I think you've hit the core of what any good journalistic reporting is about. How do you make somebody sitting in their house in Kent or somewhere in Essex or wherever in Scotland, interested in what these people called ISIS are doing? How do you make it not only accessible, how do you make it understandable, how do you make it relevant to their lives? And that's the key. In the Philippines case it was almost kind of easy because this man Marcos had been a crook for a long time, and had, and Cory Aquino represented something which was different. And we all thought she would win. What was nice about that story for me, I never forget and I'm always grateful for, is that it's very rare that you're able to see something begin and end, you know you're always pulled away just at the crucial moment. I was there at the beginning of that revolution and I saw its end. I remember very well the night Marcos left, somebody came running through the corridor of the hotel saying "He's gone, he's gone", and we ended up, as I think you probably saw there, outside the palace where people were rather naughtily firing bullets at us, which I never recognised even as bullets until bits of tarmac came, sort of was dug up around me.

**KY:** And that was for Channel 4 News.

**TM:** That was for Channel 4 News, yes.

**KY:** You won a BAFTA for that coverage of the Philippines election. I mean it's very interesting to hear you say, and I'm sure there will be people watching tonight who remember when it was possible for a reporter to be there and to see a story through from the start to the end.

**TM:** It's rather nice isn't it?

**KY:** These days a great indulgence actually, not to be sent and brought

back, and there's no more, often not a bureau there. When you look at that time with the perspective you have now as a newsman of many, many decades, does it seem like a sort of, in its way a golden time, a time of indulgence for news reporters?

**TM:** I really, I enjoyed the fact that, I thought after about a month, I thought I was finally beginning to understand what was going on there. I have always found, I mean you put it very well, it's not always easy, or to put it more crudely, it's terribly difficult to get into a situation and understand what's going on sufficiently to make it intelligible to people who are watching. I mean, how does one understand or try to explain to anybody what's going on in Syria? I mean I, I sit at home now and wonder, and can't make head or tail of it. And incidentally, I mean I have such great admiration for people who do that now. I would never be near that stuff now.

**KY:** Is that true?

**TM:** Absolutely not. Well I think I would not be anyway.

[Laughter]

I like to think I would have a little more sense, I have grown up a little more.

**KY:** Your career has been peppered by these great landmark interviews, and those are the situations that, no matter what reporters will say, that's what they're all waiting for. They're waiting for the big one, and you have had lots of great interviews. I want to take you back for a moment to 1988, it was Libya's Colonel Gaddafi. Before we talk about it, let's just see a little clip.

[Clip plays]

**TM:** Ah, controversial stuff.

**KY:** So much to say. Let's start first of all with the logistics of landing it. Where did that begin?

**TM:** That's a very, very good question, and I'm not too sure I remember to be very honest. I was very, very lucky in being asked. There was a period in ITN

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where if Colonel Gaddafi was to be interviewed, I was asked to do it, if Hillary Clinton was about to, I was asked to do it, so I got the, you know by a lot of stroke of luck. I worked these things too, I mean I called them up a lot and convinced them that they should see me.

**KY:** Who do you call?

**TM:** I started with the embassy here, and then I'd call, I got to know people there. And I actually got to know one of his sons sort of peripherally. I'm glad it was peripherally.

**KY:** Not the one with the golden gun?

**TM:** Well the one with the golden gun probably, yes, I met him a couple of times. And I always, I used to, I lied about what I, how I would do this. And I would say to them, I would say, "I also do the news on television you know," I would boast. "So if I come on Thursday I must see your man on Friday, because I'm doing the news on Monday, and I must do it." And they fell for this a lot of the times.

[Laughter]

Although in his case he decided, I must tell this story, he... Colonel Gaddafi as a showman. I'm sure he was corrupt and he did awful things to his people, but he was a showman. And he wanted to show how brilliant he was in improving relations with Tunisia, so he took us down to the Tunisian border, I'm sure it was only for the benefit of the ITN cameras, and to demonstrate that he was sort of establishing better relations with Tunisia, he would demolish this customs post. And he got into a JCB, and you know those things with the big fronts which knock... The only problem, he couldn't drive it. And the thing was pretty large, but he kept missing the post. And then he wouldn't go back to Tripoli where I thought was to do the interview that night, and said would I spend the night in the desert with him? And I said, "No, I would prefer to go back to my hotel room in Tripoli."

**KY:** Did he?

**TM:** He did this thing, he wanted to prove that he was a Bedouin at heart, and so he would occasionally go off into the desert and spend the night, I suppose very comfortably. But I had a drink and went back to Tripoli.

**KY:** Was there a point in the interview, and I think for anybody who has been in that situation they might recognise it, where you think, that's the line, that's going to be the headline what he's just said. Can you remember that?

**TM:** My headline, which I don't think I got, not in many interviews, I didn't get very many, but was about his support for the IRA. And he denied, and of course we know that that was, denial was rubbish. He did supply arms to the IRA, he supplied arms to a lot of unpalatable people all over the place. But I must tell you though, that I, he was extraordinarily generous in one way. I don't know whether you've picked up on that halting English?

**KY:** Yes.

**TM:** I begged him to do it in English, which he said, "I haven't done interviews in English for a long time." And long after I did it somebody said to me, "I saw you interviewing that crook Gaddafi, and he was so halting in his answers that I knew he was being, you know he was not telling the truth." In fact, I think that was probably because he was being very kind and did it in English to please me, which I begged him to do. Because you know we don't like translations much on British television do we, you know we don't, we like people talking in, you know in our language.

**KY:** It sounds like a lot of the time you employed a great deal of personal charm, would that be fair?

**TM:** I don't know. He offered me a job.

**KY:** What was the job?

**TM:** He said to me, he was very, he said, "How did you come to," and many people in the Middle East always it was a line of questioning, they would always say, "How did you ever end up working in England?" And I said, "Well look, this is

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a long boring story, but you must understand Trinidad was a colony of the British empire, and the metropolitan centre of all our lives was London, and we all aspired to work in London." And he said to me, "Why don't you come and work for me?" As somebody famously said I think in a Times interview, I made my excuses and left.

[Laughter]

**KY:** Of course, I mean it is fascinating and charming to hear these stories, and you are somebody who desperately underplays any sort of danger or crisis that you've ever been in, but you have reported from a lot of dangerous places. You've had colleagues of course who have lost their lives, not least Terry Lloyd in 2003, and two colleagues at ITN, they were killed in Iraq. You spent time of course in Iraq, how much did you fear for the safety of your crew and for yourself at any point?

**TM:** I was, well I was a confirmed coward so I always, I was always worried. I mean and I always did everything I could to get away from anything which looked terribly dangerous. You know I would send, if there was a roadblock in Beirut or in Baghdad, I would send the driver to ask the people to lift the barriers you know, and I would say, "Tell them that I'm an international reporter and they can't bar me from going there." And the driver would come back and say, "Well they threatened to shoot me, and you may go but I'm not going." So I always found a way of getting round them, but I mean you were worried. It's amazing how many times you find ways of getting round things. I remember in Beirut in particular, I got rather tired of, there was a drive from Beirut to Damascus; there was no television station in Beirut so you had to take the stuff to Damascus. I did the drive a couple of times, and on the way back as it got dark I thought it was rather dangerous, so you'd give a guy 100 bucks at the Commodore Hotel in Beirut and say, "Would you take this tape to Damascus Television?" And then you would sit in the bar and wait for a call from London to say, "We've just seen your pictures," and I thought, what wonderful people that they never took my \$100 and disappeared with the tape

into the hills. You know so you found ways of getting round it.

**KY:** There are many foreign reporters who, and I'm sure you might have met some, who in a sense only really seem alive when they're in danger zones. They come home and they're sort of half living in a newsroom when they're not on location and they're not in flak jacket. You don't strike me as ever having been one of those?

**TM:** I have a serious dislike of that, and I remember very well when I was in Dhahran in Saudi Arabia when it looked as though there was going to be a second Gulf War in the Middle East, and I hated it. And I have the greatest respect and so on for my colleagues, I didn't get on with those very well with those who couldn't wait to get off there, I mean, but maybe it was just. I also thought wars are always a failure of diplomacy, and I was, I've always felt there must be some better way of organising our lives without shooting at each other, there must, must be a better way. I know there's an inevitability about some conflicts, especially in the era of the Military Industrial Complex, where people want if anything to show off their weapons you know. They want to be able to fire these nice new missiles at somebody else. But I hated the idea of conflict, I had to spend a lot of my life doing it, but I secretly, I always disliked it. I disliked the effect it had on people's lives you know. We saw the missiles and so on, but you're seeing a little bit of it now in the refugees, it's catastrophic that this sort of thing should degenerate into this lack of humanity, and awful, I hated most of that.

**KY:** It was 1990 when you interviewed Saddam Hussein. Let's take a little look at that.

[Clip plays]

**TM:** I think that's the most I've ever seen of that interview, it was a fairly, fairly tedious affair.

**KY:** Well, I have to say that was not a tedious opening question. What a very, very clever opening question to pin him to the wall with: "Saddam Hussein, that

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was a very un-Arab thing to do." How long did it take you to formulate that cracker?

**TM:** There's a long story to that which I shan't bore you with.

**KY:** Well bore us a little bit.

**TM:** Well a little bit. We were under pressure to do, to be tough, I had to be seen to be tough. At one stage in fact, and this is telling intel stories you know about ITN and ITV and so on here, but it was said, there was the perception that Saddam Hussein was so beyond the pale he shouldn't be interviewed. I said, "We would have wanted to interview Adolf Hitler, so I see no reason why we shouldn't." Some of the companies in the ITV conglomeration said, "If this interview is not tough enough, we shan't run it." So I was sent to Iraq to do an interview which may not be seen on television, and I resolved that I had to be very, very, very tough. To cut this long, boring story short, years, well not years later, when the war actually started I went to see the man in London who had partly had to arrange this interview, and he said to me, he said, "You know Trevor, there is something I always wanted to say to you." And he said, "You were bloody rude to my President," and his words were not bloody, he didn't say bloody. But I felt I had to do it. Do you know, I am not sure I would do that again. I didn't think it was that brilliant way to begin an interview. If you're trying to get things out of people I'm not too sure insulting them in that way is a great idea, I'm not sure I would do that again.

**KY:** Do you go back, I mean I sense that you are not somebody who will, you know of an evening with a whiskey and soda sit and watch your greatest moments. Do you tend not to watch...

**TM:** I had never seen that interview; it was rather tedious. The interesting thing for me about that though is what that whole occasion taught me about Saddam Hussein and the regime. There were half a dozen people from his inner cabinet sitting in on this interview, and we'd been given a tough time in the run up to the interview you know, taken on

false runs to interviews which never happened, to places where they would never happen. And it was a very bad scene, and I, although I was taking I think what I now call downers and Miss Sharapova would probably regret taking them, but to keep myself calm and so on, I did lose my temper when these people sat, all these ministers sat in my interview space. And I said, "Don't you guys have anything else to do? This after all is a television interview with your President, what's so strange about it?" And the guy made a very significant comment, one of the ministers, he said, "You have no idea the significance of this. We never, ever see him questioned. We never see him questioned." So those cabinet shots which you saw on the television, nobody ever asked a question. And in fact, before the war with Iran, one minister who challenged him was taken outside, shot, and Saddam walked back in and continued as though nothing had happened.

**KY:** During that, during those tough questions then, did you, he didn't look cheerful. Did you fear for your own safety?

**TM:** He was not very happy about that. I was worried about getting out of Iraq in one piece after that.

**KY:** Was there any moment when you almost didn't?

**TM:** I tried to leave very early the following morning.

[Laughter]

And managed to. I don't think in all the things I have done, I have ever been so worried about sitting opposite to somebody with that reputation. I was genuinely worried, and the security people didn't make it easy either. Terribly, terribly interesting I think, nobody else does these days it's become so common, they took our shoes off. And I was saying to my colleagues, I said, "Why are they looking at our shoes?" We know now, but they were way ahead of that guy who tried to bomb the shoe bomb. The Iraqi security service made us take our shoes off, and they were...



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**KY:** How extraordinary, this was 1990.

**TM:** And they were, they almost took bits of the leather off and so on, and I was, I've always thought that's just one fascinating detail. But the other thing too is, you realised what a hold he had on the country, and the way he ran the country was reflected in the way his security people behaved. After the interview I discovered that my hotel room was invaded by half a dozen people from the Ministry of Information, and they kept saying to me, "What was it like? How did it go?" And I was so obsessed by this interview for the reasons that I've explained, that I started talking about the interview and the mechanics of the interview. They were asking me, 'what was he like?'

**KY:** Goodness me.

**TM:** I had sat in a room with somebody, of whom they worked for a number of years, but who they would never, ever meet. And whenever you talk to people in Iraq about, you know you have discussion with them, and you mention the name President Saddam Hussein; he terrified the people there.

**KY:** 1990 then was, I mean it was a year of extremes I think for you, because you conducted that interview and it was also the year that you returned after many visits to South Africa to conduct the interview with the then newly released ANC leader Nelson Mandela. Just give us an insight as to, I mean it was the, you know goodness knows it was the interview everybody wanted. How did it come about, and in knowing that you were going to meet this man, what were your personal feelings?

**TM:** I was slightly reprimanded by the editor of ITN, still then a man called Nigel Ryan, who, and I said, in answer to your question, I was overwhelmed at meeting Mandela. I am a black man and South Africa under Apartheid represented to me all that is horrible about human life, and I couldn't work out how they got away with it for so long. And to have somebody like that who came out, and who immediately embraced the concept of you know racial harmony, and that everybody should have a part.

And so I, I was terribly, terribly chuffed about doing that, and I mean I...

**KY:** And what did you say to Nigel that sort of cheesed him off?

**TM:** I didn't, no no, I said, I think on the tape it was I said, "Mr Mandela, it's an honour to meet you."

**KY:** We'll take a little look; we'll take a look Trevor.

[Clip plays]

This of course, I mean a moment of enormous significance for you personally, but even greater than that, the world is watching, the world is listening for everything that drops from this man's lips. It is a signal to the people who are led by this man, it is a moment when South Africa could have turned on a coin. How aware were you of the importance of that?

**TM:** Well I wasn't aware of it in the sense, in the way you put it there, I mean, but that is what it was.

**KY:** But you accept that it's true, yes.

**TM:** What struck me, and what you know, I mean we couldn't quite believe it. I put it to him in the course of this interview that there was absolutely no way that he could come to an accommodation with the National Party. I said, "It's just, your views are absolutely you know implacably opposed to each other, this thing is not going to fly, it's not going to work." And he said, "If you are sincere, and if you want to negotiate in good faith, everything is possible." And I said, "No no no, everything is not possible. Some things are possible, and you can agree on peripheral issues, but on fundamental, core issues, you can't. You must stick by what you believe." He said, "No no no. If you are in a situation like this, and you really mean to succeed, you must be prepared to compromise on everything." I was blown away by that; I couldn't believe that somebody would say that.

**KY:** Did you feel personally changed by that encounter?

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**TM:** I had a respect for him which began there. I mean I was terribly lucky and I saw a lot of him throughout the years, many, many occasions. But that changed my view of international politics, and it made me, I referred to it earlier, hate conflicts even more. Because what he proposed, which could be a kind of universal solution to many problems, was that if you are genuinely prepared to compromise, you can avoid conflict. And for as long as he was there, and the transformation in South Africa has been a peaceful one. I mean it was one of the most extraordinary things of my life to meet him.

**KY:** It was?

**TM:** It was, absolutely. And I mean, if I can just bore you one moment further. The thing which, his humility was just the most wonderful thing you could... The day after, or later that day after that interview, the crowds were all outside his house and they kept clamouring for him to make a speech. He's not a good speech maker, he was not a good speech maker. He couldn't, he's not a great orator, never was, and didn't want to speak. But of course they were standing there, they'd been there the night before on *News at Ten* and you know jumping up and down. And he went out and he talked to them, and he began by saying, "I have one thing to say to you today, all you young people, go back to school." I thought, 'Pardon?', I mean. And then to compound that he said, "Walter Sisulu and I," who was standing next to him, "and I are old men now, we shan't be here for very long." He was released 48 hours before and he's already talking about his political mortality, unheard of in the world of politics. There was, in my book there has been nobody ever like him.

**KY:** By 1992 you were anchoring *News at Ten*, and then you went on to host *Tonight with Trevor McDonald* that earned you in the first series two BAFTA nominations. Let's just remind ourselves.

[Clip plays]

So Trevor, being the anchor, going from being the reporter out in the field to being the anchor of, especially *News at*

*Ten*, was the job that everybody wanted and you got it. What did it feel like when you made that transition of being the reporter out on the road, to being the guy with his, well can I say his bum in the butter? Can we say that? To have the cushy job, to have the job everybody wants.

**TM:** I don't, I hardly remember. I remember contemplating what I would do if I didn't get it, because if you have two anchors on an evening, then there are about five or six of you when you consider the different permutations. When you go down to one, there's just one or probably two. So there weren't a lot of options open if you didn't get it. So I seriously thought I would go to some parts of Africa or something and do charitable work. I was really worried about what, and I don't suppose you know living with me was very good then, because I had no idea what I could do if I didn't get it.

**KY:** So are you saying you really really wanted it? You put yourself forward for it, and that was the only thing you wanted, by that point the only thing you wanted to do?

**TM:** Well I had to only really want it, but I knew, the competition was, I mean there were, you know there were colleagues who were absolutely brilliant, and I, up to the last moment I was desperately unsure about whether I would ever get it.

**KY:** So how did you get it, how did you secure it? Go on, tell us.

**TM:** If they were the usual fivers they must have been somebody else's! But I don't, I really don't know, I mean I'm told when people want to be extraordinarily kind to me, I'm told there was a kind of survey about what people want to do this programme, and that I didn't do too badly in the survey. But I really, I found it very, very difficult. And I've always said, no matter how good you think you do your job, you need a good slice of luck, and I thought I was just terribly, terribly lucky.

**KY:** Young reporters, when they embark on their young reporting life, of course they have the callowness of youth and

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they can do a lot of things that actually in retrospect they think, did I really ask that? Did I really do, did I really say that on television? As you matured through the role, and as you became, you know, the guy in the newsroom who people looked to, the guy who'd done the Saddam Hussein interview, who'd been in the Philippines, who'd won all the awards, what did you see around you that sort of made you mature and think differently? Did your approach change as you became, you know as you became, as you got married, as you became a father, as you got older?

**TM:** I became more convinced about the importance of news. I always did, and I never ceased to strive to try and find better ways of doing what we did. And I suppose that's why I became a bit of a bore really, I've always felt, do you know we today we, and you know the last few years we've been telling the people in Iraq and the people in Afghanistan and so on, "Be like us. Be a pluralistic, democratic society. Inform your people about what's going on." The business of telling people what's going on in their own lives, in their own countries, is desperately, desperately important. I mean news is the lifeblood of democracy, information is the lifeblood of democracy. And I was obsessed by the importance of this, and so what happened was that I worked rather hard at it. And this isn't, news anchoring is not so much a job as a vocation, you can't for example on a Sunday night ignore what's happening if you're going to be in the office on Monday. Do you know, so it's...

**KY:** Yes, you're living and breathing it.

**TM:** You live and breathe it. And I probably did a little too much because I, but I was obsessed by how vital this was to the society that we all aspire to.

**KY:** It is the case though, surely, that people can, and I'm talking about now as much as any time at all, people can watch the news they absorb it for the moment that they're watching it, hopefully they're engaged in it, but you know as well as I do that people say, "Well what I really remembered is, did I like the guy's tie, and what was the

weather?" You know, do you feel that news can materially change the way people you know exercise their democratic vote, their attitudes to foreign policy, their attitude to how they want to bring up their children, their attitude to where they want to live? Do you think it can fundamentally change peoples' attitudes?

**TM:** Well that's a good question. I mean the way you put it, I'd be terrified of answering yes to all that, but I do believe...

**KY:** Or to any of it.

**TM:** Or to any of it, but I do believe in its importance. I think what you're referring to is more relevant in the kind of multiplicity of channels from which we now get our news. I think it's much more disparate, it's much more chopped up. I think people have a greater, greater variety, and they can make up their minds about small bits from various sides of it. So I think it's become much more difficult now, but I still believe in its fundamental importance, even now when I'm no longer involved, and I still want to throw things at the television when I see things which I don't agree with.

**KY:** We've seen some of the statuesque world leaders that you've interviewed, you've also interviewed Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton, George W. Bush, we saw earlier Tony Blair. You've seen power, and goodness knows it's a fascinating thing when you get very close to it at very, very close quarters. I'd be very interested on your view of how power changes men and women, and how you think it, well I was going to say compromises them and that shows my own prejudice, but what you make of how power can influence human beings, because in the end that's what they are.

**TM:** Yeah, yeah, I'm not sure I know really to be very honest. I've been fascinated watching it operate. I've also been fascinated by the way people view their power, and I would never, ever forget, Bush the younger, I had what I thought was a great, great question for him, on which as I said before I spend a lot of time. And I said you know, "Being

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President, what is it that worries you most? You know that call at two in the morning, when you know because of who you are it may be a world shattering, world changing event, and you have to be involved in making a decision about what happens you know?" And so I framed this question I thought with great skill and scholarly thought, and I said, "What have you learnt most about where you sit now?" And he said, "I've learnt there is good and evil, and I must be on the side of the good." And I just thought, what the hell do I say next? If there's this guy who absolutely believes there's you know good and evil and he's on the side of the good, then you know I... And I stumbled to think, and I was fascinated by his view of, and that's what, by the way....

**KY:** And such a telling answer in its way.

**TM:** That's, it was absolutely honest, straightforward. That is what he was. He believed certain things, and that's what he was going to believe about it, and you couldn't change his mind.

**KY:** 2005 then, you retired after 30 years at ITN, but it was three short years later that you decided that you were going to return to report on the American Presidential elections. What changed your mind? What finally got you back?

**TM:** I was terribly chuffed about the possibility of a man called Obama, or even worse as the New Yorker magazines put it, a name who is sort of a catastrophe, you know Barack Hussein Obama becoming President of the United States. And I had spent a lot of time in the south of America, and it was fascinating to watch people there contemplate the mere possibility of somebody like that becoming... And they wouldn't believe it, I mean they you know I would say, "But come on you guys," you know black man in Selma, and I said to him, "Your man's going to walk it you know, John McCain or whoever it is, Romney or these guys you know they're no..." They said, "Ah but, you never know what people will do once they get into the secrecy of that voting booth and what they'll do." So it was, I mean, it was a great thing to do.

**KY:** It is probably the greatest privilege, I would guess, of being an anchor or being a reporter, to be there at those moments of, as we saw there with Mandela, and again when you were reporting in 2008 on the American elections. Could you describe to us what it actually feels like to soar on the wave of that moment of world history, where you think never before and probably, well never again because this is the first time. What does it feel like personally for you?

**TM:** I mean just, I mean you describe it much better than I could, I mean it's just sensational. It's an absolutely wonderful, wonderful feeling. But you know we are all, we're all human. When I first went to America to cover Presidential campaigns, when I bored my friends in the pub what I said is. "Do you know last week I was at the back of Air Force One?" you know. You know it's those bits which you also remember. So yes, of course, on reflection you are consumed by the kind of importance of this event, but you know at the time you look at little bits and pieces. I remember on the Obama thing it was a freezing day, but walking through the crowds, the biggest crowd ever assembled in Washington, his inauguration. And talking to people who just said you know, "I can't believe I'm alive. This isn't really happening. You know here's a man, a black man, walking into a White House built by slaves. This is not happening." You know so you do, you are as you said, you are consumed by this, by the moment.

**KY:** 2009 marked the beginning of your sort of concerted documentary career.

**TM:** [Laughing] Concerted!

**KY:** Well I mean insofar as you know you had made stuff before that could be sort of quantified as documentary, more long form stuff.

**TM:** They kept asking me back, I have never discovered why.

**KY:** Yeah, I know, because news people, you know they have a short attention span, they're very, very impatient, they like to see it get out on the night and it's

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all finished and they go and do it again tomorrow, and if it was rubbish last night they can make it better today.

Documentary making is far, far different from that. How did you find that it suited you in the beginning?

**TM:** Well not suited me at all, I mean I was led all the way, as I've been led all the way most of my career, by colleagues. You know I couldn't do this on my own. I had never made, you're absolutely right. *News at Ten*, the piece is two and half minutes long.

**KY:** It's gone, yes.

**TM:** To get peoples' attention today, to watch 25 minutes, it has to be skilfully, skilfully done. And in those documentaries you rely on your colleagues, I mean in my case entirely on your colleagues, the people who do the research, who get the stuff, and the people who manage to get those people before the camera. And some of the people that I have talked to in programmes I have done, in the documentaries, quite frankly you know you could put a five year-old before these people and they'll get the same that I did out of them, because the stories were those people, they were just magnificent. And the greatness of those programmes were in the people who organised getting you know those people to sit and appear and talk to me.

**KY:** Let's take a little look at one of your first documentaries called *The Mighty Mississippi with Trevor McDonald*.

[Clip plays]

**TM:** You see, even Morgan Freeman was astonished you see, so that must mean something.

**KY:** I'm very interested, because knowing a little about the way that these things work, you seemed entirely convincing there when you spoke in your beautifully modulated voiceover about how fascinated you were about the subject. But did the channel or the production company come to you and say could you be interested in this, or did you say...

**TM:** Oh yeah, they they they they...

**KY:** Yeah, so they talked you into it?

**TM:** They talked me into it. But I mean to do something, to get a chance to do something like a programme called 'The Mississippi', especially if it's modestly called *Mississippi with Trevor McDonald*, it has a certain charm.

[Laughter]

**KY:** And what about, what about being away for a long time with a crew? I mean they've got to be people you get on with, you have to like their company.

**TM:** Oh you have to. And that's what I say, I mean the fascinating thing about television, which is why I have this nagging worry about the celebrity age and so on, television is the most collaborative thing in the world. You know to appear in *Soweto*, there must be 50 other people in ITN who make that image possible. The thought that you are the most important people in this is crazy, it's rubbish, it's not true, and the documentaries I mean show this much more than anything else. To find these people who talk you through these fascinating stories, that's really the key. Once you get them, as I say I'm pretty sure you know you can get a fairly bright five year-old to get them to talk them through it.

**KY:** How much convincing did you take in production meetings when they said to you, "We've got a great idea for your next series. We'd like you to meet the guys on Death Row who are responsible for the worst crimes humanly possible. We'd like you to meet them face to face." What was your gut reaction?

**TM:** My gut feeling was how horrible. I have a dislike of any kind of violence, I don't understand most crimes, I've lived a pretty, I must be careful how I say this, a pretty sheltered life. And so it took a lot of, I had no idea what it would be like I mean to be very honest, and I was fascinated I suppose by the fact that I didn't know what it was going to be like.

**KY:** Okay.

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**TM:** And I, I couldn't, I didn't know what to make of these people, and it was their ability to talk about their lives and about what they had done so clearly, and it's a life so alien to mine. I sat on the bed of this guy who had killed two people in the most horrendous way, and I did, when I went back to my hotel that night, thought you know, I was in the cell of this guy who cut the throats of two people, and talking to him about his crimes; you must find a better life I tell myself. But in the end there's something sort of fascinating about listening to people. I have one favourite memory, I said to one guy on the cell, I said, "What is it like?" Again, not a brilliant question, "What is it like when somebody from your cell is taken away to be executed?" And you know not a particularly brilliant question, you know it's a pretty average question really, and he gave I thought the most brilliant answer I've ever heard to anything. I said to Morgan Freeman, I said, "My guy was better than any of your guys in *Shawshank Redemption*." Because he said to me, he said, you know he screwed his eyes up and he looked at me and he said, "Ah," he said, "It's tough. You see this guy every day, you share meals together, you go to the play area together, exercise yard together, and then one day he comes to you and he says, 'I got to go man'." And he said, "You know when he says that, that's the last you'll see of him because he's going to march down them steps," he said, "and they're going to kill him." And I just, I sat there and I thought, you know I couldn't have written a more brilliant answer. So there's such a lot of humanity even, you know even in these outrageous circumstances, and in hearing people emote about you know this awful slice of their lives, it's just...

**KY:** It was called, of course, *Inside Death Row with Trevor McDonald*.

**TM:** Ha, with Trevor McDonald.

**KY:** We're going to just show you a little clip.

[Clip plays]

In all the work that you do, you always maintain a decency, and I would say a

scrupulous integrity in the way that you address your subjects.

**TM:** Oh Kirsty, that's terribly kind. Could I write that down and take that with me?

**KY:** I say it because I think it's true. When you come up against, and I'm not talking about the individuals, but I'm talking about their circumstances, the worst that humanity is capable of. When you meet it at such close quarters, what does that do for you? What do you come away thinking about that?

**TM:** It's a brilliant question because we talked a lot about that. My position, before I talk about what I come away with, going into it was, I am not going there to condemn these guys, they have been condemned.

**KY:** That's done.

**TM:** I'm no judge, I'm you know, what I want to do is to turn my camera on to hear their stories, that's what we try to do. The other bit of your question though, is I do find it difficult to get those people out of my mind. There are not many days where somebody would mention the word prison where I have not thought of that guy Sanford.

**KY:** What is it you think, is that to do with the Western or particularly the American criminal justice system, where still juveniles can be sentenced and treated as adults within prison?

**TM:** I mean that's to particularise it perhaps a little too much. Yes, I do think about that too but the thing that stays with you more is this feeling of this catalogue of human misery.

**KY:** Yes, do you feel sort of drenched in it?

**TM:** I do, totally. I behaved, I was staying, we stayed at a, what's it called a casino motel to go to that prison, and it was a very odd place. We were probably the only people there, the five of us, were the only people there who weren't gambling. So you were sent off to your rooms at an entirely different way from the casino. And mine was a particularly long walk down a corridor after dinner,

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and I would get very nervous about taking this walk, and I would get up and double lock my room at night and do odd things like that. And I couldn't get those guys out of my head, I just, and even now as I say on occasions I'm not too sure. I just, it's a million miles from anything I know and however much you talk to them it, you can't get them out of your head.

**KY:** Speaking of a million miles from anything you know, we're going to take a look now at a little clip of *The Mafia*.

**TM:** Oh, yes, other nice guys.

[Clip plays]

**KY:** Simple.

**TM:** I just, I found, he's another guy I've never forgotten.

**KY:** I bet. This guy had never given an interview before, how did the producer and the researcher get it?

**TM:** No he'd never. Well as I say, I said before, you know nothing to do with me at all. You know the team...

**KY:** Can you give me a little snapshot of what surrounds, in production terms, on the day that you've got the interview? Do you know where you're going? Do you know if he's going to turn up? Do you know if he's going to have his people with him?

**TM:** Yes, I make sure the crew knows, and I ask a lot of boring questions. I think it was well arranged, but that's a very perceptive thing, because we weren't sure about whether he will, and he gave us I think some problems I'm right in saying about you know agreeing to this. And it was very funny, on the little street in New York, and I think it was the morning I actually flew back to London that night, so it was done that very morning, and if you looked carefully around the street you could see that he had a lot of minders around the place. Because he was, he's a you know a serious serial criminal guy.

**KY:** Why did he give the interview?

**TM:** I, it's another interesting point. My view, for what it's worth, of the Mafia, was that we see it as a criminal organisation in a kind of one-dimensional way. It's a kind of caray and it's a religion to them. And in an oddly paradoxical way they are very proud of what they did. He, I said to him, the Philadelphia mob man, I said you know, "How do you sleep at night having killed all these people?" And he said, it was very amusing, he said, "Oh I sleep absolutely fine." He said, "Of course at my age," he was in his eighties, he said, "I have to get up for the odd pee at night," he said, "but other than that I sleep like a child."

**KY:** Do you have any concerns about the fact, and of course there's a whole industry now that surrounds criminality, you know there's a publishing industry, there's a documentary industry, of actually there is a conferred glamour upon these subjects by virtue of the fact that we even bother to make television documentaries about them. Does that concern you at all?

**TM:** It, no it doesn't, I tell you I've never thought about that so seriously. I mean I, I think that has to be dealt with in the approach, whereas you're not overly censorious about what they did, you also make sure that you say to people... I mean why your question is a brilliant one is I, I rather liked Sanford, the guy before in the film, the young man, and so I remembered just listening to it now, I hadn't thought about it before, putting in, and probably the producers had a lot to do with it as well, putting in that line about "for this vile act." In other words, I was terribly, terribly careful in making sure that my sympathy for his state now does not in any way ignore the fact that he killed two people, for nothing, for five dollars. And that must always be at the forefront. And so hopefully that gets over the point you make about not being seen to glamourise in any way, by saying whatever you think, you know these guys did kill people. And for absolutely no reason, because they wouldn't allow him to cut the grass, I mean.

**KY:** We're going to take a look now at your most recent documentary.

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**TM:** Oh is there more? Oh dear.

**KY:** It's called *Las Vegas*, let's take a look at this.

[Clip plays]

Let's talk for a moment about Mike Tyson.

**TM:** Yeah, I know, he's not the most brilliant, I didn't get a lot out of him did I? I don't think I did.

**KY:** Well I don't know because I think that actually often, well not often because he doesn't give very many interviews, but on the occasions where I have seen Mike Tyson articulate his experience, the thing that always strikes me is, he's blinking articulate. I mean this is a guy with a vocabulary who is a thoughtful man. What struck you when you were talking to him?

**TM:** Gosh.

**KY:** Not that? Did you think something different?

**TM:** No, I mean I thought he was very difficult and he was very defensive. And I thought that he had decided the parameters within which he would operate during this interview, and he would not go outside that. I must also say a little immodestly that I think he was rather interested in who I was. After the interview he said to me, Americans can't understand this thing about knighthoods, and quite rightly.

**KY:** Yeah, they've got a point Trevor, come on.

**TM:** I think they're very lucky not to get involved in this rubbish. I once had a conversation with President Bush about this, and I made the terrible mistake in saying that they're pretty worthless. And he said, "Don't say that, my father has one," and this was, his father got an honorary knighthood. But Mike Tyson said to me at the end of the interview, he said, "I kept being fascinated about this black knight." I said, "No, you're making a terrible mistake. I'm not really a knight in shining armour at all," I said, "It's a title which you know you may have

different views about." But he was really keen about this, and he was very interested in black history and so on of America, and I was, that surprised me about him. But he, the thing in televisual terms which I think I went away with was that he and his wife had decided exactly what they will do, and they did that and not a scintilla more. They were absolutely, you know I thought we were really properly handled by them in that interview. We didn't come away shouting oh hurray, you know as sometimes you do, as we did when we interviewed that Mafia guy who killed 23 people or whatever it was. You know we thought Tyson had given us a bit of a run around you know.

**KY:** Did you gamble a buck in Las Vegas, did you go to the tables?

**TM:** I am a boring non-gambler, I've discovered that the only people who win are the casino owners, and I'm not prepared to contribute too much to them. No I don't like gambling, and my, the one thing I come away from Las Vegas with, which is a stain on my honour, and I hope I'm not in any way being political here, is that we stayed at the Trump Tower, and I...

**KY:** You're funding his campaign.

**TM:** And there the lesson endeth. I will say no more.

**KY:** You are, it's clear to me because I know you, and it's certainly clear to all the people that have worked with you, a very modest man by nature. And therefore we thought we'd like to embarrass you further by showing you the opinions, and dare I say it tributes, of some of the people who have worked with you over the years. Let's take a look.

**TM:** Oh, they must have been paid!

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

**KY:** Ladies and gentlemen, we are rapidly running out of time, I think we're probably going to have time for just two or three questions from the audience. Before we do that, I am going to subject



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you to the quick fire question round, because apparently this is traditional on A Life in Television evenings, so you've just got to very quickly, don't think about it, just answer Sir Trevor.

**TM:** Okay, I haven't thought of very much so far, so no change there.

**KY:** Here we go. Award-winning broadcaster or world class cricketer?

**TM:** Which would I prefer? World class cricketer.

**KY:** Who makes you laugh?

**TM:** Comedians.

**KY:** Lenny Henry.

**TM:** Lenny Henry.

**KY:** Pint of bitter or glass of fine red?

**TM:** Oh, red every time.

**KY:** What makes you cry?

**TM:** Pictures of refugees streaming across Macedonia to the sight of barbed wire. I think that's, it strikes me as being something which one would have seen in 1936, I am horrified by those images.

**KY:** *Countryfile* or *The Kardashians*?

**TM:** I'm not too sure I know what The Kardashians are.

**KY:** That's *Countryfile* then. The single most influential person in your life?

**TM:** The single most influential person in life, I think my parents were probably, both.

**KY:** Positive discrimination or the market decides?

**TM:** This is not too susceptible to these easy answers. I think are circumstances in which positive discrimination has to be done. In South Africa where 80% of the population, 85% of the population were discriminated against, to change that you had to do it. I think there are real philosophical problems about positive discrimination. I think it would be horrible

to be the person who gets the job because of positive discrimination, and to have everybody in the room look around and say I know exactly why he or she has got that job, that's awful. I'm a great believer in meritocracy.

**KY:** Who would play you in a biopic of your life?

**TM:** Oh God, nobody would want to do a biopic of my life. So I've never, I can't answer that.

**KY:** Should we pay for news?

**TM:** That's a big, big question. I think the BBC are, we pay for everything anyway in every way. I think it should be made available to everyone, whether people pay or not. I think it's the main ingredient of democratic, pluralistic life.

**KY:** Huw Edwards or Tom Bradby?

**TM:** Pass.

**KY:** You bloody old smoothie. We're going to open it up to the audience. As I say, we are very, very tight for time, we'll take two, maximum three questions. If you have a question please put your hand up and we've got somebody with a microphone, two people with microphones who can come to you. So here we go. Yes, just speak up from here.

**Q:** As a reporter, have there been times when being black has been a significant advantage, and times when it's been a significant disadvantage?

**TM:** I would hate to say it's never been an advantage, but I don't remember many of those. I know in, the people in Arab countries, where I went to in the Middle East and so on, they were always fascinated about how I got there. Before I interviewed Saddam Hussein I was subjected to a round of meeting with some of his ministers, and I went to one of these minister's offices, and it was very clear that he had no idea why he was seeing me, and I had no idea why I was there. And so in the end he said to me, "How did you end up working in London for ITV? You know, and how did you end up here, how did you get this you know?" So they were all fascinated, and

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Gaddafi said the same thing. I mean he said, "How did you end up in London, you know why don't you come and work for me," and so on. So they were always interested in me. Was it a disadvantage? I don't remember times where it was particularly. Do you know, the wonderful thing about this job is that there is this distance between you and the subject because of the camera. And you can almost disconnect yourself from some of the things you do because of the camera. You know that's the important part of it, the camera and what the camera does. So I can't remember, I have no complaints about anything. If anything I think I've been overly lucky I think.

**KY:** Let's take another question. The lady there, sort of fourth or fifth from the back row. Yes, sleeveless T-shirt.

**Q:** I mean we've heard it tonight, but also I think a lot of us have grown up with knowing you are a man of total class, perfect elocution, and a gentleman that everybody really looks up to. So what would you say for the younger generation, for those who would hope to have even a quarter of the career that you've had, what would you say to them?

**KY:** What's your advice?

**TM:** Oh God, I'm always asked advice. I mean, I don't know, what do you say to young people today. They're much cleverer than I will ever be and capable of making up their own minds. I still feel this business about some aspects of journalism being a vocation. It's more than a job, I think you really have to want to do it, and you have to want to do it well, and you have to work hard at it, and you have to constantly work hard at it, and you never succeed in getting it totally right. Always be aware that if you are lucky enough to work in something like television that it's not about you, it's about the people, and it's about the fact that for your one image to get on the screen there's 60 people behind who make it possible. And so for my point of view, if you allow me this remark which is probably not very necessary here, but just don't ever believe in this nonsense of celebrity, it's one of the most annoying

things I find about, I shouldn't say this really, about modern life, which makes me sound like a sort of antediluvian person. But you know it's, television, journalism, I mean Kirsty on *Desert Island Discs* will tell you it's a collaborative enterprise, it's not about any one person. That's my advice.

**KY:** Great advice, and one last question. The lady there in the dark sweater.

**Q:** Thank you. Is there anyone...

**KY:** Here we go, there's a mic, if you wouldn't just use the mic because it's much better for us all to hear.

**Q:** Thank you. As an American I would appreciate that if you did not respond to my question with the answer being Donald Trump...

**TM:** I promise I would not say him.

**Q:** Thank you. Is there anyone in history, current, past, that you would like to interview. You can include Jesus, and what would you ask him or her?

**TM:** Did you, what was the last part of your question?

**KY:** What would you ask him or her?

**Q:** What would you ask a person that you would like to interview, past or present?

**TM:** Okay, yeah, alright. We as a kind of cadre people, we're frightfully boring about you know contemporaneous events, do you know. So, today, I mean one would want to talk to somebody who is in the news today. I'm frequently asked this, and I've never come up with a good answer about who I would have liked to have interviewed. I do wish for all sorts of reasons that arch-criminals like Adolf Hitler were subjected to rigorous Robin Day style interviewing, I would, do you know because I think that in secrecy you know, and behind the scenes, and hidden away from the cameras and from journalistic inquiry, tyrants flourish. I didn't think it was any accident that people were so terrified of even mentioning the name Saddam Hussein. They were terrified about the name, and

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that terror was visited in a larger scale on his country. So, I haven't answered your question, but I would like to think that people who rise up in any age are subjected to rigorous enquiries about what they really intend for us. I think the television interviews you see with politicians and so on, sometimes we get wary of some of them and they don't tell us all we want to know, but they're desperately, desperately important. I'm, this vocation which I've been very fortunate to be a part of I think is desperately important to our way of life.

**KY:** That seems a very good point, not least because it is running very late, to say thank you very much to the audience for the questions, thank you to Rathbones for being our sponsors, thank you so much to BAFTA for hosting this night, A Life in Television, but more than anything, thank you for this evening but thank you for the decades.

**TM:** And thank you Kirsty for your kindness, thank you.

**KY:** Sir Trevor McDonald.

[Applause]