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one point he used money given to him for a medical leave to buy a secondhand Jaguar. It was also a period of increased dissipation — according to Rathbone, Evans got up to a bottle of vodka a day. After subjecting his wife to much psychological abuse, he divorced, but a while later married a much younger Swiss woman with whom he began an affair while she was still married, "a situation," Rathbone tells us, "to which he was well-accustomed."

Having trouble justifying "a photographer who seemed to do whatever he pleased, if he did anything at all," his bosses at *Fortune* told him in the early 1960s he was a luxury they could no longer afford. But once again falling back on his network of well-connected friends, Evans got a teaching job at Yale.

There he warned students of the danger of nostalgia, sentiment, propaganda, and color, spoke of photography as "the most literary of arts," and roped students into helping him steal road signs for his ever more eccentric collection of American cultural artifacts. While rewarding, this period was also sad. He grew testy at always being questioned about the Depression, "as if he weren't a living artist, still churning with ideas."

Although Rathbone's portrait of Evans is hardly flattering on a personal level, she leaves no doubt about the impact and influence of his work. Describing a journalistic world with more opportunity than ours for cross-over talents like Evans, Rathbone suggests that Evans the photojournalist was only the adjunct to Evans the artist. Although he has a "self-effacing style," she observed, he left a formidable imprint on history. As Hilton Kramer's *New York Times* review of a 1971 Evans retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art put it: "For how many of us has our imagination of what the United States looked like and felt like in the 1930s been determined not by a novel or a play or a poem or a painting or even by our own memories but by the work of a single photographer, Walker Evans?"

It Wasn't Just Watergate

by Piers Brendon

At the beginning of this notable autobiography Ben Bradlee acknowledges the help in furthering his career given by Richard Milhous Nixon. Toward the end Bradlee recalls the presence in his story conference room of a large color photograph of a smiling President Gerald Ford captioned, "To Ben Bradlee and all my friends at *The Washington Post*. . . Jerry Ford." Watergate, in short, made Bradlee the greatest editor of his day. Yet, as his wise, witty, and wonderfully entertaining book reveals, the breaking of that story was merely the crowning endeavor in a lifetime of journalistic achievement.

A GOOD LIFE: NEWSPAPERING AND OTHER ADVENTURES
BY BEN BRADLEE
SIMON & SCHUSTER
514 PP. $27.50.

Bradlee modestly attributes much of it to luck and maybe he has had more than his fair share. A Boston brahmin, he went to private school during the Depression. He recovered from polio and sailed through Harvard. He had a "good war" on destroyers in the Pacific. Afterwards he was able to buy himself a newspaper apprenticeship, helping to found and run the award-winning but short-lived *New Hampshire Sunday News*. In 1948, thanks to a rainstorm, he missed a train stop in Baltimore and went on to get a job at *The Washington Post*. According to his own account, he just chanced to be on hand to give a detailed report of a man threatening to jump from a ninth-floor window ledge and to witness an assassination attempt on President Truman. Actually, Bradlee was beginning to make his own luck.

He was also making waves. In 1949 the craven *Post* gutted his eyewitness account of the Anacostia race riots, which broke out over the issue of segregated

Piers Brendon, author of The Life and Death of the Press Barons, *is a fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge.*

swimming pools, and buried it inside the local section of the paper. Bradlee's comment is worthy of that profane word-scrambler Joseph Pulitzer himself: "Unfucking-believable!" Bradlee and fellow reporter Jack London did "a rain dance" in the city room. So the publisher, Phil Graham, intervened. But he agreed *not* to splash the full story in return for a promise by the secretary of the interior, Julius Krug, to integrate the pools the following year. Bradlee now reckons that this served the public interest, though he adds: "I am instinctively pro-sunshine, against closed doors, pro-let-it-all-hang-out, anti-smoke-filled rooms. I believe that truth sets man free." Ironically, the acceptance of his credo in newsrooms throughout America means that no such secret deal could be struck today.

SIMON & SCHUSTER

Editor and publisher: "God bless her ballsy soul"

Bradlee's perverse addiction to truth-telling permitted him only a brief interlude as press attaché to the American embassy in Paris during the McCarthyite era. But it served him well on *Newsweek*. He was arrested and nearly expelled from France for trying to report on the Algerian national liberation movement. During the Middle East war of 1956 he visited the Israeli front line by taxi and only just missed death in Egypt aboard a jeep. Later he exposed the venality of Eisenhower's self-righteous chief of staff Sherman Adams, discovering in the process just "how little it often took to corrupt a Washington official." Bradlee is funny about Bernard Goldfine, who bribed Adams and tried to bribe him. But he is, alas, silent about the gifts Ike himself received but somehow failed to diminish his moral stature.

Bradlee was certainly fortunate to acquire John F. Kennedy as a Georgetown neighbor in the late 1950s. But he capitalized on his luck, writing insider pieces about the presidential campaign and stealing frequent marches on his rivals. Subsequently he dictated an exclusive story leaked to him by the president, about the swapping of U-2 pilot Gary Powers for Soviet spy Rudolph Abel, direct from the White House.

According to a recent biographer of Kennedy, the president "shamelessly manipulated" Bradlee, spilling secrets in return for "favorable coverage." It's true that Bradlee kept quiet about the president's foul mouth, a convention of which he rather approves today, though he sabotaged it in his salty *Conversations with Kennedy* (1975). Bradlee also made no mention of Kennedy's womanizing, claiming that he knew nothing about it then (despite the fact that one of the women in question was his own sister-in-law) and is "appalled" by it now. However, he was no mere presidential poodle. Bradlee even criticized Kennedy's attempts to control the press, for which he was briefly banished from the White House.

Having brokered the deal by which *The Washington Post* bought *Newsweek*, Bradlee became managing editor of the newspaper in 1965 and executive editor three years later. Supported by publisher Katharine Graham, he modernized the *Post* and hired new talent. With a little help from Sally Quinn, now his third wife, he created the Style section. Under his auspices the paper took proper account of the women's movement, civil rights, and the drug culture. It also changed sides on Vietnam. Bradlee made the *Post* the voice of the age and, at its best, the conscience of the capital. He followed *The New York Times*'s lead over the Pentagon Papers, resisting official attempts to gag him. Despite his initial view that the revelation of Nixon's self-bugging was only a B-plus story, Watergate was his finest hour.

Such is Bradlee's fame that one often feels a sense of déjà vu when reading about the part he played in public events,

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Gloria Cooper, Managing Editor
Columbia Journalism Review
700 Journalism Building
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none more than this. But if he adds little to the mountain of information already printed about Watergate, his reflections on it are always pertinent. He relishes the irony that Nixon, who hated journalists, "attracted an entire generation of able, young, tough activists" into what seemed to them a heroic profession. It was "forever changed," he believes, by the press's post-Watergate assumption that "government officials generally and instinctively lied when confronted by embarrassing events." On the other hand, the status of journalists also changed, not least as a result of Alan Pakula's film *All the President's Men*, which Bradlee thought "damned good." Sitting in the best seats of the establishment, they now felt more protective toward it. Even at the *Post*, Bradlee considers, "the fires of investigative zeal were allowed to bank."

Its hubris was notoriously rewarded with the publication of Janet Cooke's Pulitzer Prize–winning report about an eight-year-old heroin addict who turned out to be a figment of her imagination. Bradlee gives a suitably chastened account of this episode. Cooke's references were not checked because she was "too good to be true, and we wanted her too bad." Worse still, he admits, the *Post*'s editors were only concerned about the story; they did not think about the safety of the child.

Throughout, Bradlee is engagingly candid about his faults, personal as well as professional. This is one of the charms of his book, which is written in a sizzling demotic hot from the newsroom. It also lets him spurn false modesty. Indeed, he retails his copious retirement plaudits with pardonable pride. He also blows the trumpets of friends and allies, none louder than that of Katharine Graham — "God bless her ballsy soul." Doubtless she was an excellent boss, grossly traduced in 1976 by a *Post* striker carrying a placard saying: "Phil Shot the Wrong Graham." But Bradlee's account of the editorial staff's cheering when a policeman wantonly assaulted this demonstrator leaves a nasty taste in the mouth.

In general, though, Bradlee basks in a glow of nostalgia that old-fashioned liberals feel for the bright hopes of the Kennedy era and the great causes of the Johnson and Nixon presidencies. Despite the gritty cynicism of his style he seems to embody an idealism that has been tarnished, if not quite obliterated, over the past two decades. At a time of political passion and national trauma, Bradlee was the champion of an honest and courageous journalism that did the state some service. When all is said and done, it is hard not to admire him.

The *Post* learned its lessons from the Cooke affair and at the end of the book Bradlee briefly records his own maxims about the craft that he has practiced with such courage and distinction. He deplores "kerosene journalism," the tabloid habit of adding fuel to smoking news. He declares that most government attempts to suppress information on grounds of national security are bogus, designed to serve its own and not the public interest. But the press should maintain the privacy of officials, he avers, except where their private lives impinge on their public duties. Beyond such laws Bradlee has no general theory of journalism, only a grade school motto: "Our best today; better tomorrow." It's a good conclusion to a good book about a good life. ◆

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