"...When CBS took me off the air after the Pike leak, Safire said my real offense was exploring Bill Paley's big secret..."
For most of the 25 years I worked for him, William Paley had been more legend than person for me—the practical visionary who had built both a successful entertainment network and, with Edward R. Murrow as his conscience, the finest and most pampered news organization in the industry. My first direct communication from Paley came in 1956, when I was stationed in Moscow. He wrote asking me to look after his “favorite niece,” Kate Roosevelt, the stepdaughter of FDR’s wife, whose wife was the sister of Paley’s wife. For courtesies easy to extend to the charming young tourist, I was rewarded, on my return to New York: house seats for a successful Broadway musical that Paley’s uncanny sense about entertainment had acquired for CBS, and an invitation to a Sunday supper-musical at the Whitney estate in Manhasset, Long Island.

Stationed in Germany from 1960 until 1966, I joined other European correspondents who were summoned to Paris during Paley’s biennial trips for a leisurely lunch, with faultless service and exquisite wines, in his suite at the Hotel Ritz. These meetings had no visible purpose other than to display Paley’s continuing interest in the old Murrow news organization. The unstructured conversations, under the influence of cocktails, wine, and after-lunch cognac, had sometimes unexpected results.

At lunch in the spring of 1962, Paley complimented me on the recently aired CBS Reports documentary on East Germany, “Land Beyond the Wall.” Its dramatic climax showed Walter Ulbricht, the East German Communist leader, upbraiding me for my questions and finallystorming out of the room in full view of the camera. “What I admired most,” said Paley, “was the coolness with which you sat there while he was yelling at you.” Breaking into laughter, I said, “Surely you understand that the shots of me looking cool were ‘reverses,’ filmed after Ulbricht had left the room!” No, Paley had not understood that and had not known about “reverses,” and he wanted all this explained. Feeling as though I was betraying some company secret—albeit to the head of the company—I proceeded to explain in detail the conventional post-interview procedure for shifting the camera and focusing it on the correspondent to repeat the principal questions, plus a gamut of absorbed and skeptical poses, all of this to be spliced into the interview to add variety and facilitate editing. Paley was fascinated.

“But isn’t it basically dishonest?” he asked finally. “‘Are you in a position to sharpen your question the second time around? And can’t you arrange your reactions the way you would have liked to have them?”

“Okay, it’s reasonable, I’ll do it.”

Paley looked deeply shocked. By the time I was back in Bonn that evening, I had heard reverberations from New York. Paley had ordered the summary abolition of subsequently filmed reactions and questions, and any editing that attached answers to the wrong questions. His sweeping order, which had film editors wringing their hands, was later quietly eased to permit “reverses” when approved by the interview subject. Since 1962, however, CBS News policy has reflected the Paley rebellion against the creeping deception that his news people had, almost unconsciously, slipped into. That was one kind of Paley intervention into new precincts—as the watchdog of honesty.

Another side of Paley was displayed at a subsequent Paris luncheon. The CBS Radio Network, trying to keep its fingernail hold on solvency, had begun requiring correspondents to “billboard” commercials—that is, to mention the names of the sponsors. I argued that the tawdriness of the practice harmed the prestige of the correspondents and of CBS News. With a flash of irritation, Paley said that if I was not happy with the commercial requirements of radio, I could give up doing the broadcasts. That was Paley the businessman.
The toughest part was the Paley-CIA connection, protected by the cloak of corporate secrecy and intelligence security..."