

WHAT TRAINING AND RESOURCES WOULD HELP
JOURNALISTS COVERING TRAUMATIC EVENTS?

A Project

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Abstract

There is no question that covering traumatic events can cause PTSD in journalists. The research is proven. According to Killeen (2011), reporters' suffering has been labeled Assignment Stress Injury (ASI). Backholm and Björkqvist (2012) back this up saying "86–100% of news journalists had assignments including potentially traumatic exposure at some point." In the past, journalists were not viewed as first responders. This project examines journalists who have covered traumatic events. It also takes a close look at how to spot the warning signs of trauma and what journalists and managers can do about it. It is important to change the culture in newsrooms to not view emotional distress after covering traumatic events as a sign of weakness. If journalists have the proper training and if managers know what to look out for and how to handle it, the mental health of future journalists will be protected. This entails more training for journalists, as well as more resources provided to newsrooms after covering traumatic events. Staying on top of the mental health of journalists is vital for the future of the industry.

Key Words

TV stations, journalists, journalism, newsrooms, trauma, traumatic stress, traumatic events, moral injury, repetitive injury, vicarious trauma, pandemic, fake news, social media, reporters, mental health, mental wellness, PTSD, anxiety, stress, virtual reality, healium

Table of Contents

Chapter One	
INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter Two	
LITERATURE REVIEW	
Literature Review	6
Research Questions	14
Methodology Research Design	15
Conclusion	18
Bibliography	19
Chapter Three	
PROFESSIONAL ANALYSIS	23
Preamble	24
Trauma	26
Unprepared for the Trauma	28
Training Journalists Receive	35
Fear	41
MMJs	48
Feeling Numb	51
Overwhelmed	58
Moral Injury	63
Fake News & Social Media	69

Pandemic	72
Managers	74
Resources Available	89
Solutions	93
Resources Wish List	94
Training	96
Security	100
Mental Health Days	101
Counseling	102
Mentorship	104
Future Research in Virtual Reality	108
Healium	109
In Summary	111
References	114
APPENDIX	
Interview Transcripts	116

List of Tables/List of Illustrations/List of Figures

Self-Care Tips for Journalists Exposed to Traumatic Events	9
Tips for Managers	12
Management Actions after Traumatic Events	80
Beneficial Station Actions after Traumatic Events	83
Station Mental Health Services	89

Chapter 1:

Introduction

After covering the Boston Marathon bombing, I began experiencing severe anxiety as a reporter. I began to wonder how the news personally affects those who cover it. As a young journalist, I was never taught how to deal with the shock of seeing a dead body for the first time or how to digest an interview with those who have just lost a loved one. I was taking it home with me and did not realize so many others were doing the same. One of my hardest days as a journalist was covering the death of my friend and colleague. This was in my first market. I was told that my dear friend was the victim of a murder-suicide. An hour later I was on air anchoring. The news became real to me that day. I realized every story is personal to someone. It is someone's mom, dad, brother, sister or best friend. After this, every story began to build on one another. I was not talking about it. I was not processing it. I was holding everything inside, putting on a brave face and moving on to the next story. For me, it all started to unravel after the Boston Marathon bombing. I could not seem to hold it together anymore. The photographer I worked with on the day of the Boston Marathon bombing was suffering in silence as well. Neal was one of our photographers constantly sent to breaking news. He would cover every car crash, stabbing, shooting, fire, etc. How do you digest all of this as a journalist and what training can be provided to better equip those covering traumatic events/stories? About a year after the bombing, Neal spent the entire night shooting a massive fire in Boston. Two firefighters lost their lives. The next day Neal headed into work, paid his toll on the Zakim Bridge, then pulled over and jumped off. As abrupt and shocking as it is to read this, that is how it felt for all of us who worked with him. His

family knew he was suffering, but we were all expected to put on a brave face at work. We are expected to compartmentalize when we have never been trained to handle the weight of news stories we cover.

There was never a meeting at work to discuss what we had seen after the Boston Marathon bombing. And with such a traumatic event, it was like every news story after that began to build on the anxiety, fear and depression of covering the daily news. You hear all the time people say, “I don’t watch the news anymore because it is so depressing.” If our viewers can only take it in doses, what should we do to help the journalists who are covering it daily? News never stops. In today’s world, we are expected to not only cover the stories but tweet about them, post Facebook updates and Instagram stories. It can feel never-ending. But what are we doing to train and equip journalists so they can take what they have seen or heard and help their community rather than destroy themselves mentally?

There is no question that covering traumatic events can cause PTSD in journalists. According to Killeen (2011), journalists’ suffering has been labeled Assignment Stress Injury (ASI). In the past, journalists were not viewed as first responders. With an increase in coverage of crime, journalists arrive on scene right along with first responders. After covering the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, I really started to notice the lack of training to help equip journalists to cover traumatic events as well as a lack of focus on journalists’ mental health. This project focuses on what training and resources would help journalists covering traumatic events, as well as developing an online resource guidebook to help support those journalists. This was created from the research gathered from interviewing journalists who have covered traumatic events, as

well as authoritative sources like the Dart Center, which is a research center for journalists who cover tragedy. The Dart Center was started by the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University.

This research for newsrooms and journalists is important because as Gartman (2010) points out if “PTSD symptoms are not treated, they can increase the patient’s risk for suicide, vehicular collisions, job loss, divorce, social isolation, and illness. Meyer (2009) explains that recent evidence suggests trauma causes genuine neurophysiologic changes in the body.”

Al Tompkins (2002) of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies wrote the following after the September 11 attacks:

Reporters, photojournalists, engineers, soundmen and field producers often work elbow to elbow with emergency workers. Journalists’ symptoms of traumatic stress are remarkably similar to those of police officers and firefighters who work in the immediate aftermath of tragedy, yet journalists typically receive little support after they file their stories. While public-safety workers are offered debriefings and counseling after a trauma, journalists are merely assigned another story.

Journalists are like first responders. Their mental health should be of concern. This begins with the proper training of our journalists, as well as managers and media companies. If they are going to put journalists at a higher risk of distress, then companies need to take responsibility for what they are asking of their staff day in and day out.

The Dart Center is one of the resources that newsrooms can utilize. Killeen (2011) points out “the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma (2007) provides to editors a list of

ways employees exhibit trauma, especially those employees who are covering traumatic assignments: disorientation or spacey on the job; difficulty doing simple tasks or problem-solving; the 100-meter stare; impulsivity, extreme anger, argumentativeness, violence; constantly distracted; distortion of time; expressions of futility, helplessness, terror, fear for one's life, or shame; and physical or mental exhaustion." Killen (2011) states, "The more common responses to PTSD, according to the DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition) include sleeplessness, upsetting dreams, flashbacks or intrusive images or thoughts of the event, avoidance of reminders of the trauma, feeling that bad things are about to happen, being jumpy and easily startled and physical reactions such as sweating, rapid heartbeat, dizziness or nausea when reminded of a traumatic event."

The online guidebook provides journalists and TV stations resources to prepare for coverage of traumatic events, as well as what should be done in the aftermath of a traumatic event (i.e., bombings, mass shootings, natural disasters, etc.). Journalists completed online questionnaires, and I interviewed subjects via zoom to hear what has been beneficial to them and what they wish would have been done in their newsrooms while covering traumatic events. I also interviewed specialists and therapists to receive guidance for the online guidebook and pulled resources/information from the Dart Center, Poynter, etc. to help address those areas. When it comes to covering traumatic events, we know there cannot be a meeting after every car crash, shooting, stabbing, etc. and that is why this training and resources are so important. There are once-in-a-lifetime events that journalists will cover though, and TV stations should have a plan in place for station meetings, resources, etc. to help their staff. I hope to be able to present this to my

station as well. I want this guidebook of resources to help stations on their own when I'm not there to present the information. Eventually, I have thought about teaching a traumatic events class to help future journalists before they enter the workforce. This project will help me better understand what journalists need before and after covering a traumatic event.

Chapter Two:

Literature Review

With an increase in coverage of crime, journalists arrive on scene right along with first responders. What training is beneficial to journalists covering traumatic events? Gartman (2010) states in her dissertation that “the act of reporting and witnessing the aftermath of trauma means journalists are more apt to develop PTSD symptoms, much like that of other first responders.” Gartman also cites Figley (1995) in saying that “Reporters do not have to witness an event to suffer some sort of distress. The mere nature of their work lends its hand to psychological and physical anguish. Simply by listening and observing victims’ stories journalists may exhibit emotions associated with fear, sadness and distress.” Many journalists do not have the right training, which is brought up numerous times in the references analyzed. Gutkowska (2005) points out, “Reporters are given minimal education or preparation ... They are left vulnerable to symptoms of vicarious traumatization, and even to developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) themselves. Whereas firefighters, police officers, and crisis workers have been well studied, there is minimal research on experiences of reporters who are exposed to traumatic events.”

This investigation is grounded in communication theory -- specifically displacement effect theory and protection motivation theory. According to Communication Theory (n.d.),

Displacement effect theory states that the human mind has a defense mechanism which involuntarily displaces the effects from an individual or anything which are felt unacceptable to another situation which the mind distinguished more

acceptable. This unconscious activity which occurs in the mind finds a satisfying alternative to the basic objective and is basically done to relieve stress and other tensions.

The displacement effects acts like a cycle. The human mind unconsciously finds itself a solution for the problem which causes the stress.

Research shows that covering traumatic events has PTSD-related effects on journalists. Whether it's called PTSD or Assignment Stress Injury (Killeen, 2001), covering traumatic events affects journalists' mental and physical health. Evans (2016) points to research that suggests “many journalists turn to avoidance-based response strategies, such as black humor, substance abuse, emotional suppression, and disengagement.” As journalists begin to build up stress and anxiety from covering traumatic events for their jobs, they unknowingly release that stress in other ways like the examples given. This is where we start to move into protection motivation theory. According to Communication Theory (n.d.),

The protection motivation theory deals with how people cope with and make decisions in times of harmful or stressful events in life. These decisions are a way of protecting oneself from perceived threats. The theory attempts to explain and predict what motivates people to change their behavior.

Journalists are expected to put on a brave face and cover traumatic events on a daily basis, and it takes a toll. In many newsrooms, showing emotion is a sign of weakness. According to Al Tompkins and Sidney Tompkins (2020),

You are looking at disturbing information all day. The repetition underlies traumatic stress. All day long you read about people who are sick, dying and

worried. You see disturbing data and forecasts. If this occurred just once, you might be able to dismiss it as something that happened and has ended. But the repetitive nature of this kind of ongoing coverage will take a toll.

Protection motivation theory has two cognitive processes – threat appraisal and coping appraisal. According to Communication Theory (n.d.), threat appraisal “deals with how threatened one feels by the threat.” Journalists can cover so many traumatic events that they themselves can begin to feel that their life is threatened and in danger. Communication Theory (n.d.) says, “Perceived vulnerability and perceived severity are the two sets of beliefs from which threat appraisals are derived.” The more traumatic events a journalist covers, the more their anxiety levels and perceived severity of threats can increase.

When it comes to coping appraisal, it is not always positive for a journalist as noted above. As Evans (2016) mentions, journalists can turn to coping mechanisms such as substance abuse, emotional suppression and disengagement. An online guidebook would provide journalists the resources they need to develop healthy coping mechanisms.

On top of all the stress and trauma that journalists face in their jobs, it is a career that continues to pay less to employees but continually expects more out of them. CareerCast ranked reporters as the number one worst job for 2021. According to CareerCast (2021), “Dwindling employment opportunities, poor pay and routine exposure to hazardous conditions — including potential exposure to COVID-19 — make a reporter the Worst Job of 2021.”

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021), “Overall employment of reporters, correspondents, and broadcast news analysts is projected to decline 11 percent

from 2019 to 2029.” That means there would be about 5,800 fewer jobs in journalism by 2029 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (n.d.) writes about how any professional who even hears a traumatic experience is at risk of developing Secondary Traumatic Stress. According to The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (n.d.),

Risk is also higher for professionals who carry a heavy caseload of traumatized children; are socially or organizationally isolated; or feel professionally compromised due to inadequate training.

Several studies have shown that the development of secondary traumatic stress often predicts that the helping professional will eventually leave the field for another type of work.

With declining numbers of journalists and an increase in stress on the job, there are numerous options that managers and peers can take to recognize warning signs of trauma in journalists and help keep more journalists in the field as opposed to losing them to burnout, stress and trauma fatigue.

According to the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma (2007), here is what journalists should keep in mind while covering potentially traumatic assignments:

Before a potentially traumatic assignment, a journalist should:	While on the job, a journalist should:	After the job, a journalist should:
Talk through possible emotional risks with your editor or manager.	Understand that distress in the face of tragedy is a normal human response – not weakness.	Diffuse with someone you trust. Choose a good listener. Don’t bottle up feelings.
Agree how you will keep in regular touch, particularly if difficulties arise.	Ensure proper eating, hydration and sleep. All these can affect journalistic	Monitor for delayed reactions – they can catch you by surprise at a later

	judgement.	date.
Agree that partners and families are kept informed.	Easy on 'self-medication'. Overuse of substances is an indicator that all is not well.	Maintain normal routines and activities, but slow down. Look after yourself.
Maintain strong social supports and peer networks.	Get some exercise if you can. Even a walk helps break down 'stress chemicals' in the body.	If distress continues beyond 3-4 weeks seek professional assistance from a health care practitioner trained in trauma.
See crises as challenges to learn from. Maintain an optimistic outlook and positive self-view.	Take breaks	
Remember that the journalism of trauma matters. What you do is important and worthwhile	Acknowledge your feelings. Understanding feelings informs your journalism and helps you process trauma.	
	Talk to others. Take time to reflect on what you are witnessing and how you are responding.	
	Call home. Maintain contact with loved ones and peers— especially on long assignments.	
	Don't look at grotesque images too long.	
	Look out for others in your team.	
	Know your limits. Request rotation if needed.	
	If you are feeling distressed don't hide it. Such responses are human, and it is neither weak,	

	unprofessional nor career-threatening to admit them.	
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Backholm & Björkqvist (2012) suggest using a method with a web-based questionnaire for employees. This could be offered monthly or quarterly. They measured trauma in journalists using the Journalist Trauma Exposure Scale (JTES). The JTES asks questions such as “Number of times responding to an assignment involving an injured or dead child?” or “Number of times responding to an assignment involving a motor vehicle accident?” For measuring symptoms of PTSD, news managers can use the Civilian Version of the PTSD Checklist. This checklist asks questions such as “Suddenly acting or feeling as if a stressful experience were happening again (as if you were reliving it)?” or “Feeling as if your future will somehow be cut short?” This can be incorporated into the questionnaire to help detect those warning signs.

When it comes to TV stations or media companies (like TEGNA, Gray, Nexstar, Comcast, etc.), Evans (2016) points to the Dart Center, which suggests that “Media organizations provide trauma-related organizational resources in newsrooms to reduce the occupational risk of harm to journalists.” Managers can also be trained on how to spot the early warning signs of trauma within their staff. If managers can spot these early warning signs, they will potentially be able to help before a staff member spirals after covering multiple traumatic events. Another option managers can take is sending out a monthly survey that their staff is required to take to check-in on their mental health. This will help them spot those staff members they should be keeping an eye on or to monitor how their newsroom is doing as a whole. If managers provide training to journalists, their

newsroom will also be better prepared when breaking news does happen. Managers can attend training at corporate headquarters as well.

The Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma (2009) has the following tips for what managers can do specifically to help their newsrooms:

Before an assignment, managers should focus on the following:	While journalists are out on a potentially traumatic assignment, managers should:	After staff arrives back from assignment, managers should:
Trauma awareness briefings should be a core element of standard training and management.	Maintain regular contact – even a quick phone call to say ‘g’day, how’s it going’?	It’s essential that managers make contact with anyone on their staff who’s been through a distressing experience.
Sit down with the individual/team and talk through the possible emotional risks involved as well as the logistics and purpose of the assignment itself.	Give words of encouragement and watch criticism – people’s sensitivities are heightened when exposed to trauma.	Acknowledge with thanks, lunch, drinks, public recognition, emails – thank you goes a long way to assist well-being and better work performance.
Remind staff that distress from trauma exposure is a normal human reaction and not weakness. It may even inform their reporting.	Remind them of the importance of self care. Healthy eating, exercise and sleep are vital and ensure better journalism. Too much ‘self-medication’ with alcohol has the opposite effect.	Diffuse with those returning from trauma reporting – talk to them about how it was both logistically and emotionally. Don’t be afraid to talk emotions – they are normal.
Acknowledge and show appreciation even before people go. Feeling valued keeps people emotionally balanced and more invested in hard work.	Encourage staff that if they are feeling distressed not to hide it. Such responses are not abnormal, they're human, and it is neither weak, unprofessional nor career-threatening to acknowledge them.	Encourage staff to maintain support from family, friends and social networks.
Organize newsroom to journalist contact before departure for support as well as news gathering.	Manage contact with others from your organization – a badly timed phone call will exacerbate stress levels (especially regarding finance!)	Remind them that any distress is a typical human response following trauma exposure.
For longer assignments reassure that phone calls with home are	Consider rotation or withdrawal of a highly distressed person,	Offer counselling if they appear overwhelmed or you feel out of

important - not a perk. Ensure you have updated lists of personal emergency contact numbers for those leaving.	but remember to discuss your reasons with them and do it sensitively.	your depth.
Remember that all those involved in news gathering can be exposed to trauma – not just the front line. Picture and film editors, sound recordists, etc. will be also exposed to potentially traumatic material.	Following longer assignments consider a day or two of ‘decompression’ – a ‘layover’ period to readjust from trauma exposure. Ensure that families are aware this is happening.	It is important to check in with them again in 3-4 weeks to see if any of these symptoms are still occurring ... During this time employ ‘watchful waiting’ (keeping a quiet eye on them).
	Research indicates that car crashes, court reporting and ‘small scale’ trauma reporting can have as much an impact as the ‘big ones’. Be mindful of daily domestic tragedy.	Remember that you are also part of the ‘ripple effect of trauma’. Notice your own emotions and don’t be surprised if you also feel some of the above symptoms or others that seem out of the ordinary.

Another thing that is very common in newsrooms is black humor. Evans (2016) points to research that suggests “many journalists turn to avoidance-based response strategies, such as black humor, substance abuse, emotional suppression, and disengagement (Buchanan & Keats, 2011).”

Mike Walter created a documentary on journalists suffering psychological effects from the job, called *Breaking News: Breaking Down*. He focuses on the fact that many journalists and newsrooms discourage showing emotion. It is viewed as a weakness. Journalists need to be trained and equipped for the job and what they will cover and see. Managers need to be trained as well to spot the signs and know where to go from there to help their staff.

Another suggestion from Hight (2005) states, “We had a trusted counselor who could receive e-mails from reporters and editors who had questions about their feelings,

talk to them on the phone, and schedule one-on-one appointments when needed. This is in addition to the regular EAP counselors.”

It is difficult for many journalists to turn off the “news never stops” mentality. It is a culture. If journalists want down time to destress, it is usually interrupted by the next breaking-news cycle. Hansen (2020) had this to say to managers,

If you never take a break and are constantly on the verge of burnout, that will become the unhealthy norm in your newsroom...

To give your team the peace of mind to occasionally turn off, build trust. You have to all trust each other to have each other’s backs and not let someone be totally out of the loop. Check for signs of burnout on your team, and step in to let people take breaks when they need. Then, don’t be afraid to ask others to do the same for you.

Research Questions

The research questions should lead logically to the specific overall research questions:

What Training And Resources Would Help Journalists Covering Traumatic Events?

RQ1: What personal effects do journalists identify with from reporting on trauma?

RQ2: How well trained do journalists feel before covering a traumatic event?

RQ3: What training/education do journalists receive in college to cover traumatic events?

RQ4: After covering a traumatic event, what did journalists’ TV stations do afterward to help with mental health?

RQ5: Do journalists feel anxiety/depression got worse as a result of their job?

Methodology | Research Design

The method for this research is a qualitative research study based on interviews and online questionnaires. According to Bhandari (2020), “Qualitative research is used to understand how people experience the world. While there are many approaches to qualitative research, they tend to be flexible and focus on retaining rich meaning when interpreting data.”

Killen (2011) did research in qualitative data that “revealed the need for training on dealing with the emotions of the reporter in a crisis situation, training on dealing with traumatized subjects of stories and greater encouragement and support by management before, during and after a reporter has covered a traumatic event.”

The research includes an online questionnaire with multiple choice, as well as open-ended questions where journalists expanded on their answers. The online questionnaire was used as pre-interview research to gather information about the type of trauma, effects, coping mechanisms, etc. journalists use and what they perceive as helpful resources or what they believe would have been helpful to them. The interviewees mainly consist of reporters (current or past reporters), photojournalists and editors because they are the most likely to consistently witness traumatic stories they are covering. Journalists had the option to be reached for a follow-up interview. To find journalists, an email was sent to TEGNA to send out to their TV stations. TEGNA is a broadcast company with 64 television stations across the United States. Posts were also made on Facebook groups like TV News Women, Mizzou Mafia, Mix/Minus, etc. A link to the online questionnaire was shared, resulting in 79 responses from journalists for this part of the research. Journalists had the option to stay anonymous in the online survey if they would just like

to answer honestly and not be reached for a follow-up. Sixty percent of journalists remained anonymous in the online survey.

A criterion sample strategy was used as a method for choosing the journalists to be interviewed as an in-depth follow-up after the online survey. The sampling for the online questionnaire was a broader sampling of local TV news journalists in the United States. According to Cohen & Crabtree (2006),

Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2001, p. 238).

Those that have experience covering major traumatic events (i.e. bombings, mass shootings, natural disasters, etc.) will fall into the criterion sampling category for follow-up interviews.

According to Boyd (n.d.), the five steps to sampling are:

- Identify the population
- Specify a sampling frame
- Specify a sampling method
- Determine the sample size
- Implement the plan

Ninety-four journalists were interviewed. Seventy-nine journalists completed the online questionnaire with 60% choosing to remain anonymous. Fourteen interviews were conducted via zoom. Sampling mainly consisted of local TV news reporters/anchors, photojournalists and editors. According to The Pew Research Center (2021), there are “839 local TV stations defined as ‘news-producing stations’ (stations that have a news director and are viable, commercial and are English-language affiliates in the U.S.” At

WCNC-TV, there are 21 anchors/reporters (nine are MMJs) and 13 photojournalists.

There are about 28k local TV news journalists in the U.S. give or take. The first part of this sampling from the surveys consist of systematic random sampling.

When it comes to coding, this was done with the constant comparative method.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) use these guidelines for coding:

- Open Coding - "The process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (p. 61).
- Selective Coding - "The process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development" (p. 116).

Open and Selective Coding are what was used to analyze the information gathered. When it comes to coding, there was a common thread in words, phrases and shared experiences from journalists covering traumatic events. According to Saldana (2008), coding is "a word or a short phrase that symbolically assigns summative, salient, essence capturing and or a vocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data."

When it comes to the research component, participants were asked about their behaviors during and after coverage of traumatic events as well as what resources were available to them. What did they view as helpful resources during and after coverage of traumatic events? What did their managers do that was helpful? What do they wish managers would have done?

With this information - as well as interviews from experts in the area of mental health and traumatic events - I created an online resource guidebook for journalists and TV stations to utilize.

Conclusion

Online questionnaires and interviews with journalists gave perspective on what training or resources have helped with their mental health after covering traumatic events. The research also sought to gain an understanding of what journalists wish their stations offered, along with their wish lists of resources. The online questionnaire was completed through Qualtrics Experience Management. Interviews were conducted via zoom to provide a broader understanding of the trauma journalists can experience after covering certain stories.

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Chapter Three:
Professional Analysis

Preamble

I was accepted into graduate school in December 2019. I wrote my admissions essay about a glaring oversight I believed was apparent when it came to training and treating journalists who cover traumatic events. This stemmed from my own mental health issues as a reporter in Boston, and it all seemed to culminate with the Boston Marathon bombing. Looking back, I did not realize at the time this all began to build from my first job in Hartford, Connecticut where I had to cover the murder of my friend and colleague. Then I will never forget the first dead body I watched being pulled from a car crash scene contributing to my own anxiety when I am out on the roads. When my friend and photographer Neal decided to take his own life, I knew more needed to be done to help journalists covering such traumatic events. I spoke to Neal's wife, Erin, who told me, "It was a thankless job for whatever story was being covered. Because then the next story was the next story to move on to and, you know, that was what needed to be covered and worked on. So it was like, just forgotten about, door closed." When it came to Neal's struggles, Erin said, "He was embarrassed by it. And at that time, it wasn't something that was talked about. You were seen as weak and you know it was just you put on a good front, and you move on." What I didn't know when I chose this topic as my research was that we were about to set out on an historic time in our lives: the COVID-19 pandemic, protests like we have never seen before and mental health brought to the forefront. Schools were closed and our children were struggling. We no longer had our teams to talk with and support in person. We covered an Olympics that was pushed back an entire year, and once it finally arrived the star of gymnastics - Simone Biles - stepped back citing her own mental health concerns. Mental health is being talked about, but there

is so much more that needs to be done to help when it comes to journalists. I found when given a safe space to discuss issues and concerns - while most journalists stayed anonymous in this survey - they were able to express themselves openly like never before. Some subjects had been in the business two years, others 44 years. Some journalists were 24 years old; others were 65 years old. I sought out to research how journalists feel covering traumatic events has affected them, as well as what training and resources they feel would help. While digging into the research, I continued to see recurring themes. They are broken down and explained below.

Trauma

According to the American Psychological Association (2021), “Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster.”

Journalists witness and report on these traumatic events daily. They also hear about them firsthand from those who most likely have experienced the worst day of their lives.

According to The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (n.d.), “Secondary traumatic stress is the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another.” Ninety percent of journalists surveyed said not enough emphasis is put on mental health in the business.

In this research, when journalists were asked what story affected them the most mentally, one subject wrote, “Seeing a motorcycle crash right after it happened and the dead man get covered by a body bag.” Another person wrote, “I covered stories of people being stuck in places during fires such as homes, large gathering spaces, and cars. People being trapped and killed by fire, as well as stories involving children who have died or have been murdered affect me the most.” These stories are day in and day out for journalists. They cover it all.

Al Tompkins (2002) of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies wrote the following after the September 11 attacks:

Reporters, photojournalists, engineers, soundmen and field producers often work elbow to elbow with emergency workers. Journalists’ symptoms of traumatic stress are remarkably similar to those of police officers and firefighters who work in the immediate aftermath of tragedy, yet journalists typically receive little support after they file their stories. While public-safety workers are offered

debriefings and counseling after a trauma, journalists are merely assigned another story.

When interviewed for this research, Tompkins said, “I think journalists are often not just first responders, but also last responders. You don't just leave the scene with the patient. You're still there. You're still there for the four o'clock, for the five o'clock, for the six o'clock, for the 11 o'clock. Oh, and by the way, you're there for the funeral. You're there for the memorial. You're there for the trial. I mean, you keep doing it over and over and over again.”

Journalists may see themselves in the victim; or they are parents and covering a child's death becomes increasingly more difficult. Many journalists try to compartmentalize with little to no training and when they get home, they fall apart. “The mass shooting affected me more in the sense of how I had to mentally separate myself from it until I got off work, then it all hit at once,” said one subject. When discussing trauma, another person wrote, “Sandy Hook. I had recently become a mom and it was extremely difficult to get through that coverage. I remember crying while editing stories and seeing the faces of the parents and the children.”

Tompkins said, “It starts with awareness. It always starts with awareness.” And this past year has been quite a year for journalists. Tompkins continued, “You've been through unbelievable amounts of things in the last year and a half. You've had a pandemic, a racial reckoning, a political season unlike any in 150 years. You know, you've been stuck at home with your kids trying to do your work while your kids can't go to school. You're worried about your health. You're worried about your parents' health. You're worried about I mean, come on, how many more things can we throw on you?”

Producer Jeremy Young of Al Jazeera said, “I think as long as you're having a conversation about it, and a dialogue about it, recognizing it, as opposed to pretending. I think the worst-case scenario is you pretend like nothing is happening, and that you're totally all right, and that it doesn't bother you at all.” He continued, “Interviewing, witnessing an execution, or watching video of 9/11, or we're interviewing someone whose child was shot and killed in a drive-by, like any of these experiences are not normal. And if you think that they don't have an impact on your brain, then you're in a really wrong place.”

Mike Walter has made it his mission to focus on mental health in journalism. He was an eyewitness to American Airlines Flight 77 crash into the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. It changed him forever as a journalist. In 2005, he became a Dart Ochberg Fellow. In 2011, he directed and produced the documentary, *Breaking News Breaking Down*, which tells the story of how traumatic news impacts the journalists who cover it. After one of the screenings of his film, he recalled a veteran coming up to him. “I remember this Iraq War veteran said, you know it's really interesting. We're all kind of in these different bubbles, you know. Military is in this bubble. Paramedics are in this bubble, firefighters and journalists. And there's nothing that connects us except for trauma.”

Unprepared for the Trauma

Eighty-two percent of survey respondents said they received no prior training to cover traumatic events. Ninety percent said they received no prior training in college to cover traumatic events. Eighty-three percent said they never received any training from their TV station to cover traumatic events. When asked what they weren't prepared to

see, one respondent said, “VIOLENCE! My broadcast journalism major never went through how to deal with trauma or anything of that nature.” Another person wrote, “There were so many things I wasn’t prepared for. The first time a mom cried about losing her child, the time I knocked on the door of a man’s home who was accused of a crime and he pulled a gun on me and my photographer.”

Photojournalist Brian Wiedeke, who has been in the business 28 years, talked about covering the protests in Minneapolis, Minnesota. “It was just a free for all in that area, and I don't think anyone was prepared for that,” he said. “I think that honestly caught city leaders, it caught our management off guard, caught those of us in the field off guard. You know, we weren't expecting it to turn that violent,” Wiedeke said.

Reporter Kimberly Bookman wrote, “I was covering a hostage situation in MA and after our 11pm hit, the live truck we were in was shot at. Bullets were stuck in the siding.”

Many subjects feared for their safety while out on stories and felt unprepared for what they were going to face - whether that be in protests, door knocks or crime scenes. Almost every response mentioned death or “dead bodies.” When asked what they were not prepared to see, many had similar responses writing, “Bodies, mass bleeding, mass casualties; Dead bodies at crime scenes, dead children; Dead bodies being covered at murder scenes.” Another subject wrote, “I wasn’t prepared to cover dead kids, blood everywhere.” Another journalist wrote they were not prepared to see the body being brought out of the home. And yet another subject wrote, “I wasn't prepared to see a car being pulled up from a river with the driver still inside.” Desk editor Nick Kurtz wrote, “I was not prepared to see video of decapitation, child abduction, physical abuse of women,

and aftermath of fatal car crashes.” A male photojournalist wrote about the recurring event of covering drownings and not being prepared to see the bodies. He said, “Recovery of a body floating in a river for a few days. The advanced decomp and water absorption turn the corpse into a flimsy, over bloated water balloon filled with viscera.”

A female reporter said, “I got to a homicide before police did (we heard about it on scanner) ... I was in a horrible neighborhood and saw a body lying in the middle of the road.” Many journalists wrote about arriving to crime scenes before emergency personnel got there. One subject wrote, “While working in Tampa as an AM reporter, we often got to the scene of crimes as emergency personnel was arriving, meaning I would see a lot of dead bodies, devastated families, etc.” A male photojournalist said, “I once arrived at an accident scene where a person's torso had been ejected from the car and skidded across the asphalt for 50 or so feet from the vehicle.” Another journalist said:

During the Aurora theater shooting, 6-year-old Veronica Moser Sullivan was shot and killed in the theater. I was one of the first people who had to respond to the shooting, and we got some UGC (user-generated content) video of someone who had evacuated the theater. The video showed her limp body being carried out by first responders. I don't think I'll ever get her face out of my brain.

For journalists, the images and sounds live with them forever. One male reporter wrote about covering so many mass shootings, but he said what he cannot forget are the sights and sounds from a plane crash at an air race event. He said, “A plane crashed into a stand full of people at an air race event. There were body parts everywhere and screams I can't forget.” A male producer wrote about what he wasn't prepared for saying, “The

extremely long list of stories involving death. I knew this would happen, but the frequency is often a lot to handle.”

Retired professor and reporter Greeley Kyle wrote, “Covering a traffic accident where the driver was stuck in the car, awake and screaming in pain waiting for the EMT's to arrive to cut him out.”

Former reporter/anchor Sarah Hill said, “It wasn't necessarily the trauma that bothered me that much. We went in with the trauma teams in the aftermath of the tsunami in Sri Lanka and Indonesia and you know, we went to third world countries, but it was when people lost children and we had to go in and talk to their parents about how they felt like that is what just really you know, like rocked me.”

Many journalists also wrote about how they felt unprepared to cover certain trials or read reports. One person wrote, “While I wasn't working at a TV station for Sandy Hook, I have covered some events after the fact, including the 700 page report that was released. I was not prepared to see any of the pictures that were released in that report.” Another subject wrote, “Reading very graphic court documents on child sexual assaults or murders. And having to be the person to cut off video before it got too graphic for the public. Meaning I watched it over and over again.” Reporter Kimberly Bookman wrote, “My very first TV job, [I] went to court for the first time to cover a father who sexually molested his baby daughter. I came home and cried and cried and cried. Probably because I was so young, inexperienced and sheltered. I had never heard of anything so vile, let alone have to sit through hours of graphic testimony.”

Heather Forbes of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) said court reporting can be some of the most difficult. “You're recording the underbelly of human

society, you know, the rapist, the murderers, the child pedophiles, I mean, it's just horrible stuff," she said.

According to Simpson and Coté (2006),

Two out of three reporters say they were not prepared for what they saw on their first assignment that involved violence. In some cases, the details of that first event -- the physical wounds to dead and injured people, for example -- prevented reporters from getting information. One reporter confused the order of events.

For journalists, it is not always just one major traumatic event; it is the repetition of traumatic stories over and over again. Producer Christina Santiago said, "I was not prepared to see the video of Officer [Derek] Chauvin kneeling on George Floyd's neck." Al Tompkins of Poynter explained, "It's the repetitive injury, right? So it's like working on an assembly line where you get injured over and over and over again, from the same injury, the same thing happens with traumatic stress. So it's not the one time you do the George Floyd story. It's the seventh time you've done the George Floyd story, right? It's repetitive injury. And every time you do that, now compound that with the fact that you yourself have experienced some traumatic stress." Journalists are either a witness to the stories they cover, or they are hearing about it and reliving it through the victim's story. "I don't think there is a specific story that had a strong impact on my mental health. I do think there have been a series of stories/events that have built up over time that are starting to affect my mental health," said one subject. When talking about the stories that affected him the most, former news director Daniel Brown said, "A lot of them were smaller events more than anything." For many journalists it is the build-up of these tragic

stories and speaking to family members on their worst day with little to no training on how to approach these situations that is the hardest. “I’ve spent time with grieving families, it has affected me. Seeing people lose loved ones because of violence, a pandemic, etc. has a cumulative effect,” said one female respondent.

Sometimes journalists get a bad rap, viewed as vicious with no heart. But many of those surveyed struggle with being asked to interview those who have lost loved ones. When asked what they struggle with the most, one respondent said, “Any time I am at a scene and witness family members learning their loved one is dead.” Reporter Jackie DelPilar wrote, “I’ve covered several deadly car wrecks that have stuck with me. There were two that I was there for when family arrived and had to ID the body. Hearing the howls of mothers learning they just lost their babies still haunts me.”

Triggers can be different for different people. Poynter’s Al Tompkins said, “You’re seeing images you’ve seen before. It’s a reinjury. It’s very similar to journalists who have been sexually abused covering a sexual abuse trial. Think of the reporters in Boston, for example, who were sexually abused by priests and covering the Catholic priests’ scandal. So it’s, it’s the misunderstanding or the lack of understanding that we’ve had until now that keeps us from knowing the depth of this.”

A manager who filled out the survey wrote, “All stories have affected me mentally in various ways. The assault and murder of the mother of two was a heavy one. Reading the details of what happened and speaking one-on-one with family members; it just triggered so much of my emotions and thoughts on assault.”

For some journalists, the accumulation of stories and the uncertainty of how to deal with the emotions can become too much to handle. Producer Liz Barry said, “I

couldn't stop thinking about the plane crash that killed seven people. It was towards the end of my time in journalism and kind of how I knew it may be time to start thinking about getting out. I'd covered way worse and never been affected like that before."

Another respondent, former anchor/reporter Rick Hancock, wrote about leaving the business after Sandy Hook. He recalled, "The kids killed weren't much younger than my youngest children at the time. The tragedy happened in December. I walked away from journalism for good three months later. I had enough." Al Tompkins' wife, Reverend Sidney Tompkins, a licensed psychotherapist, said, "Go back to Sandy Hook. Think about a journalist who has small children covering that story and what that would feel like if you had small children, and you're covering a story where needless, senseless crazy killing of small children is, is what you're doing." She went on to explain how journalists experience vicarious trauma by interviewing victims that you can relate to on a personal level. She explained, "Vicarious trauma is just saying that it's very easy to slide into the position of the person or the story that you're covering." Another anonymous subject simply wrote they were not prepared to cover "the worst days of people's lives." And this happens over and over again. Producer Sean Bodden simply wrote, "It has made me question if I want to continue being a journalist."

In his interview, Mike Walter said, "Soldiers, people in the military, are a lot more acclimated that trauma is a way of life. There's training there, I think for police and firefighters, paramedics, you know, it's a piece of the puzzle, too. But journalism, no."

Training Journalists Receive

In this survey, 82% of respondents said they received no prior training to cover traumatic events. Ninety percent said they received no prior training in college to cover traumatic events. Eighty-three percent said they never received any training from their TV station to cover traumatic events. When asked what story affected you the most, Laura Smith wrote, “A deadly house fire in the summer of 2014. I was an intern and knew there were going to be difficult scenes to report from, but it wasn't until I was there that I realized I hadn't had training to deal with the emotions of it all while also doing your job respectively.” A manager who has been in the business 35 years said, “I have now earned graduate level education in de-escalating in-person, telephone and social media/email conversations with viewers and readers.” But this is not the case for many of the respondents of the survey. Journalists were left asking where was my training to prepare me to cover such traumatic events?

Of the 10% that received some prior training in college, the mean age was 29 years old. It seems the younger the age, more is being done to raise awareness. It is not such a taboo topic as it was/is for the older hardened news journalist. When it came to training in college, 24-year-old reporter Monica Harkins said, “The Las Vegas shooting - a fellow Mizzou grad talked to our class in Q&A style.” Producer Christina Santiago said she received some training but not a lot. She wrote, “I know we spent a class discussing it in undergrad, but that was it.” Producer Sarah White said, “My education in trauma training in college came more from my legal education than TV courses. I got a crash course in talking to families, police, etc. during that.”

Manager Shayla Teater said, “It was not a lot, but a small portion using 9/11 as an example. I would have taken a full course on it.” It seems many journalists craved more training and more resources to prepare them for what was to come. One reporter wrote, “We were taught in school about coverage of all types of events but nothing teaches you better than experience.”

Photographer Brian Wiedeke spoke about getting some real-world experience by working at KOMU-TV in college. According to the University of Missouri School of Journalism (n.d.), KOMU-TV is “the only university-owned commercial television station and major network affiliate in the United States that uses its newsroom as a working lab for students.” Wiedeke said, “As far as like, trauma related stuff? I don't really remember any specific classes, per se. I remember that year, we had the flood of 95. That spring it was one of those ongoing things ... But we went to one town at six and one town at 10. And so you know, I mean, it was a little bit of insight into kind of some of the things you were going to be doing, but I don't remember any specific classes.”

Professor Katherine Reed was one of only two professors in the country during her time at the University of Missouri teaching a course solely dedicated to covering traumatic events. The other professor, Ari Goldman, developed a class solely related to trauma at Columbia University. According to Reed (2015),

It teaches future journalists to be aware of their own mental and emotional health as they cover the daily grind of violence in their communities, disasters, and perhaps even conflicts. Maybe, just maybe, it can prevent early burnout.

Eighty-two percent of respondents said they had never received any prior training to covering traumatic events whatsoever. Former news director Daniel Brown said, “You

know, I really haven't had any training. And it's not something I thought about until you were posing that question, you know, it was just kind of like, wow, you know, I've never had that training.” Brown continued, “You know, I took some things that I did on my own, like, personal, going to psychologists and stuff like that. So, I took some of what I learned from that into what I was doing professionally, but overall, no, there was no training. And I even went back and was looking through some of my folders and binders that I got at conferences and stuff. I went to just make sure that I didn't forget.” He added, “They tell you how to be a better leader and all those things, but never about the psychological effects of those things.”

When asked about traumatic events training, there were respondents who gave answers like this: “Lol stations don't do trauma training. They barely pay for photographers or protection. My family wants to buy me a bulletproof vest.”

Jeremy Young, now a senior producer at Al Jazeera, said he traveled over to Afghanistan at the age of 23. He said he always felt open about reaching out to people within his circle if he needed help, but did not recall having any resources for covering traumatic stories. “Nothing that was like a formal institution that would help you out with any sort of training or anything along those lines,” he said.

Of the 17% of those surveyed that had received prior training, most took place within the last year as a response to recent protests. Manager Michelle Jones wrote, “Before riots from George Floyd protests came to town, we received training to protect ourselves, how to use riot gear and how to escape a mob.” Reporter Harri Leigh wrote, “Our station gave us some safety preps before rallies/riots.” Journalist Elicia Dover said, “I was sent to war/trauma training with former British military. We were put into fake

hostage situations, confrontations, etc.” Another journalist explained, “Not my local news stations, but at the network level, yes. That was ‘civil unrest’ training.” Manager Shayla Teater said she received training from her employer, TEGNA. She said it was called “How to lead and manage stress during crisis training” for news directors.

Reporter Jackie Bruno said she took online seminars at work, but in her words it was “nothing extensive.” A male photojournalist wrote, “As part of workplace training, you are required to take a course on sensitivity in the workplace, that includes a section about dealing with trauma/loss.” A male reporter said he received training in how to talk with people. He learned what words were appropriate and what should be avoided during a traumatic situation. Reporter Nate Morabito received IRE (Investigative Reporters and Editors) traumatic training with Poynter’s Al Tompkins and his wife Sidney Tompkins. Desk editor Nick Kurtz said, “Companies I have worked for have provided mental health resources as well as seminars with experts and training sessions on what to look for when covering events that may be personal.” A female reporter added, “My current station is supportive and holds frequent seminars, listening sessions about how trauma may be affecting us. After 18 years, this is the first station where I’ve experienced this.”

It can be difficult to provide training during a traumatic event. When discussing their plan during Sandy Hook, former manager Rick Hanock said, “It was more reactionary and not structured. There wasn't a playbook.” When covering Surfside, Annaliese Garcia said, “I think during, we had wall to wall coverage for four days, five days so there was not much you could do. I think everybody being positive, and you know it was you showing up to do your job, during it would have been hard to actually like address these issues.”

Even though Hayden Ristevski said they did not receive any training beforehand, she said, “We did have some seminars during like zoom seminars about best practices for covering protests. And then we did get training by our security, who were ex-military.” Ristevski added that since she had a traumatic childhood, she believes the skills and tools she learned in therapy as a child has helped her as a journalist. “I have been through therapy. So, I'm very good at processing; I'm very good at working through. And I'm very good at like, knowing my limits and tapping out, taking a break,” she said. “Some of those skills that I received as a child are like invaluable to me,” Ristevski added.

News director Shayla Teater said, “In 2020, I got counseling after becoming a news director right before the pandemic hit and the massive protests broke out after the death of George Floyd. Dealing with it all, with little support and separated because of COVID was very hard. Looking back, I should have sought it out sooner after covering events like deaths during tornadoes and mass shootings.”

It is after the traumatic event when healing can begin, and journalists should not just move on right away to the next traumatic event. One reporter wrote, “Managers at every station I have worked will pretty much just move onto the next story and don't say anything or ask if I am OK.” Experts say journalists need to process what they have been through. According to Reverend Sidney Tompkins, “Take the time to let go and respond to that after ... What you don't deal with continues to just build up inside of you and those things don't go away.”

Annaliese Garcia said she wishes more would have been done by her station after the Surfside condo collapse. She suggested a mandatory meeting or counseling sessions. “Some type of meeting or scheduled meetings,” she said, “just so you can have a

conversation with a professional because a lot of people have too much pride, I feel like. Like me, for example, I wasn't going to seek that out myself through the station. And even if I felt like I really needed it, because sometimes you don't even realize that you do.”

Another reporter wrote about covering Ferguson. She said, “In St. Louis, a manager once asked for a show of hands if we needed counseling (meaning if anyone raised their hands, the station would bring in counselors). At the time, we were covering Ferguson day in and day out. It was an important story and a hard story. No one raised their hands. We all definitely needed counseling.”

So this brings up the question: Is there shame or embarrassment in asking for help?

When photographer Neal Ernstrom was struggling, his wife suggested he talk to someone that understood what he was going through. She said, “I was like, well, why don't you reach out to somebody, like you have to have a work friend, somebody that you trust that you're able to talk to about this, because he wasn't talking to me about it. And he wouldn't talk to his close friends that he's known all of his life. Because he was embarrassed by it. And at that time, it wasn't something that was talked about. You were seen as weak and you know it was just, you put on a good front, and you move on.”

Former manager Rick Hancock said, “You need more people like me.” He continued, “I've talked to people, I'm very open. I mean, it's why I responded to your survey ... But this topic is very important. It really is. And so anytime I can talk about it, I'm not an expert. I don't have any formal training. My bottom line, first step is talk, talk,

talk to someone. It doesn't have to start with being a professional clinician, just be open about your issues, your concerns ... But the first step is to talk about it.”

When Daniel Brown’s general manager brought in a counselor to the station, he said only a few people utilized the resource. “There were like just a handful of us. I think there was like maybe three total that utilized that,” he said. “It was just something I think there's a shame that goes along with mental health, and I think there's a shame that goes along with you know, talking to someone about problems is something that I felt both inside and outside the industry, you know, throughout my life, it's just this stigma about not wanting to talk about it.”

Hancock had a similar concern. He said, “The stereotype of the persona of a journalist, whether it’s broadcast, digital, print is that you know, we're immune to the chaos that we see. We're not. We're not immune to it. And management needs to know that.”

Fear

One of the most traumatic events for many of the journalists surveyed was the deaths of WDBJ reporter Alison Parker and photojournalist Adam Ward, who were both shot and killed on live TV. It made many of them aware of how vulnerable they are out in the field and what some described as “a target on their back.” One respondent wrote, “After the on-air murders of WDBJ journalists, I felt concerned as a journalist about all of our safety.” Another subject had a similar answer, “The story that affected me the most wasn’t a story I covered or even in my market. It was the murder of Allison Parker and Adam Ward that happened live on tv. That could have been and could still be me or any of my friends any day of the week.”

Photojournalist Brian Wiedeke said, “You look at the guy from MSNBC down in Louisiana a week or so ago doing the hurricane coverage.” MSNBC reporter Shaquille Brewster was assaulted during his live report of Hurricane Ida. “The worst thing to happen to him is some crazy guy gets out of his truck and starts berating, you know, I think that's going to become a lot more commonplace. Until, until we figure out this polarization, you're going to have people who feel emboldened and can take out their hatred and frustration on a TV camera,” Wiedeke said.

Other journalists mentioned the rare occurrences that they cover make them uneasy in their own lives. One reporter said, “In my first few years in the field it hit hard. I looked at the world as a dark, fearful place.” Another reporter wrote, “Random murders happening in broad daylight. It makes a community uneasy, and when you know the details and live in that community-- it becomes unnerving.” According to Megli (2021), “When you're working in local journalism, the line between one's personal and professional life is far more blurred than for national or foreign correspondents, who often parachute into a community to cover an event and leave.”

Journalists cover every “freak accident” when it comes to death. Many fear they could suffer the same fate. Could this happen to me? Could this happen to my child? One subject wrote, “You can only speak with so many grieving moms before you wonder what kind of world we're living in.” Sometimes that fear can be debilitating. “I think in general it has made me a more scared parent. I also think about losing my family at least once a day,” said one subject. When asked about a story that affected them the most mentally, one reporter wrote this:

“Child killed in carbon monoxide leak while doing a sleepover at a hotel. The kids went to the pool to have some fun, and there was a leak at the pool...one kid died and a couple of others had some poisoning...

I had gone swimming laps that day before I was called in to cover the story. It took me months/a year to be able to swim in an indoor pool again. Part of it was timing of that story, part was it was heartbreaking and scared me because it could happen to anyone.”

One manager who has been in the business 27 years wrote, “I have irrational fear of certain situations that are unlikely to happen to my child; kidnapping, school shooting. I also have large fear of driving of getting into a car accident specifically with a big rig truck.”

Photojournalist Ken Shermer wrote, “I have a disproportionate idea of the frequency of horrible stuff that happens. Most people never see fatal accidents/murders in their life. I’ve seen hundreds and the survivors are real people whose world has been destroyed. These things are real to me. I was there and saw the results. Seeing it on TV doesn’t do it justice.”

Many journalists mentioned how they experience increased anxiety since working in the business. Reporter Jackie Bruno covered the Boston Marathon bombing. She was there to cover two runners getting married right after finishing the race; instead, she was an eyewitness to horrific injuries. She wrote, “The bombing made me neurotic about terrorism. I’m always on alert and suspicious of crowds... I think traumas are more common than they are because I’ve been to so many.”

Reporters also covered historic protests in the past year as well. They were no longer arriving after the fact... after the shooting, after the crash, after the tornado, etc. They were in the middle of it all as it was unfolding. And many were not welcome.

Reporter Hayden Ristevski found herself in the middle of a shooting at a Breonna Taylor protest. “And they're just pushing and pushing and pushing and pushing and trying to flip a paddy wagon. And we're like, oh my gosh, what are they gonna do? Well, at the exact same moment, you just hear pow, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow,” she said. “And it was like, now all of a sudden, we're in the middle of a mass shooting,” she continued, “And I was like on my hands and knees with my arms up just screaming we're with WDRB, we're with WDRB, like screaming because heavily armed police officers have turned the corner not knowing what they're going to encounter. They don't know who's just fired the shots to our knowledge. One of them heard and said, ‘Media?’ And I screamed, ‘Yes, media.’ He said you gotta get out of here.”

Photojournalist Ken Shermer wrote, “Protests regarding police shooting of Keith Lamont Scott. Saw bystanders and other media assaulted. Police were overwhelmed and could not protect people in Uptown that night. Several times that night we were in danger of being victims of attack from protesters.” Another anonymous female reporter wrote, “I didn’t feel prepared to cover riots. We usually don’t get much training in how to stay safe before major news events happen.” She continued, “I was caught in the crossfire of a shooting. I hid in a news truck which had its windows shot out. I was not hurt, but I was pregnant. The shooting lasted several minutes. and I believed me and my unborn baby would die.” It seems though even when a journalist is fearful for their life, they are still afraid to tell management they do not feel comfortable or safe covering a story. Al

Tompkins said, “You and I both know that if a woman were to say, you know, I'm really kind of stressed out by what I saw, if you were to say, wow, you know, I covered the Boston bombing, and I'm really kind of freaked out about it. Oh, you poor thing. We'll let the boys cover that.”

Ristevski said, “It did feel like for some of us, like, I don't see it as that I could say no, like, this is what I signed up to do.” Ristevski added one of her station’s veteran photographers left the business after this incident. She said, “And I believe that this is why, a lot of things from last year, but he's honestly the most talented photographer that I've ever met in my life.”

What is happening now to journalists is what many foreign correspondents knew they were going into, but these are local reporters who have no training to be in the middle of a shootout or cover mass shootings or bombings.

When it came to coverage of the Surfside condo collapse, Annaliese Garcia said, “It's almost like you show up because you feel like you have a duty, you signed up for this, you're there in the moments like the first responders are.”

When she tried to address her concerns with management, another reporter wrote, “Well, my station didn't do diddly squat because my news director was awful at his job. I did talk to another manager in the newsroom about my experiences. The next week (and until I left about a year later), I answered only to this other manager and was very limited on the ‘serious’ stories I was assigned.”

Tompkins talked about this issue of women being fearful of speaking up to management, otherwise the big stories will then just go to someone else. When it comes to being fearful or emotionally traumatized from these events, Tompkins said, “What do

we do? Well, we make it okay for anybody anywhere to talk about their concerns, to talk about their experiences, to say, look, it's normal for you to have seen horrific things and are bothered by it. Let's talk about it. We don't vilify the people who are willing to stand up and say that they're suffering from it; it's a cultural thing, Sarah. It's a cultural thing that we have to change in our newsrooms.”

Tompkins also explained how journalists are viewed differently now and that is affecting our mental health as well. “It always starts with awareness, to say, we're putting our people in some pretty hazardous places,” he said. “And so it starts with recognizing what a very difficult world journalists are working in right now. It's a divisive world that's not necessarily welcoming of you being there,” Tompkins added.

One survey respondent said, “I have been put in several dangerous situations in which management did not care about my physical safety or mental wellbeing. I feel that stress might have caused me to cut the time at a scene or time covering a story short out of self-preservation.”

A Black female journalist wrote in the survey about having to cover the death of Ahmaud Arbery in Brunswick, Georgia. “I was there for two and a half weeks, which included interviewing Roddie Bryan, who took cell phone video of the murder. I could feel the hatred towards my crew of two Black men and myself when we went into his house,” she wrote. “And instead of pushing for questions, I was scared. He didn't want to talk to us, instead choosing to proclaim his innocence through his wife, and I regret that I let that happen. He was arrested later that week for his involvement in Ahmaud's death.”

Another reporter wrote, “I also never felt comfortable door-knocking for MOS (man on the street sound) in small racist towns as a Black woman. I had to do it often.

I've been called 'colored', the N word to my face, and even been greeted with a gun just for knocking on someone's door.”

Fear can affect people in different ways. According to Reverend Tompkins, it depends on your back story. “Anything that you have experienced in your life, like physical, emotional, sexual abuse, whatever, all of those things have the potential to rise up on any given day in the work that you're doing,” she said.

In the survey, one photojournalist wrote, “It sometimes makes life difficult to enjoy. Moments that are supposed to be joyous I just end up thinking how quickly it can all be over. I think a healthy amount of that feeling is good, but covering trauma week in and week out when you interview people who constantly say ‘don't take people for granted’ or ‘you never know when the last time you'll see someone,’ it almost makes your whole life a sadness. Because you never stop thinking about the end.”

It is one of the reasons Rick Hancock got out of the business after 20 years. He explained, “I was an everyday, day in and out weekend anchor, political reporter, I had a beat, it's the reason I covered politics. It kept me off the streets. It kept me from knocking on doors, kept me from going to the fires, chasing car crashes.” But Sandy Hook changed everything, and it continued day in and day out after the shooting. “Then we have to do the day after stories and the day after stories. And that's when sometimes our world gets crazy in journalism,” he explained, “But you have to have the passion to do that ... I don't have the passion or the want anymore to do what he's telling me to do. I don't. And so there's, there's really no sense of me staying, and just the basic trauma of just knowing those kids were killed, they were around my kids age.”

MMJs

Journalists are also very concerned with MMJ safety. MMJ stands for multimedia journalist, formerly known as one-man band or VJ (video journalist). MMJs shoot their own video, edit, report in front of the camera and save TV companies a lot of money. According to Potter (2006), “The benefits for the stations are obvious. For one thing, going VJ can be cheaper – a lot cheaper. The cameras can cost a tenth as much as full-sized professional cameras. And if more people shoot, the station should be able to cover more stories every day.”

Reporter Hayden Ristevski, who is no longer an MMJ, wrote, “I would drive around in the middle of nowhere and no cell service with a car that would break down regularly as a 22-year-old girl in the middle of the night, in the early mornings. I felt like regularly, it was only a matter of time until the worst happened to me.”

One female reporter wrote, “I was sent as an MMJ (alone) to Nashville, TN (3 hours away) and worked every show for three days. I was having to talk with a family who did not want to speak with me about their parents dying in the fires when they escaped and were in the hospital. The trauma of being yelled at, exploiting hurt people, and being exhausted really got to me.”

Another journalist wrote about her concerns after the death of Mollie Tibbetts. According to NPR (2021), “Cristhian Bahena Rivera was sentenced to life in prison for the stabbing death of college student Mollie Tibbetts, who was abducted as she was out for a run near her small eastern Iowa hometown in July 2018.” The 29-year-old reporter wrote, “I didn’t feel safe running in my neighborhood anymore (she was murdered while

on a run) and my bosses seemed unsympathetic to my concerns of covering this story alone as a woman.”

Another MMJ wrote, “My first crime scene in my first market... I got to a homicide before police did (we heard about it on the scanner). I was MMJing a midnight to 9 am shift ...by myself.. I was in a horrible neighborhood and saw a body lying in the middle of the road.”

Veteran photographer Brian Wiedeke said, “I almost think that it needs to start with training managers in terms of just being able to recognize, hey, we're sending people to these jacked up scenarios, you know, and I mean, especially in some of these, and it's not even in smaller markets anymore. I mean we have crews in Minneapolis that are MMJs that are going out by themselves.”

In the survey, one journalist wrote, “MMJing is a dangerous practice that should be outlawed. I've never felt more vulnerable than standing around with thousands of dollars of media equipment, alone at night, with a bright light shining in my eyes so I can't even watch my surroundings.”

Ristevski said, “If you're feeling unsafe, that affects you mentally.” This fear of physical safety affects a journalists’ ability to do their job and do it well. The anxiety and stress that comes with covering these traumatic events, and alone at that, affects a journalist's mental health. When talking about her managers, one subject wrote that they “still make me feel like a workhorse who is at their disposal.” Another anonymous reporter wrote, “I actually got in trouble for speaking out on social media about the danger of being alone as a female reporter at night.”

One manager, Shayla Teater, addressed concerns in the survey when it comes to her team's safety. She wrote, "As a leader, worrying about my team during covid and protests affected me the most. Covering the death and far over covid was awful and traumatic enough, but worrying about my employees health and safety pushed me over the edge. The constant fear, the constant worry that I was making a decision to put them in harms way as we tried to cover the story for our viewers was the hardest thing I have ever had to do."

In his interview, Wiedeke spoke about covering a fire in the wake of the George Floyd murder, "About 9:30 at night, my assistant news director called, and he said, 'Hey, the AutoZone is on fire and the chopper is down refueling. Any chance you can go back down there?' And I said, 'Yeah, I'll go back down.' And, it was one of those things that I was by myself. It was dark, you know, but I mean, you were very aware of everyone around you. And by the time I was tear gassed for I think it was a fourth or fifth time that day, I was like, okay, I'm done with that area."

Poynter's Al Tompkins said, "Very often, particularly during the pandemic, the difference between you and other first responders is they almost always work in teams. But journalists in the last year and a half and very often work with no other support, nobody really to talk with about their experiences. And that's, that's troublesome as well." He explained, "It starts with recognizing what a very difficult world journalists are working in right now. It's a divisive world that's not necessarily welcoming of you being there. And let's recognize that, let's be sure they have the security that they need, let's be sure that we're not sending them out alone to dicey situations and when they raise concerns, let's listen to those concerns. That's a big piece of it."

Wiedeke added, “I will say, our management has been very good. I mean, once we kind of realized, whoa, the game has really changed in the way that they're protesting. They didn't hesitate at all in terms of getting us private security.”

Ristevski, who was caught in the middle of a protest shooting, said, “I never thought I would need an armed security guard to be able to do my job, but we did need them. We didn't wear logoed gear after like the first week. We tried to blend in as live streamers as much as we could. We would ditch the big cameras and do things on the live view app on our cell phones because we felt like the cameras made us a target. Thankfully, none of our crews or our vehicles were like broken into or assaulted on like a bad degree. But other stations like people went to the hospital, someone got beat with his own tripod. So really, it changed the game for me of physical and mental and emotional exhaustion in news.” Ristevski said she will never take a job as an MMJ again. She said, “I think that like part of it with your mental health, is that you're not going at it alone. Right? That makes you feel good on a safety sense. But it's about like mental safety and physical safety.”

Feeling Numb

When asked how reporting on traumatic events has affected them, one journalist wrote, “I feel like I have gotten numb to it, which I am sure every other journalist would tell you, along with most law enforcement officials who see far worse things than we do on a monthly basis.” Another respondent said, “I've seen dead bodies carried out of houses while on stabbing scenes. But I've seen it so much that I feel numb to it now.” But Reverend Tompkins says when she hears this, she gets worried. “That is absolutely a

sign that you need some help. Because if you have sown yourself up so that you're not affected by the work that you're doing. That's a real sign that you need help.”

Former news director Daniel Brown, who recently left the business, said, “I think this is one of the reasons why you get out of the industry, because I was finding myself becoming numb to everything, you know, like, there would be, you know, school shootings, or the natural disasters, and it was just kind of like, just another one, you know, it was just, it was becoming kind of mundane, and I was just like, that's not who I am as a person.” The similar responses were endless. Reporter Jackie DelPilar wrote, “I also think it's de-sensitized me. Maybe this is a trauma response, but sometimes when I speak to people who lost a loved one, or I'm seeing devastation, I don't feel... anything. Like I understand that it's sad and traumatic but I can become numb to it. It's strange.”

The comments from journalists with almost identical answers continued. One female journalist wrote, “I think every trauma response is different. It's affected me by becoming disjointed from reality in certain situations. I've become adept at feeling numb or disconnecting to be able to do my job.” Another reporter wrote, “It has honestly numbed me to emotions. I hardly ever cry and I do not feel emotionally impacted by horrible things anymore.” A female photojournalist said, “We cover it every day, some people can get numb to it.” Producer Christina Santiago wrote, “It almost numbs me to trauma.” And Katie Ferrell McDonough had a similar response writing simply: “Made me numb.”

Former anchor/reporter Sarah Hill said, “The bodies that we all became desensitized to.” She continued, “There's no regard for you covered a murder in the

morning and then now you're being sent out to, you know, cover a rape or something like that. And police officers, you know, there's brakes built in, but not journalists.”

One 28-year-old reporter wrote, “Every story impacts me mentally — the graphic & deadly ones make me cry. To deal with it, I just disconnect from the situation and try to block it from my memory. I don’t actually analyze what I’m seeing, hearing, feeling... otherwise I’d leave this business.” Reverend Tompkins said processing it after your shift is key. Otherwise, you aren't taking care of the situation, and it will just continue to build. “Recognize the need to be able to destress, to be able to let down and to just absolutely allow yourself to experience what you're experiencing in a way that can be healing,” Reverend Tompkins said. “Not to take the time to let go and respond to that after, it's nuts because what you don't deal with continues to just build up inside of you and those things don't go away,” she said.

Another reporter wrote, “I’ve seen dead bodies carried out of houses while on stabbing scenes. But I’ve seen it so much that I feel numb to it now.” Feeling hard, cold or numb were words that kept popping up again and again. Reporter Nate Morabito said, “It's hardened me in a way that I don't think is beneficial.” A female manager said, “It has hardened me in some ways about what is happening around the world.” Reporter Jackie Bruno, who covered the Boston Marathon bombing, said, “I think I am a bit hardened to things like fires or murders. But the bombing made me neurotic about terrorism.” Producer and manager Liz Barry wrote, “I’m much colder, things don’t bother me as much as they probably should.” She added, “I have a hard time expressing or identifying my emotions.” A photojournalist who has been in the business 36 years simply stated, “I’m hardened to it.”

Manager Michelle Jones said, “Lack of compassion or sympathy for sad events, putting up a wall so as to not get too invested emotionally in work.” Another anonymous subject wrote, “In some ways it’s desensitized me. It has for sure made me tougher, and nothing really phases me.” But what can prepare a journalist to witness traumatic events? One journalist wrote, “I hate to say this, but I think it is often something you learn when in the field. It is hard to explain to someone how a dead body is going to smell...or what it’ll look like when a house is obliterated by fire or a tornado...or showing up to the scene of a car crash where someone died and is still visible in a car.” When asked about training, reporter Annaliese Garcia had a similar response, “Zero training in that regard. I do feel like the best training is like going through it.” When discussing the importance of training so journalists can better process their emotions, Tompkins said, “There is some truth to the idea that we become inured to traumatic scenes. When we become emotionally detached, however, it can be dangerous because it is our bodies shutting down to protect us. Training can help us to understand that. We can be alert to the fact that we are seeing something awful and for the moment not react so that so we can do our work. But then we should take time to process what we have witnessed.”

There are those journalists who are aware of the toll covering traumatic events has taken, and they are cognizant of not becoming desensitized or numb to it all. One female reporter wrote, “There is no doubt it has shaped who I am today. You can’t cover shootings and see/hear other horrific things without taking some or all of it home with you. But honestly, I wouldn’t want to get complacent about it either - because that’s the day I lose my humanity.” She went on to say, “One of my coworkers told me that covering crime scene after crime scene drove him to drink heavily after work.”

Neal Ernstrom's wife, Erin, said, "It's almost like he just kind of just shoved it under the rug. And again, like that light switch, which, in a field like that, I imagine it's pretty hard to just be able to turn off those feelings. And I'm sure what was going on in his mind was a lot different than how he was displaying that to everybody else."

Producer Jeremy Young of Al Jazeera talked about flying to Boston from California to work on a documentary about private space travel. They landed in Boston right after the marathon bombing and immediately switched assignments to cover the domestic terrorist attack. "It was one of those instances in this context, where you go from, you know, not at all covering trauma to like, you better turn it on real quick. And you better be ready to endure the fact that these people just went through a serious terrorist attack. And that they're traumatized. And it's just that kind of a light switch mechanism that probably doesn't exist in too many industries where you have to pivot like that," he said.

One male photojournalist said, "Desensitization is obvious. I use humor as a deflection tool. I have struggled with feelings of depression and did isolate myself for a time from my friends and loved ones."

Brad Borders is the vice president of outreach for Purple Heart Homes. He's a veteran himself and also the regional representative for REBOOT recovery. According to REBOOT (n.d.), "REBOOT Combat Recovery is a 12-week, faith-based, peer-led course that helps veterans, active-duty military and their families heal from service-related trauma." Borders said isolation is a major concern. "One of the things that we talked about in the total REBOOT course was the reactions, when we deny it happened, then we cry that it did happen. And then we get numb, and then we run, right. And we run away

or, or we run to, you know the painkiller of choice, whether it's alcohol, or, or maybe it's even a self-help thing, right. But there's no meat there," he said. "And it just doesn't work. And so the biggest threat to anybody's wellbeing, in my opinion, and what I've seen over the last 20 years of doing stuff like this... folks in isolation."

Training is what can prepare journalists and help them process what they have covered. REBOOT has branched out to help first responders, and there is now a general course for anyone who has experienced trauma. Borders said, "It's only in relationships and community that healing really happens."

Reporter Vanessa Araiza wrote, "It has impacted my romantic relationships because it's hard to break my hard exterior and express my emotions." Reverend Tompkins spoke about having a strong support system at work, which has been especially difficult during the pandemic. Reverend Tompkins said, "Not having the support of staff, and colleagues that you are accustomed to working with cuts-off for many people the opportunity to be able to talk about what's going on, in your day to day with someone else who understands it, as opposed to going home, and talking with your family, with your spouse, with good friends or whatever. But they really don't, much of the time, do not have the ability to be able to understand what the gravity of what you might be feeling and experiencing on a daily basis."

"Fortunately, I'm not, you know, like I didn't go into a deep, deep, dark hole," said Annaliese Garcia. "I was able to kind of pull myself out because I have a strong support system. But for people who don't and if you're not in your hometown, and you're not you know, I just feel like, I don't know, you can go into a really dark place after something like that." Garcia continued, "I definitely think that this is not talked about enough. What

the reporters are going through, when they walk away from the scene and when they get home, because that's something that you know, I just didn't feel like I could talk to anybody about it other than maybe people who were there.”

Another female journalist wrote, “I feel desensitized in many ways, and it seeps into my personal life. When I’m stressed or upset about an assignment, I find myself taking it out on my own loved ones for no reason. They don’t deserve that. I’m learning to acknowledge the source of my emotions.”

Anchor Fred Shropshire said, “I would also say, you know, really take stock of your relationships, people who are close to you, people you can talk to, you know, if you're younger, whether it be your parents or your siblings or your friends, you know that they know that you're in this type of job, or they may not, they may know that you're in this job, but they may not know that it affects you the way that it does, or that things weigh on you. So I mean, having people close to you who you can talk to is very important.”

Borders explained, “When people get numb, they stop wanting to communicate with others, and they go into the hole. And then this begins to manifest itself. I'm the only one going through this. And so one of the, I think the sharpest, the most effective tool that REBOOT does, is it brings people back together in community to let them realize they're not alone and they're not the only ones going through it.”

Overwhelmed

“One of the things that I learned really quickly is that I felt the weight of the stories on me when I would go home,” explained anchor Fred Shropshire. Many of the journalists surveyed spoke about not knowing how to handle their emotions from traumatic stories they covered. Reporter Annaliese Garcia said, “You’re covering these stories and a few times on air, I got emotional. I couldn't control it.” She continued, “Then I would leave and it was like, if something like if my strength all of a sudden was just like pulled underneath me like a rug, you know, like I couldn't really communicate with anybody about it. Because nobody really fully understood ... I would curl up into a ball some days and just like cry, I didn't know how to control it. I didn't. I felt like I shouldn't be feeling like that, because these families were going through so much worse.”

Reverend Sidney Tompkins emphasized the importance of having a strong support staff at work because family and friends don't always understand what you are going through. Of course, during a pandemic with many people at home, it made this increasingly difficult. “Not having the support of staff, and colleagues that you are accustomed to working with cuts-off for many people the opportunity to be able to talk about what's going on, in your day to day with someone else who understands it, as opposed to going home, and talking with your family, with your spouse, with good friends or whatever,” Tompkins said. “But they really don't, much of the time, do not have the ability to be able to understand what the gravity of what you might be feeling and experiencing on a daily basis.”

When it comes to the most traumatic event covered, one female reporter wrote, “COVID- The pandemic brought a series of stressors including the fear of getting sick,

making vulnerable people in my family sick, being physically assaulted at anti-mask protests and generally becoming overwhelmed.”

Being overwhelmed was a continual theme. “I specifically went to counseling because I was overwhelmed with covering crime,” said one photojournalist. “I was hearing and feeling the cry of mothers who get to crime scenes and learn their child is dead and I felt like I couldn’t stop thinking about hearing that cry.”

An editor/producer during 9/11 wrote about how she wasn’t prepared for the images she had to filter through before they were broadcast live on television. “It was hard to focus on work when all I wanted to do was watch what was happening in New York and Pennsylvania, and DC. I was a producer in Orlando at the time and we were doing local cut-ins. I had friends on a plane awaiting a flight to Mexico and several friends who worked in New York and DC. It was also my first day back at work after losing my Grandmother. My emotions were already raw and dealing with the tragedy was almost too much to handle. Within the year, I actually stopped working in television for a few years and started doing radio. It was 5 years before I found myself working in a newsroom again.”

Poynter’s Al Tompkins said, “It turns out that it’s not just the people in the field, who are suffering measurable traumatic stress, but also the people back at the station. So the producers, the online journalists and others, also have significant levels of traumatic stress. And, there are lots of reasons for this.” Tompkins explained, “They often are the ones who are taking in the most graphic, disturbing images that never even make air or never make it online.” He said, “It’s not just looking at video. It’s also listening to it with your headset on, so it’s going straight into your brain. It’s writing those stories, it’s writing

the headlines, it's talking about them. It's pitching them, it's following up on them. It's the repetitive injury, right?"

One reporter wrote, "I don't sleep well. I haven't slept a full night in years. I can't hold back my emotions. When I have to cover violence or death, I feel physically ill."

Another reporter said, "I covered a mass shooting at an IHOP arriving on the scene just as EMS did. Seeing all of the bodies gave me a form of PTSD. Still to this day, I can't eat at IHOP and sometimes even have trouble passing by them."

Brad Borders of REBOOT explained how this is the same for first responders. "In our class, especially for the first responder class, I use a vignette, where a first responder responds to a car wreck. And in the car, the car is on fire. And in the backseat of the car, there's a little boy in a car seat. He's holding a blue teddy bear. On the floor, there's Kentucky Fried Chicken all over the place and on the radio Creedence Clearwater Revival is playing on the radio, but he doesn't have time to think about all that, he just goes in and gets the kid out, cuts him out, brings him out. But he finds out later on that night after the ambulance takes him away that the boy didn't survive, right. But then two, three months later, when he smells Kentucky Fried Chicken, he gets sick and anxious. He sees a child with a teddy bear and doesn't know why all of a sudden he becomes angry, or hears Creedence on the radio. And, and it brings up a lot of memories, right and, and so letting people know that when we go through a traumatic event, that can come back later on down the road through triggers, understanding our triggers, that can help us prepare for the effects of what trauma does to us."

Shropshire said, "I think that newsrooms need to make a more concerted effort to make sure that a reporter is not covering 50 homicides consecutively, or covering, you

know, whatever that story is a tragedy. If a person covers it, does a continuous round on a particular story, that person gets, you know, a breather in terms of the heaviness of the story that they're covering. We can do a lot better with that.”

One anonymous reporter wrote, “I will always remember covering 39 homicides in my first 6 months on the job. At times it felt like I was going from one murder one day to two or three the next. I kept count in my reporter notebook. The sounds of distraught parents and family members still haunt me more than the images. I still hear the screams in my dreams and it’s something I’ve had to work through with my therapist.”

According to Simpson and Coté (2006), “Thoughtful managers and editors encourage reporters to rotate out of stressful assignments periodically, shifting to reporting on positive themes.”

Photojournalist Neal Ernstrom’s wife said, “I’ll never forget the day that Neal had the day off, and we were going to go to lunch. And then he got the call saying that he had to go to Newtown because there was a school shooting. And he didn’t know how long he was going to be away. It was before Christmas. So he didn’t know if he was going to be there through Christmas. He was there for over a week. And it was our first Christmas as a family with two eight-month-old babies at home.”

Producer Jeremy Young emphasized, “Let’s be honest, our industry, again, is not one that caters to healthy work life balance, healthy family lives.”

Former news director, Daniel Brown, recently left the business after the passing of his mother and both his grandparents. He posted on social media, “As someone who has lived away from home for nearly 13 years... these losses impacted me in unexpected ways.” He added, “Mental health is such an important thing for everyone to recognize

and treat -- and my decision to leave is about that.” In an interview with Brown, he spoke about not knowing how to process all of his emotions. “It was one of those things where you really started learning to process things a little differently, you know, you kind of, I call it put the shutters up ... you kind of have to take your emotion out of what's happening. Because if you don't, then you just become overwhelmed. So it's almost like what you're covering is not really impacting you, even though it really is kind of impacting you. So you put those shutters and those blinders on, for those big ones. But I think over the years, you know, and I'm sure you can relate to this, it's a lot of the smaller things, the stories that get you that you go home and just have like this emotional breakdown,” Daniel said.

Rick Hancock, former manager, spoke about the stigma that comes with dealing with our emotions or feelings of being overwhelmed. “The stereotype of the persona of a journalist, whether it's broadcast, digital, print is that you know, we're immune to the chaos that we see. We're not. We're not immune to it. And management needs to know that.” Hancock explained it's not just the day of stories. It's the continuation, as Tompkins called it “repetitive injury.” After covering Sandy Hook, Hancock said they were getting constant pressure to cover whatever angle the other stations had. “We were getting pressure from management. [W]FSB has this and [W]VIT has this and [W]TNH has this. And I'm like, do you know, these guys haven't slept? Because we've been working around the clock and pretty much people are traumatized. I don't know what to tell them. You know, if I use my personal devices to tell them... I'd tell them to chill, go home, don't come to work. They would get fired, I would get fired for telling them that.”

Moral Injury

Another theme that kept reoccurring in the research was feelings of moral conflict when it came to what some journalists were asked or told to do on assignment. It ultimately manifests into feelings of guilt and remorse. When asked if they have ever been pressured to do something they felt was morally wrong, 58% of survey respondents said yes. Poynter's Al Tompkins talked about research from Tara Swart, an MIT neuroscientist. Tompkins said, "So Tara Swart's data seems to indicate that younger journalists are suffering at a very high rate. And it's not because they're too tender. It's because they come to this with a very different context. They understand loss and trauma differently than an older person who's seen and done a lot of things. It's the difference in life experience." He continued, "She believes that what you can describe in these younger journalists is mostly not PTSD, which tends to be incident related. But instead, it's probably moral injury, which is more similar to what soldiers often feel when they don't believe in the cause that they're involved with, for example, it has more to do with guilt than it does to do with shock."

One female news director described her experience early on in her career. "During a weekend shift, three kids fell through the ice on a river and drowned. The news director at the time rushed into the station and yelled at me to get us on the air with live footage of their bodies being pulled out of the water. They were wearing distinct winter jackets, so if you knew who these kids were, you would know they died because of our breaking news coverage. There hadn't been time for the authorities to notify their parents. I had just started my career, and it made me question everything about it." She continued, "Sadly, this happened again many years later when a firefighter died in a five-alarm fire."

We put live footage on the air of his colleagues carrying him to the rescue and performing CPR. No one could see the firefighter's helmet or jacket number, or his face. A year or so later we aired a one-on-one interview with his mother. She said she "just knew" it was her son while watching our news coverage. To know that the producer and I chose to put that on the air and are responsible for her finding out that way...it breaks my damn heart, and makes me ashamed of my (then) profession."

A female reporter had a similar experience of feeling immense guilt. She said, "A mother lost her son and grandson in a fire and we were on scene covering the fire. At that point, she didn't know it was her son and grandson and came up to me, asked me who was inside the house. I directed her to speak to police because I didn't want to be in the position to tell her that her family died. But I feel heartless being there while she's finding out this terrible news. And my ND (news director) is telling me to interview her. The last thing I want to do is put a camera in her face at this moment. What good does that do? It doesn't help viewers, and it certainly doesn't help her."

Katie Ferrell McDonough, who has since left the business, described her relationship with the family of one of her interviewees. She wrote, "Judy Malinowski who was set on fire and survived for two years. I became very close with Judy, her mother, stepfather and two daughters. I basically watched Judy slowly die and her daughters looked up to me as almost a mother figure. It was difficult to manage station expectations/ pressure to get the story and being a friend to the family and girls." McDonough said, "I felt trapped in the middle and never wanted to disappoint the station/ or feel I was taking advantage of them in any way/ didn't want them to think I was disingenuous because I truly care for them to this day." When it comes to reporting on

trauma, McDonough said, “It’s made me numb and feel dirty for feeling I was forced to push the envelope too far by station management and producers. I still carry the weight of stories and feel like I’ve somehow added to their pain.”

Another female reporter wrote, “Covering a workplace shooting at Molson Coors in Milwaukee affected me tremendously. The gunman shot and killed several of his coworkers before killing himself. The most traumatic part was having to walk up to the gunman’s home and see if his family would be willing to do an interview.”

She continued, “The pain on the gunman’s family members’ faces was something I will never forget. They politely asked me to leave and I felt like such a terrible person for having to bother them at such a traumatic time. Not only had they just lost their dad/husband but they had to live with the fact that he was a killer - who had changed other families’ lives forever.”

The guilt, especially when it came to interviewing those who had lost loved ones, continued with similar responses. When asked if journalists had been pressured to do something that they felt was morally wrong, one respondent said, “Asking families who just lost loved ones for interviews.” Another reporter wrote, “To knock on the door of a family whose child was just murdered or died a tragic death. We do it all the time.” Door knocks kept coming up with the subjects. Door knocks are a common occurrence where a reporter is given the address and told to knock on someone’s door to see if they will do an interview. Some reporters don’t ask though. Usually, the camera is already rolling and the mic is ready as soon as the door opens. Reporter Jackie DelPilar said, “Any time we are forced to door-knock on the family of victims immediately after a traumatic event always makes me sick. It feels so intrusive and rude and insensitive. I hate it.” Another journalist

wrote, “Door knocks when someone has just suffered a personal loss and asked for privacy to be respected.” Photojournalist Ken Shermer said, “Any door knock to get sound from a dead person’s friend or relative. It’s repugnant.” Producer and manager Liz Barry said, “I had a hard time being told to push reporters to reach out to people who had just suffered a tremendous loss.”

Many journalists also felt it was morally wrong to approach those right after they lost a loved one. One journalist wrote, “Feels insensitive and disingenuous. Pressuring people to talk to you at their lowest moments doesn't feel morally right.” Reporter Harri Leigh said she struggled with “invading a family's privacy after their loved one died.” Another reporter said, “Never does it feel right to go after a victim's family for an interview.” And yet another subject reiterated, “Being pressured to talk to someone who just lost their loved one. I think we can wait before reaching out so they can process the news. It feels heartless.” Reporter Jackie Bruno said, “I’m always disgusted when we cover a drowning at a family pool. It’s usually just a terrible accident. Doesn’t feel like news to me. I feel awful for those involved and I know the news there doesn’t make it better.” Many journalists will still do these door knocks or ask a loved one for an interview because they feel the pressure from their managers to do so out in the field. “I don’t like having to push people with lost loved ones to talk on camera,” another journalist said. “If they want to, great, but otherwise I feel like a vulture out to exploit their pain.” One reporter wrote, “It doesn't feel right to approach someone who's just gone through something traumatic (like death of a family member) just to get sound. I know it's who we all want to hear from and can be very impactful depending on how the story is told, but often times it feels insensitive and disingenuous.” A male reporter said,

“I hate when bosses want you to push family members of victims into an interview right after their loved one died. Luckily the station where I work now has a policy that we wait for them to reach out to us.”

Retired professor and reporter Greeley Kyle said, “We don't need the graphic video and the body shots and the close-up of grieving family members and friends.”

Reporter Katie Steiner wrote about her first job out of college, and she was assigned to cover a triple murder. She wrote, “It was my first big murder. A woman's boyfriend killed her and her two kids. I vividly remember going to the house of the husband and knocking on the door. I was terrified and just felt awful for him and the rest of his family. That was the third day after the shooting, and I remember the pressure to find a new angle every single day and how exhausting it was.”

One reporter expressed her concern for these frequent door knocks, but said she does understand how it can turn into an impactful story that will ultimately help others. She wrote, “Frequently, as a reporter I have had to knock on doors and cold call people who just lost loved ones. It never gets any easier, and at times it makes me feel like I have compromised my morals. Being at crime scenes and having to shoot video of grieving families also can feel like an invasion of privacy.” She added, “I continue to do it all, though, because there are rare moments where sharing a loved one's story can be healing for a family. Sometimes their message can also prevent something similar from happening to another family - such as in the case of a drunken-driving crash or another kind of preventable death.”

Rick Hancock said far too often journalists have felt the pressure to feel immune to these stories. “I don't think the human body/mind, we should ever be that we are

comfortable with that, we shouldn't feel like, oh, I can cope with this, like we should always feel anxiety and fear and anger and sadness, and sorrow for all of those things," he said. "As journalists, we should feel those things. I think it will make us even better storytellers and that we're not just sticking a mic in someone's face and just asking for a response."

According to Professor Katherine Reed (2015),

When I invited to class the mother of two children who were electrocuted in a recreational lake not far from the city where I teach, she told my class she couldn't remember much about those first days after their deaths.

Friends and family told her later about the TV reporter whose lights and camera were already on when he rang the front door of the family's home. And about the reporter parked in her car at the end of the driveway, visibly sobbing inside (the reporter told the concerned neighbor who knocked on her window that her editor wanted her to talk to the parents and she didn't want to do it).

What puzzled the mom most was why "no one came back to see how we were doing" in the long, hard months that followed. It bothered her that most people knew nothing about her children's lives and a lot about their deaths — some of it incorrect and painful to read or see on television. She talked about how much it meant to her that the *Columbia Missourian*, where I teach, published an obituary/feature about her son and daughter, who they were, and what they loved.

That story helped, she said. So she saved it.

Psychiatrist Dr. Bruce Perry was a guest speaker at the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma webinar, and he spoke about a journalist's role when interviewing someone after a traumatic event. "When you knock on somebody's door as a journalist and say, how do you feel that your child was shot 12 hours ago, that is not giving that person control over the process by which they share their story," he said. "You know, at some point in their lives, they should have the opportunity to tell their story, but they should be the ones to choose when and how and to whom, and I think that sometimes, journalism -- some journalists get in the way of that."

Fake News & Social Media

"When I started out as a reporter, way, way, way back, people were generally glad to see you. Oh, it's that guy from Channel 6. Wow. You know, that's pretty cool," Poynter's Al Tompkins said. "Now, journalists, anywhere, often are met by 'fake news,' 'you're a liar.' 'What are you doing here?'" Tompkins said it is very important to recognize what a difficult world journalists are working in right now. "It's a divisive world that's not necessarily welcoming of you being there. And let's recognize that," he said.

Photojournalist Brian Wiedeke said, "There is a growing element of whether it's, you know, to me, it's the far right, and the far left, in terms of their hatred of mainstream media. And, you know, they have somewhat different reasons for it. But they're both especially vocal about it."

Producer Sarah White said, "It's a wild world out there for journalists right now." She added, "We're either the 'fake news' or we're unimpeachable. And you never quite

know which side you'll fall on with any given person. It's stressful for sure and I wish more people knew it.”

Because of this, one reporter worried for her safety while out reporting during the election. She said, “I worried a lot during the election that I would be targeted from the ‘fake news’ hate that was spewed.”

Blair Shiff added, “Being called ‘fake news’ for four years was traumatizing.” Other journalists wrote they were not prepared for “being called ‘fake news’ and realizing the lack of trust that is out there.”

Many journalists also cited responsibilities to social media as a contributing factor to their deteriorating mental health. The Australian ABC’s Lisa Millar recently left Twitter all together. According to Sydney News Today (2021),

She (Millar) says. “While we were on the air, I couldn’t stop the barrage of constant criticism. I broadcast 15 hours a week live.”

Millar used a tool embedded in the app to filter out malicious comments. These range from automatic machine learning detection of words that may be offensive or abusive to mute repeated offenders. However, this still left her exposed to dozens of problematic messages.

It (Twitter) has been criticized for not doing enough to fight abuse.

Millar’s friend and colleague Leigh Sales (2021) wrote, “It is that the bullying and harassment now comes, not in an occasional phone call from a real person, but at a furious pace on social media from politicians' acolytes, lackeys, fans and proxies, mostly — but not always — operating anonymously. It is non-stop, personal, often vile,

frequently unhinged and regularly based on fabrications. It has the effect of an angry phone call from a politician magnified thousands of times over.”

Former anchor/reporter Sarah Hill said, “I had a very poor media diet. As you know, journalists do because you're feeding yourself crap every single day of all the world's negativity.”

When asked what they were not prepared for, one subject wrote, “I wasn't prepared for the ugly people on social media.” Another journalist wrote, “Social bullying.”

Daniel Brown, who has since left news, said, “Right now and the state of journalism, it's on top of, you know, the mental health thing. I felt like it was a good time just to kind of step away. Journalists are becoming like an enemy of the state almost. I was just like, that's not, it's not how this was founded, it's not how this was meant to be. And I feel like the talking heads in primetime cable news overshadow even, like what local reporters or journalists are doing. We get lumped into that, and it's not even remotely the same, you know.”

Poynter's Al Tompkins explained, “Reporters it seems to me, it increasingly is true... I think that we wonder, why am I doing this? Why do I go out there and put myself in front of people who hate me, who call me fake news. It's not worth it, what we're doing isn't worth it. And moral injury works that way, when you think that the harm that's being caused, is greater than the good that comes from it.”

Brown added, “I think that we as an industry need to take a stronger look at why all these people are leaving, you know, and, and like you said, it's a common consensus

across the board. It's not just like one or two people saying it. So I think we have a problem and we're ignoring the problem very much.”

Tompkins emphasized, “What others now have supported is that the elixir for moral injury is if you believe that your work matters. So Tara Swart and others, Dr. Anthony Feinstein at the University of Toronto has also found that if you believe that what you do matters, you will recover fast from moral injury. What you're doing is not just for ratings and clicks, and shares and views, and that I think is encouraging. But we don't spend enough time in our news operations to talk about the value of what we're doing.”

Brad Borders of REBOOT said his organization has a similar mission with its program for veterans and first responders to keep them from going into a dark hole. Borders said, “Because the isolation is caused by lack of mission and purpose. And so REBOOT helps establish that, that brings them out of isolation, gives them a new team to be a part of, re-establishes mission and purpose, and that mission and purpose begins to help them be a part of the rescue team for someone else.”

Pandemic

“I don't think anyone was prepared to cover a pandemic and live it. It's taken a mental toll on everyone,” said one survey respondent.

A 31-year-old male journalist said, “Inside of a COVID ICU at the height of the Coronavirus pandemic” was the most traumatic story he has covered.

A female producer said, “The COVID pandemic has affected me the most, I think because it has been prolonged.” A male producer said, “The pandemic, mostly because of

how long the story itself has been going on, how it affects everyone on a personal level, and how violently politicized it has become often leading to journalists being targeted.”

Photojournalist Brian Wiedeke said the pandemic made it even more difficult to lean on each other. “You know, you weren't going back into the newsroom the next day where people could see you and say, oh, you know, how you doing after last night, that type of thing. I mean, you weren't, we weren't going in at all. I mean, I still haven't been in the newsroom and it's, what 18-19 months later,” he said. “The other big stress with that is, you know, you're in these huge crowds, and you're like, oh my God, like, you know, am I gonna walk away from this with COVID? On top of it all, you know?”

A 29-year-old reporter said, “I left my station in the middle of the pandemic. My mental health kept rapidly deteriorating and my boss did nothing to help my safety or address concerns.” She also said she wasn't prepared to see so many people yell “fake news” at her all the time.

Anchor Fred Shropshire said, “During the pandemic, I actually started seeing a therapist.” He did this outside of work resources. “TEGNA has started talking about, you know, therapy sessions that were available, those kinds of things. To me, that should be standard. Like that's not, that's not exceptional,” he said. “You know, that's basically making up for a gross oversight. I think in our business that's been there for all this time. We're no different from first responders when it comes to dealing with traumatic situations.”

Reporter Jackie Bruno said her station has really stepped up during the pandemic. “There has been unlimited coverage for therapy which has been helpful,” she said.

Managers

In this survey, 57% said after covering a traumatic event station management never checked in on them. Sixty-two percent said after covering a traumatic event nothing beneficial was done by their station to help with their mental health.

Al Tompkins told the story of a reporter who was in Las Vegas for a wedding when the mass shooting took place in 2017. She had covered the Pulse nightclub shooting as well. Managers called her in Las Vegas, and she immediately got to work. She stayed there for a week covering this mass shooting and the aftermath. Tompkins said, “And then not long after that she covered Marjory Stoneman Douglas.” He explained how her station had her cover one mass shooting right after the other. Tompkins asked her why they kept sending her. Tompkins said this is how she explained it, “She said, well, because I was in the newsroom, and they said, wait, you've covered this stuff before you know how to do this, go do it. And she said, so it's like a punishment. If you have any experience, they send you back.”

Jeremy Young of Al Jazeera said, “Once you gain experience working in these difficult places, you tend to get called for those assignments again, because of that work experience, and it's almost like your ability to withstand the trauma is part of the reason why someone wants to hire you.”

Annaliese Garcia was one of the first reporters on scene at the Surfside Condo collapse. She said, “I think I covered it for 14 days, 15 days straight.”

This is not uncommon for journalists to cover these traumatic events without much down time at all to decompress. A male photojournalist wrote in the survey, “After Sandy Hook, I had to call my station to remind them that I had slept 6 of the last

72 hours and had worked what wound up being 51 hours in a 3 day period without leaving (slept in a hotel outside Newtown for 3 hours a night before waking at 3am to continue wall to wall coverage.) I called at 9am Sunday, a replacement arrived to relieve me by 3pm, I was off the clock by 5pm. I had to be to work at 9am the next day, Monday, and start my new work week.”

Neal Ernstrom won an Emmy for his coverage of the shootout in Watertown with the Boston Marathon bombers. He had said that no managers told him good job or thanks for putting your life on the line. His wife, Erin said, “It was a thankless job for whatever story was being covered. Because then the next story was the next story to move on to and, you know, that was what needed to be covered and worked on. So it was like, just forgotten about, door closed.”

One female reporter wrote, “There is such a lack of compassion within management that they don't even take a second to speak to you.” Another journalist wrote, “So much of working in news seems to be wearing our exhaustion and pain on our sleeves like badges of honor - like that makes us good at our jobs and worthy. I want to be better and set boundaries, say no... but it's hard.”

Not all newsroom managers are like this, one manager wrote in the survey, “Multiple stories forced me to realize it's okay to grieve, to take time off, to seek counseling and help for what journalists experience in the field. I realize I work for newsroom managers (and I am one, too) who encourage work-life balance and are generous with time off to take a break, recharge, etc.”

Hayden Ristevski had to call her manager for some time off after only one day of traumatic coverage. She was covering a Breonna Taylor protest and was caught in the

middle of a shootout. “I had to call my boss on like the second day of what's the most important story I'll probably ever cover here and be like, I'm coming in if you want me to, but I haven't slept. So, I don't know if I'm doing much good on the anchor desk ad libbing for hours. And I think I'll put someone in danger if I go out with them in the field because I feel like I'm living in a fog right now,” she explained. “He's like, go back to bed. I'll call you if we need to. I'm like, Okay. I have wonderful bosses, like the best bosses ever,” she said.

In an unprecedented move during this research, managers at KATU in Portland, Oregon decided to preempt newscasts so everyone could attend a seminar on job stress and trauma. Photojournalist Mike Warner tweeted, “NO NEWS MONDAY... just a heads up, the @KATUNews morning and afternoon shows have been preempted and will NOT air on Monday, Sep. 27th. The entire news team is attending a seminar to help deal with on-the-job stress and trauma.”

It is not always the nonstop breaking news coverage that journalists can become resentful of when not given time off, it is the pressure they say from managers to put themselves in dangerous situations. Oftentimes, they say with the feeling they cannot say no to a manager. Another photojournalist explained in the survey, “I foolishly once agreed to an idea from a news manager for a story my instincts told me were dangerous. A man in the headlines had been arrested for graverobbing and claimed he needed the bones for ‘Santeria’ rituals as a part of his religious practice. The idea was to speak with a ‘eal’ Santeria priest and have them set the record straight on religious practices.” The photographer drove to the priest’s home in what he describes as a very bad neighborhood, walked into the basement with three men and conducted the interview. He said inside

there was a stone altar with a knife and body parts embalmed in jars. The photojournalist continued, “The day I returned to work, the headline story was about the priest I had been sent to interview. (You know, the one that was the "legitimate authority" for Santeria.) He had been arrested for graverobbing.”

Photojournalist Brian Wiedeke, who has been in the business 28 years, said, “I will say, our management is very good about... they make it very clear that if there is something going on, whatever it is, whether it's weather, crowds, whatever, where you don't feel safe, you get out first.” He continued, “They are not the type of managers that will say well the story is still going on, why did you leave? You know, I mean, if you do not feel safe, you get out. And I think it's, I think for the longest time we've had this idea that we have to be there start to finish no matter what. And I think if you listen to that little voice, it's more self-preservation than anything.”

A female reporter wrote about the story that affected her the most mentally writing, “A mother lost her son and grandson in a fire, and we were on scene covering the fire. At that point, she didn't know it was her son and grandson and came up to me, asked me who was inside the house. I directed her to speak to police because I didn't want to be in the position to tell her that her family died. But I feel heartless being there while she's finding out this terrible news. And my ND (news director) is telling me to interview her. The last thing I want to do is put a camera in her face at this moment.” A lot of it goes back to many of the journalists wanting to tell stories that make a difference or maybe even honor a lost loved one, but they feel like they are compromising their morals in some of these situations when a manager is pressuring them to do something they feel is wrong.

A woman reporter wrote, “I left my station in the middle of the pandemic. My mental health kept rapidly deteriorating and my boss did nothing to help my safety or address concerns.”

Wiedeke said, “I almost think that it needs to start with training managers in terms of just being able to recognize, hey, we're sending people to these jacked up scenarios.”

Jeremy Young of Al Jazeera agreed that training should start from the top down. “Well, I think one thing that certainly is helpful is training programs, not so much for someone who has my job. But for someone who has my boss's job, that people who are making the decisions about deployments, assignments, you know, people who are executives, understanding what their employees are going through, when they're sent to cover an earthquake,” he said. “Sometimes it's really the folks who are making editorial decisions that should be across this kind of stuff so that they can ask their colleagues, how are you doing? You know, are you able to stay? Do you need a day off?”

Al Tompkins said there's one thing to remember as a manager. “Recognize that people generally aren't going to come to you and say, I'm having problems,” he said. “Quiet doesn't mean okay. And newsroom leaders have to recognize that part of their job is not just to give critiques about your live shot, but also to ask how you're doing,” Tompkins said.

After covering the Surfside collapse, 28-year-old Annaliese Garcia spoke about her thoughts on making counseling a requirement after covering a traumatic event. She said, “Just so you can have a conversation with a professional, because a lot of people have too much pride, I feel like. Like me, for example, I wasn't going to seek that out

myself through the station. And even if I felt like I really needed it, because sometimes you don't even realize that you do.”

Another subject wrote, “In St. Louis, a manager once asked for a show of hands if we needed counseling (meaning if anyone raised their hands, the station would bring in counselors). At the time, we were covering Ferguson day in and day out. It was an important story and a hard story. No one raised their hands. We all definitely needed counseling.”

Mike Walter, an eyewitness to American Airlines Flight 77 crash into the Pentagon, focused on journalists’ mental health in his documentary, *Breaking News Breaking Down*. When a therapist wanted to tag along with Walter and a photojournalist for research, the photojournalist said, “Look, the first thing you need to know about the TV news business is, there's inside people and outside people. Inside people send the outside people, and the outside people see all the horrible stuff. And then the inside people tell them, you have to tell the story in a minute and a half, and they have no clue. He goes until you get through to the inside people, what you're doing is pointless. And I think it's really profound what he said. And it's really true. I think a lot of times you get managers who are so busy, you know, how do we get our ratings up and this and that, they don't even think about the harm that's being done, or even to take the pulse of colleagues, you know, how are you dealing with this?”

Walter said he has been asked to come into newsrooms, show his film and speak to the journalists. He said, “It was basically like therapy sessions. It would be groups of like four or five people, and they would just share their stories, and they would sob, but they had a lot of anger towards their bosses, even though the bosses were the ones who

brought me in to kind of talk to them. But I think it says something, you know, like, I could come in and talk to them, whereas the bosses weren't comfortable broaching the subject.”

When asked in this researcher’s survey if station management checked in on you after covering a traumatic event, 57% said station management specifically never checked in on them. Here are some of those responses:

Those who responded “No”	Those who responded “Yes”
Not that I remember. There might have been an email thanking us for our hard work after the Molson Coors shooting but that would have been the extent of it.	I feel blessed to count my bosses as friends. They are constantly checking in on us.
No, I had to be the one that said I’m not doing well and take a mental health day.	I’ve found that our current managers have checked on us throughout this traumatic pandemic.
Outside of Sandy Hook, no.	As a manager, I checked in on my reporters a lot and assigned them to a variety of lighter-hearted stories following - this also went for long murder cases in court and the like.
Especially after one of our coworkers died, I wish the station at least had offered some sort of counseling for us.	Sometimes. I have covered a lot of traumatic events, so I can't remember every one and that if it was offered every time.
Only to run down the incident and tell us what we did well and what we did poorly.	It depends on who the ND was. After Moore, yes. But only that time.
I had coworkers check in because they understood what I experienced. However, management never did.	Yes. The manager I've had for the last few years has been diligent about checking in with journalists individually after traumatic events. In fact, after a recent trial - she allowed me to take 3 days off from work.
I can't speak for the reporters, anchors, or producers, but the people who put the content on the air were often ignored or	At my current station, yes. After the shooting when I was pregnant, two managers sat me down and encouraged me

<p>forgotten.</p>	<p>to speak to a counselor in the building.</p>
<p>Only a small handful of managers have reached out to see if I am ok. Each time, it was because at some point during the day I had communicated that I was not handling the situation well.</p>	<p>My coworker's brother died in a crash in our viewing area. Although I didn't cover it (we put an anchor-read tribute on our newscast) it was incredibly traumatic for our newsroom. Our management brought in a counselor for us to talk to, which was helpful.</p>
<p>Beyond the boilerplate "take care of yourselves" emails, not specifically, no.</p>	<p>My boss was very active in taking my emotional temperature so to speak.</p>
<p>In fact, I was scolded by my news director for trying to get a "national platform". I was simply doing my job. It was very hurtful.</p>	<p>Producers and news director were monitoring how we felt. If it looked like we couldn't handle what we were covering, they would assign us to something different for the day.</p>
<p>I actually got in trouble for speaking out on social media about the danger of being alone as a female reporter at night.</p>	<p>I have only had 1 manager of 4 check in on me after covering traumatic events in the past. They called on an off day to ask how I was feeling and if there was anything I needed.</p>
<p>No, it's always just on to the next story.</p>	<p>My managers checked in with me and made sure I was resting and taking care of myself.</p>
<p>Managers at every station I have worked will pretty much just move onto the next story and don't say anything or ask if I am OK.</p>	<p>Yes. Frequently during traumatic stories and after.</p>
<p>No, but I wasn't in the field. People in the field may have been given resources.</p>	<p>There were several group conversations about George Floyd before, during and after the protests.</p>
<p>My news director basically said that this is part of the job and didn't care how we felt about a story or after covering it. We were expected to be robots about it and had to have perfect stories. We were talked down if we showed emotion during or after. Our stories were always criticized, no matter</p>	<p>After the riots one of the anchors called me first thing in the morning. Several hours later I got a call from the news director and then the operations manager to see if I was ok.</p>

what. News director almost fed on any weakness we showed. He would kick us while down, pour salt into our wounds and tell us to get over it.	
Very rarely if so and not to a level where if I said no they would provide me a day off or counseling.	When my live truck was shot at, the news director called me at home and the general manager met with me at work. Both wanted info and asked if I was ok, but I was never given time off or assistance.
They left me alone while I was on vacation. That was good enough for me.	During COVID, station management has made an effort to see how I was doing and if I had what I needed to do the job remotely. Now, that they feel like it's safe to be back in the building the compassion has disappeared.

Tompkins said this when discussing managers, “It's a tricky thing for a manager to do to call you and say, how are you doing? Because it might imply if I don't have a relationship with you, it might imply that I think something's going on with you. So building relationships with people before there's an emergency is always better. Right? You have to know that your boss actually cares about you.” He continued with these questions, “When have you ever had conversations with people? Do they know that you absolutely care about them as a person, not just what they can do for your newscast?”

Hayden Ristevski, an anchor/reporter in Louisville, Kentucky explained the mentality behind one of her former bosses, Bill Lamb. “He was our general manager for 18 years. He's at FOX LA now. And he really instituted like, we are going to invest in our people, we're going to invest in our culture, we're going to make sure that we are one of the best places to work, we're going to give people resources, we're going to give them what they need. And in return, we just are going to demand one thing, excellence.” Lamb has since written a book, *Money Follows Excellence*. Ristevski continued, “It's really

easy to achieve excellence when you feel like your boss is listening to you. It's really easy to achieve excellence when you feel like you're paid fairly.”

But is this an exception to what most journalists experience? Katie Ferrell McDonough, who has since left the news business, wrote, “Management needs to be the first line of defense. There has to be a change in culture because no one in TV thinks management gives a damn about them, their personal lives, mental health etc.”

After covering a traumatic event, survey respondents for this research were asked if their TV station - not manager specific - did anything to help with their mental health. Sixty-two percent said after covering a traumatic event nothing beneficial was done by their TV station to help with their mental health. Here are some of those responses:

Those who said nothing beneficial was done to help their mental health:	Those who said their station tried to help with mental health services:
Nothing.	Lately they offered counseling
I don't remember the station doing anything to help with mental health.	My company offered free therapy.
Nothing.	After Sandy Hook counseling was made available. A newsroom colleague's girlfriend was killed during the slaughter.
Nothing.	Offered counseling.
Nothing. We were lucky to get pizza or bathroom breaks during 12-hour control room shifts, never mind mental health care.	Brought in mental health experts to talk to, emotional support animals brought in, massage therapists brought in for free sessions, free workout classes brought into the station.
I had to assert that I was unwell. They told me to use EAP. (This person never used the services. Felt the services were limited. Wanted more small group/team sessions.)	Multiple times, stations have reminded us of available resources to help with trauma.
KWCH gave me a couple days off after I came back from helping at WDBJ. That's it.	They sent out emails thanking us and the news director called me to check in. Very

And I had just worked eleven days straight at that point, too. So not sure they were thinking mental health when they did it.	supportive.
Absolutely nothing. Made to feel worthless and a bad employee for needing a second to breathe. Completely ignored, trauma not even acknowledged. Issues swept under the rug and even covered up. Never had one conversation about trauma in TV over course of 12 years.	They had therapy dogs come to the station— field crews didn't get to see them unless they happened to be there.
As far as mental health, beyond the resources generally available as part of our Healthcare, not much.	Free counseling was offered. Also a listening session.
Gave us the toll-free number for the employee assistance program. I had to jump through a lot of hoops with paperwork and finding someone our plan covers.	My station does offer support services (emergency counseling) through our insurance.
Not one station has ever offered mental health help	After the mass shooting, we were urged to take advantage of our employee benefits for counseling and they brought in massage therapists one day for everyone.
Nothing for the mine collapse.	Gave me a day off.
Well, my station didn't do diddly squat because my news director was awful at his job. I did talk to another manager in the news room about my experiences. The next week (and until I left about a year later), I answered only to this other manager and was very limited on the "serious" stories I was assigned.	At my current station, we have counselors hold seminars for us. The station also brings in counselors for several days. We can take turns going to a private room to speak with someone.
Nothing.	They offered an EAP hotline that you could call.
Nothing. But after Hurricane Irma - Disney sent massages to each station for a day.	The station reminds us frequently about our EAP benefits. Right after the mass shooting they brought in service dogs.
Nothing.	We were offered mental health counseling if we wanted it.
Counselors were offered, but rarely taken	They made sure we were aware of our

advantage of.	mental health benefits. During the pandemic, there has been unlimited coverage for therapy which has been helpful.
Nothing.	For big events, HR has sent an email to "open the door" if anyone needs to talk or see a professional. News director or assistant news director has also discussed taking care of mental health in aftermath
Nothing.	During the Pandemic, an email went out to all staff offering free counseling for any who needed it.
Nothing.	Made a therapist available for me. HR reached out to make sure I was doing ok.
The only time I got support was covering Chadwick Boseman's passing. By this point I was already in therapy. My immediate manager said if I needed an extra day off I could take it. Otherwise there hadn't been much encouragement prior to my current position.	I have been allowed mental health days in the past to recover from long coverage as well as being reminded of resources through healthcare.
Nothing.	Offered unplanned days off to recharge; journalists can request not to cover certain stories
Not much. They sent a few emails.	My new station brought in counselors to speak with reporters and anyone else feeling overwhelmed. This is the only station I've worked at that has made an effort to support employees' mental health.
Nothing.	The Red Cross brought in volunteers from the Red Cross to make us aware of the free counseling available to us.
I don't remember anything being offered to help.	They said if we needed a day to decompress to let them know.
I don't think they did anything. I could be wrong. I just don't remember.	My station in Denver called in therapy dogs and counselors and even massage therapists. It helped so much.
Nothing.	

HR called me to apologize for my life being threatened. Probably just to cover their own butts.	
A year and a half later, we had the opportunity to speak with a counselor once for 30 minutes and were instructed to contact our EAP for additional services. Otherwise it has been pablum like calling us heroes.	
Nothing besides asking how'd it go?	
One time they reminded us that counseling is covered under insurance but I don't remember when that was. It may have been after the reporter and photographer were shot in Virginia.	
...nothing? Maybe sent an email about services but that was only after someone took a leave of absence because of mental health.	
Nothing, I also didn't ask for it but nothing was offered.	
Not at all.	
Nothing.	
Haha that's funny. Especially in smaller markets, that is never going to happen. Dealing with traumatic events is part of the job, and I'm sure most news director's attitudes are "if you can't handle the heat, get out of the kitchen."	
I had to tell my managers that I needed to leave Surfside because I had a scheduled vacation and needed the break. Almost all my other vacations have been canceled because of breaking news.	

My station didn't do anything but my co-workers and I would tend to go out to dinner or over to someone's house to hang out and talk things out.	
Nothing.	
Nothing. Not until Covid. The station now reminds us of the help available through our EAP. I went through the station EAP and it took weeks to get a call from a counselor and then even longer to get an appointment.	
They sent us a lot of emails saying thank you for what we're doing and stuff like that ... But nobody really mentioned if you're going through something, like reach out to HR kind of thing, we have those things available for you guys.	

There is a recurring theme of not using counseling services available through the station. For many journalists, just sending out an email saying here are your resources is not enough and does not really encourage them to utilize those services. Reverend Tompkins says, “That's the opportunity for a manager or for the news director, or whomever to be able to relate.” She said, “People are geared for relationships, to be able to relate to staff, to be able to relate in such a way that says, you know, if you need to take time off, let me know, let me know. And we will be glad to make whatever accommodations we can make.”

Jeremy Young emphasized it is a myth that news organizations cannot help journalists with their mental health without it affecting their bottom line, time off included. “I kind of think this idea that there's some sort of impact on the bottom line, when we're talking about improving the conditions for workers. I mean, I truly believe

like, happy healthy workers are the people who you want populating your newsroom, right? So if you're concerned with the mental health, and the well-being of your team, and you're showing a way to approach it or deal with it, I just don't believe that there's some sort of conflict with your financial model or any type of a small offer or sacrifice that you might make associated with helping out someone who works for you," Young said.

Many journalists surveyed also found their resources at work confusing to navigate. One subject wrote, "The station gave us the toll-free number for the employee assistance program (EAP). I had to jump through a lot of hoops with paperwork and finding someone our plan covers." Another respondent wrote, "I went through the station EAP and it took weeks to get a call from a counselor and then even longer to get an appointment."

Those with positive experiences usually had unlimited therapy sessions during traumatic coverage or counselors were brought in which made for easy access.

Professor Katherine Reed explained, "News organizations in general should ask with genuine interest how their people are doing after covering difficult stories, especially prolonged stories (like the pandemic) or repeated stories (car crashes, murders, day after day). And then they should be prepared for the answer and be willing to make space for journalists to take time off or see a therapist at the news organization's expense and without fear of negative consequences."

Resources Available

In the survey, 33% of respondents utilized their station’s mental health services. However, out of those who did utilize it, 60% said they were not satisfied with what was offered.

Some journalists feel like they do not have an outlet provided by their station to deal with the stories they cover. One photojournalist wrote, “I once interviewed a young man who, through a second chance program, was attending community college to learn a trade as a machinist. He was overjoyed to learn a skill and have a chance to turn his life around. I made him the central character of the pre-taped package because of the enthusiasm and genuine nature of his story.” He continued, “Two days later he was killed in a drive-by shooting walking home from school. The story never aired. I had nowhere to go with what I was feeling. There was nothing to be done about it. Accepting that and moving on was difficult.”

Here’s what some of the respondents had to say about their station’s mental health services:

More Needs to be done:	Happy with Mental Health Services:
Minimal resources. Basically no help.	I liked it because it was easy. I had no clue where to start and I had a therapist within a day.
I went to the counselor they provided and never went back. I got my own personal counselor after.	It was a great relief to talk to someone and not worry about how much it might cost.
I did feel supported by the counselor I spoke with. My only change was that these services need to be more broadly available. I got three free sessions. I can’t afford to pay for other sessions.	I was very pleased with the services. My therapist changed my mindset.

I think the counseling services are good, but they are only meant to be a bridge, which means at some point, the sessions run out.	We have a program. You call, they give you a list of providers and an authorization code. You call the provider of your choice, give them the code and you never see a bill.
It's great to have anything, but 3 sessions aren't necessarily enough. It would be great if regular counseling was covered by insurance.	Employee assistance program with free therapy.
I was not happy with the mental health resources provided by my station, it was more about who was in network than who was best to help me.	I have absolutely loved my therapist that I have.
I would make it easier to find a counselor. I had to rely on them to put me in touch with someone. I had to call EAP twice to actually get someone to respond.	It's been very helpful.
The therapists covered by the company's EAP was a somewhat small group compared to the therapists available in the area.	It was a pleasant experience. The counselor was honest and provided great feedback. My station brought in a counselor for a day and she encouraged me to seek out more therapy going forward.
I used the EAP program once and I wish it had been a counselor more experienced with our line of work. After 5 sessions I decided it wasn't a good fit.	It was Teladoc - because of the Coronavirus. It helped me get through.
I actually used the mental health resources from my side job at Starbucks. They offer 20 free sessions of counseling with Lyra, which is extremely helpful.	
Experience from the station's end is easy to use and uneventful. The insurer's tools, however, need improvement.	
It didn't exist.	
It's fine but I hate how few sessions they pay for.	
Did not find a therapist through work	
I don't know what is currently offered	

because they have never talked about it with me directly.	
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Digital producer Doug Stewart wrote, “The one time I called EAP to talk,” he said. “I was told at the end that I should ‘just find a new job’.”

Another subject said HR set him up with a local counselor. “The counselor thought the best solution was to change everything and move to another city,” he said. “I was looking for advice on how to climb out of a dark hole and he recommended picking up everything and moving which I didn’t really see as a solution.”

Heather Forbes of the ABC in Australia was not impressed with their EAP. She said, “I’ll give you an example how useless the EAP was at the ABC.” She continued, “Seven o’clock one morning, a young woman from the accounts department -- the accounts department -- threw herself off the roof and killed herself, and she landed in front of the doorway of the back entrance to the building which was seven o’clock in the morning. And from about seven to eight o’clock, staff would be arriving, while the security guards had seen us on the CC-TV cameras, went rushing out. And they had to call the place that call an ambulance. They had to cover the body until the police arrived. All of that stuff. And they were deeply traumatized. Well, human resources, ran around in circles, and they got EAP. And the EAP sent this young woman, recent psychology graduate, wearing a tight skirt and high heeled shoes, and a ton of makeup. And here are these huge big burly security guys. And she was twittering away at the end. It was, it was a disaster.”

One survey respondent wrote, “I used the EAP program once and I wish it had been a counselor more experienced with our line of work. After 5 sessions I decided it wasn’t a good fit.” Mike Walter emphasized this as well. He said, “Therapists in many

cases don't really have any concept of what it's like, you know, I always say, and you know this, you can be out on a story for four or five hours and just see all kinds of horrific things. And then your minute and a half story is antiseptic, you cut out all that stuff, but then you can't cut it out of your brain, it stays with you, you know, and your editor can't cut it out, either, because they're scrolling through and seeing those images.”

Walter said a photojournalist friend had a really difficult time finding a therapist until he found one that was a Vietnam vet. Unfortunately, a lot of people are not willing to put that much time and research into seeking out the right therapist for themselves. That’s why a therapist matching program is so important.

When asked about the mental health services at her station, one female reporter said, “I wish it was part of the cycle of the newsroom. Like completing a web story or leave behind a VOSOT. I wish it was part of the everyday routine and not looked down upon.”

Jeremy Young of Al Jazeera has worked for a lot of large news organizations, including MSNBC. He does not recall any in-house resources that were provided to the journalists. He said, “I don't know that I've gotten a lot of help in house on any issues related to, you know, stress and trauma and all of those things.”

During this research, TEGNA updated its benefits to 12 free therapy sessions a year per person. You will see in the journalists’ wish list, one subject said, “I wish you were allowed 12 (one per month). I think that's a totally manageable and helpful amount of sessions.”

Solutions

When I spoke to former news director Daniel Brown, he said, “Every time I turn around, I’m seeing people that have been in the business 15-plus years like myself get out and it’s just like, I think the industry has to take a stronger look at, like, what’s causing that. And what can we do to prevent that, because you’re losing a lot of dedicated veteran journalists.”

Psychiatrist Bruce D. Perry spoke about solutions to trauma during a webinar with the Dart Center. He said, “In all of the systems that I work with, education, mental health, there are two parts of it. One is the techniques that you do.” He continued, “But I think the people we work with who do this work day in and day out, one of the most important things is we need to get our systems to begin to change so the burden of creating a regulating, safe, nurturing environment is going to be a core element of self-care. It is not just on you. No self-care program in the world can overcome a terrible, grinding organizational process that disrespects you, that underpays you, that marginalizes you, that minimizes you, all of that kinds of stuff, and all of our organizations, whether we like it or not, every single one of our systems right now in the United States is a carry-forward of a power structure that was created by white men who were trying to basically, you know, increase their wealth at the expense of others.” Dr. Perry emphasized, “Until we change those organizational models, we are going to have a lot of frontline people that are worn out and worn to a nub, and turnover is going to be an issue, and again, self-care is one thing, but if you do not change organizational care models, it is, you know, it will be salmon swimming upstream against a dam.”

Rebecca Palpant Shimkets of the Carter Center and a public health consultant spoke in The Poynter Institute's 40 Better Hours series and said, "It's important to have healthy employees that are mentally well and physically well. But the benefit of that is the cost benefit. They are more productive. Companies are more profitable. And you have better more creative ideas" (The Poynter Institute, 2016).

Resource Wish List

When journalists were asked what services and resources they wish were offered at their stations, here are some examples of what survey respondents said:

- Mental health training
- On-site counselors
- 24/7 help line
- Small group/team support groups
- Training by someone who understands the news business.
- Open and regular communication about the importance of mental health and services available
- At least 12 counseling sessions per month.
- Easier to find mental health providers that are covered under insurance.
- Counselor match / wider range of counselors to choose from
- More time off, flexible hours and schedules
- Mental health days. No questions asked.

Reporter Annaliese Garcia said meetings or counselors should be made available without asking. Garcia said, "Some type of meeting or scheduled meetings, without any,

you know, how they schedule meetings for us to do training with, you know, everything, all the things like how to speak, how to look... why can't you do that with mental health, like make it a requirement almost, after something like this, just so you can have a conversation with a professional, because a lot of people have too much pride, I feel like. Like me, for example, I wasn't going to seek that out myself through the station. And even if I felt like I really needed it, because sometimes you don't even realize that you do.”

When discussing mandatory training at his company, journalist Mike Walter said, “They just did this LinkedIn learning thing, where we’ve all got to take mandatory classes. And the first one is about diversity, which is important. But, you know, you think about the workplace, and diversity and sexual harassment and all these things, I think they are important, but this is important too in our field, and I think that there should be a component like that.”

Another journalist wrote, “News stations need to do more than offering a link or phone number for employees to seek therapy on their own. I challenge them to think outside the box and bring a therapist in a few times a year to talk with workers, connect and see if they’re interested in therapy. Or require training or classes on how best to deal with trauma. We deal with trauma because of the nature of our job and more needs to be done by the workplace to help guide us through that trauma.”

In Wiedeke’s interview, he spoke about the importance of having a counselor on site as well. “Just to bring people on site to make it even easier, and just say, hey, you know, these people are here, you know, if they have a little extension, or whatever, set up temporarily, you know, hey, call this extension, you can set up 20-30 minutes with him

before/after your shift type thing, you know, that may encourage more people to kind of debrief.”

Training

According to The Columbia School of Journalism (n.d.), “The Dart Center develops educational resources for use in journalism schools and news organizations, provides training and conducts research about news coverage of violence and trauma.”

The Dart Center has an entire website dedicated to resources and training for journalists. According to their website, the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma (n.d.), The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma offers a range of educational, training and consultation services to news organizations and journalism-related nonprofits worldwide. Developed in collaboration with leading trauma experts and news professionals, Dart Center newsroom trainings are available on a range of topics including:

- Trauma-aware reporting on vulnerable individuals and communities
- Self-care and resilience for trauma-exposed news professionals
- Leadership strategies and duty of care: Managing trauma and stress on news teams
- Handling graphic imagery
- Planning for mass-casualty coverage
- Peer support for news organizations
- Managing online abuse and threat

According to the Dart Center’s website, they offer “both on-site and remote newsroom briefings and consultations, and can help to develop a customized program for your newsroom or team.”

The Dart Center also holds virtual events that individuals can register for and participate in, including the [*2021 Dart Awards Celebration and Roundtable, with Host Kate Snow*](#) as well as [*"What Happened to You?" A Conversation with Dr. Bruce Perry & Oprah Winfrey.*](#)

There’s also an online handbook the Dart Center created called [*Trauma & Journalism: A Guide For Journalists, Editors & Managers.*](#) According to Brayne (2007), “Journalists are professional first responders to crisis and disaster. But they’re among the last of those groups to recognize the psychological implications of that responsibility.”

Poynter is another resource journalists can use. It even provides an online training called [*Journalism and Trauma.*](#) According to Poynter (n.d.),

Journalists who cover traumatic events such as violent crimes, horrific accidents, natural disasters and other situations involving human pain and suffering are often required to approach and interview trauma victims or their family members.

However, the skills needed to interact with trauma victims do not always come naturally. This course will teach you how traumatic stress affects victims and how to interview trauma victims with compassion and respect.

And, this life-and-death pain and suffering doesn’t affect only the victims; it can affect you, too. This course teaches you how to take care of your own health after covering a traumatic event.

Al Tompkins of Poynter and his wife, licensed psychotherapist Reverend Sidney Tompkins were both interviewed for this research. They speak at conferences and newsrooms across the globe providing training for journalists who cover traumatic events. It started internationally for them, but then they were asked to start helping local journalists. Al Tompkins said, "I've got 46 years of journalism, and she's got 40 something years of therapy, seemed right for us to say, maybe we have something to offer."

Tompkins said training and resources for journalists should be no different than ethics training. He said, "It's a nonstop. It's sort of like saying, well, when do you learn about ethics? When do you not learn about ethics? Right? It should be a part of your everyday conversation, to say, look, let's pay attention to what's going on here."

Mike Walter explained how he was asked to give a witness statement to the FBI after seeing American Airlines Flight 77 crash into the Pentagon. He lost it and could not control his emotions. He explained, "I was just kind of embarrassed because here's this buff guy in a uniform, and I'm like a babbling little baby there sobbing." But Walter was surprised by what happened next. "It was amazing. His reaction, I think, you know, it kind of, I think it kind of tells a story about the military versus journalism," he said. "He stopped me mid-track and just threw his arms around me and started hugging me and he said, look, this is perfectly natural, you're in a state of shock, you just witnessed something really horrific, don't be ashamed, you know." He continued, "I think, you know, soldiers, people in the military, are a lot more acclimated that trauma is a way of life. There's training there, I think for police and firefighters, paramedics, you know, it's a piece of the puzzle, too. But journalism, no, and I think we've kind of got to get on track."

In this survey, some journalists asked if there's really any training that can prepare you to cover these traumatic events? Photojournalist Brian Wiedeke spoke about driving around during protests and how it looked like a war zone. He said, "I don't know that you can prepare for that type of thing. I think you can make it very clear to people that local news is not what it once was. I mean, we are living in these just extraordinarily polarizing times."

Brad Borders of REBOOT had a similar response, "I would say, there's nothing that prepares us for the things that we might see. I wasn't prepared for Iraq. I don't think anybody could have prepared me for that. And our army does realistic training with medical training and things like that. But there's nothing to prepare you for what it is that you see. But I think, I think awareness that this, these kinds of things do happen, and awareness of what the effects of that on the front side of it, so we're not being reactive, and we're being proactive." Many believe that's the key. Training and awareness that you will see these kinds of things and what affect that can have on you, so journalists can normalize their feelings and know they aren't alone.

Daniel Brown believes it all comes back to education. He said, "I almost think it's something that needs to start in the university level for journalists to get into, you know, how to handle that. And I do feel like we're trained or taught to, I keep going back to putting those blinders on, I feel like we are trained to do that. But it's never about how to then emotionally deal with what you saw, or what you did, and all those kind of things. And I think it's even more traumatic for people that are in the field."

A manager at the time of Sandy Hook, Rick Hancock decided to leave after that because he just did not know how to help his team. "I couldn't help these folks," he said.

“And now we were getting pressure from management. [W]FSB has this and [W]VIT has this and [W]TNH has this. And I'm like, do you know, these guys haven't slept? Because we've been working around the clock and pretty much people are traumatized. I don't know what to tell them,” he said. “I'd tell them to chill, go home, don't come to work. They would get fired, I would get fired for telling them that,” Hancock said. He said counselors were brought in because an employee lost a girlfriend during the Sandy Hook shooting, but he called it reactionary. “There wasn't a playbook,” he said.

Security

Hayden Ristevski was very vocal in how confident she felt with her management's decisions on how to keep their staff safe while out in the field. The way she put it, “If you're feeling unsafe, that affects you mentally.” She said her station even put out surveys asking if their crews felt safer in the field with security or more of a target. “And then we did get training by our security who were ex-military,” she said. “When we do a live shot, we're gonna stand at a place where we have two corners behind us,” she explained. “I'm going to be able to have a view for your back. And we've got two corners covered. Nobody's throwing anything at us from behind, like just things you never thought of before, like turning off your lights, don't draw more attention. It's just like, all these little things,” Ristevski said.

Al Tompkins said listening to your crews out in the field is so important. “It starts with recognizing what a very difficult world journalists are working in right now. It's a divisive world that's not necessarily welcoming of you being there. And let's recognize that, let's be sure they have the security that they need, let's be sure that we're not sending

them out alone to dicey situations and when they raise concerns, let's listen to those concerns," he emphasized.

Mental Health Days

Mental Health days was a recurring theme that was mentioned by many journalists in the survey. This was on the wish list for many. Jeremy Young of Al Jazeera said, "I think it's a myth to say that news organizations, you know, don't have the flexibility to ameliorate the situation." Young said he does not believe giving mental health days will affect the company's bottom line. "I truly believe like happy healthy workers are the people who you want populating your newsroom, right? So if you're concerned with the mental health, and the well-being of your team, and you're showing a way to approach it or deal with it, I just don't believe that there's some sort of conflict with your financial model or any type of a small offer or sacrifice that you might make associated with helping out someone who works for you," he said.

Hayden Ristevski said her station did give mental health days. "Everyone worked four day weeks for a while, but your four days were long days. But it really did help because everyone got a three day weekend for a while. Because it was just too much," she said. "They made it clear that you're not going to lose your job, lose opportunities, or be looked at any differently from making a good, comfortable safety decision," Ristevski added. She even said after 2020 was such a hard year for so many, her station expanded PTO. "Everyone got an extra week of time off in 2021," Ristevski said.

Counseling

Al Tompkins gave the example of trucking company, Averitt Express, and the importance it puts on mandatory counseling. Tompkins said, “This is not optional. If you're going to work for us, then we need for you to do this. And so they just said, look, we're gonna pay you for every moment that you're there. We're going to be sure that this isn't an imposition on you. But it's really important that you, that you have a good solid family life because you're going to be dangerous on the road if you don't. Isn't that interesting?”

Through a side job at Starbucks, one survey respondent said Starbucks gives employees 20 free sessions of counseling with Lyra. According to Reader (2021),

Lyra Health offers its mental health platform to companies as a benefit for their employees. While it provides both in-person and online therapy, it's telehealth-first. Lyra onboards patients online and uses artificial intelligence to match them to therapists, psychiatrists, and coaches. Patients can choose whether to go to an office or book an online appointment. The platform also provides out-of-the-chair mental health resources such as worksheets, reading material, quizzes, and access to the Calm app.

Ristevski spoke about the importance of counseling and how it has helped her. “I think if journalists are struggling with a story that they're covering, an assignment that they're covering, a toxic newsroom, a toxic work situation, they need to talk to someone about it,” she said. “I think that oftentimes, we are really afraid to speak up for fear of retribution in news. And I totally understand that. So why not seek out like a neutral person to hash it out with to ask for advice, like maybe that person will help you put

things in perspective and help you navigate it. Maybe that person will say, no, that's harassment or something, you know what I mean? Like this is not normal.”

Anchor Fred Shropshire emphasized the importance of counseling as well. “I would say that investing in your mental health is just as important as anything else that you will invest in that will help you in your career, actually investing in your mental health will take you beyond your career.”

Joe Hight wrote about what The Oklahoman did after coverage of the Oklahoma City bombing. According to Hight (2005), “We had a trusted counselor who could receive e-mails from reporters and editors who had questions about their feelings, talk to them on the phone, and schedule one-on-one appointments when needed. This is in addition to the regular EAP counselors.” When contacted via Twitter about this research, Hight said, “We went outside EAP to find a counselor to work with us. She was a family therapist who worked with us through the bombing, the massive tornado outbreak, OSU plane crash, etc.” He continued, “I think you have to find someone who can work with journalists and has the capability and trust to handle major events like this. You have to think outside your normal channels when dealing with the aftermath.” This is so different from the generic email of “here are your resources” which most people do not use. All newsrooms could provide this to their staffs. Also teaming up with texting apps like Better Help and Talk Space, may be the future of helping journalists. With these apps, you are “matched” with a therapist. Then you have weekly sessions where you can zoom, talk on the phone or text. You also have what is like an instant message service where you can reach out to your therapist throughout the week. The easier access, the more likely your staff is to take advantage of the service.

The Dart Center has also created the Journalist Trauma Support Network. According to their website, the Journalist Trauma Support Network (n.d.) is “a pilot program training therapists to help journalists ... We are training psychologists to work with journalists impacted by occupational stress and trauma.”

Mentorship

“I think it's more of a mentorship issue. Experienced journalists should be helping younger ones find ways to cope,” said one male subject.

Firefighter Addison Dunn spoke about ways he copes with the trauma they see. He said, “We do have a chaplain to speak with and occasionally they bring in counselors on big events. But it’s kind of like a brotherhood. The older guys always pull you aside after an incident to check on you.”

Photojournalist Brian Wiedeke said it is important to check in on one another and let others know you have utilized the mental health services as well. He said, “I think a lot of people did. I think we were kind of checking in on one another and saying, hey, you know, yeah, I've called this number, it's super easy. That type of thing.”

Reverend Tompkins emphasized the importance of having a support system and other journalists who can understand what you are going through. Reverend Tompkins said, “Not having the support of staff, and colleagues that you are accustomed to working with cuts-off for many people the opportunity to be able to talk about what's going on, in your day to day with someone else who understands it, as opposed to going home, and talking with your family, with your spouse, with good friends or whatever. But they

really don't, much of the time, do not have the ability to be able to understand what the gravity of what you might be feeling and experiencing on a daily basis.”

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) developed a program to prepare journalists and crews for covering traumatic events. According to the ABC (2007),

The ABC's Trauma Awareness Program was developed in collaboration with the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma.

The ABC program takes a three-tier approach: peer support group training, manager awareness and staff awareness. The training sessions begin with a powerful documentary made by ABC News in which ABC journalists and production staff talk about their experiences of covering traumatic events.

Mike Walter was a part of this program. He said, “So what the ABC has created is a program where they have journalists outside of ABC who have gone through traumatic events, where you can call them day or night, and I was on that call list where somebody, wherever they're at, they could call me up and talk to me, and it would never get back to the bosses and they would talk to somebody who's gone through something who can talk to him about you know, self-care, what are you doing for yourself and you know, who are you talking to, you got to talk about this. And so I think it's a really, really unique program.”

Heather Forbes, who started this program for the ABC back in 2006, was interviewed for this research. “I said, well, I've kind of noticed that we've got a number of walking wounded in the newsroom,” she said. “Some of them were return foreign correspondents, but some of them had been court reporters.” She added, “Peer support is the way to go.” Forbes thought it was important to train peer supporters to help other

journalists. “They're not a psychologist, they're not in any way replacing a professionally trained mental health therapist,” she said. “They can often solve the problem for the person. In other words, they'll point out that you're actually suffering from trauma. You know, this is what it is. Because a lot of people don't realize that that's what they're actually suffering from. Because in your daily day to day life, as a journalist, you go every day.” As far as getting journalists to sign up to be mentors, she said it was quite easy. “I just sent out an email saying, listen, I'm running this program. Are you interested? And honestly, it was easy. They just came pouring in, they came pouring in, because I think they thought at last, we've got something for us. And it's by us, for us. And I keep stressing that they, they were the key to the success of the program.” Forbes explained that the peer supporter had to understand when in fact a journalist needed to be referred to someone for professional help though. Then she worked on finding psychologists who were able to understand the trauma that journalists go through. This goes back to what the Dart Center is currently working on with its Journalist Trauma Support Network which is training psychologists to work with journalists. When Forbes was asked why there was not a similar peer support program in the United States, she said, “I'm not sure why they haven't been able to set one up in the States. I suspect that most media organizations are very resistant. What it takes is a good court case. We've had two in Australia in the last three years.” According to The Law Reporter (2019),

The former journalist — known only as YZ — was awarded \$180,000 in damages for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

In a legal world first, the court found the newspaper was responsible for her PTSD because it failed to provide a safe workplace.

The ruling could have far-reaching implications for newsrooms, and force them to consider what duty of care they owe employees when it comes to traumatic events and mental health.

There are a few Facebook groups that focus on journalists and their mental health. One is called “Mix/Minus”. According to the group’s page, “This is a forum to discuss ways to deal with anxiety, depression and other mental health issues that arise while navigating a life in television ... Personal stories are always welcome. Please feel free to share tips and posts from reputable sites that discuss mental illness and how we can deal with its various causes, but keep in mind this is a supportive space.” Another Facebook group called “Journalists Covering Trauma” focuses on journalists and their mental health as well. The Facebook group says, “We started this group in November 2017, in response to the mass shootings that were gripping the nation. We have since evolved to focus on the impact of covering trauma on journalists and how to best cover traumatic events, whether it's a mass casualty event, a hurricane or the pandemic. Here, you can give advice on how you coped from the secondhand grief, ask how to approach a source on a sensitive topic, and share tips on follow-up stories in the months and years ahead. This is a place for journalists to ask for and give emotional and professional support in covering a trauma.” And the third group is called “Journalism and Trauma.” The page states, “A safe space for journalists to discuss all aspects of trauma: exposure to trauma in the field, vicarious trauma, how to engage sources that have experienced trauma, and news management's duty of care to protect their reporters and the public.”

Brad Borders of REBOOT said mentorship and community is the glue that holds it all together. “It's designed around getting people together in community over a meal,

and then having a discussion about trauma, its effects, its origins,” He said. “It's only in relationships and community that healing really happens.”

Future Research in Virtual Reality

Virtual reality training

Going back to what Brad Borders of REBOOT mentioned about realistic training that takes place to prepare those who serve brings up the question: Could virtual reality training be the realistic training needed to prepare for protests, mass shooting scenes, grieving mothers?

Virtual reality has helped train everyone from police officers to the military prepare for tense situations. According to Reyes (2017),

A training scenario may be a traffic stop. There is a person behind the computer controlling the avatar, so the “person” you pulled over may respond cooperatively or not. The officer in training gives commands and the avatar responds according to the commands given at the direction of the computer operator. It could go peaceful or it could go violent.

The scenarios are set in 360-degree photos of actual locations, such as schools or city halls that you would really respond to. It's your city hall. It makes the situation very realistic.

And because there's a human behind the avatar, they can make the avatar react and say things that can very much happen in real life. So it really exposes the officer to some very real life scenarios allowing law enforcement officers to make

some very difficult decisions in a controlled environment with constructive feedback on the officer's actions.

Healium

Healium is a virtual reality headset that was created by former anchor/reporter Sarah Hill in response to her own inability to deal with the stressors of news. Hill said the lifestyle made her sick in the form of insomnia. She said, "It started first as insomnia. I was like, why am I not able to sleep?" Ultimately this led to panic attacks. "So I had to get out of the business to save my health," she said. According to the website, Healium (n.d.) "is a clinically-validated mental fitness channel that uses virtual and augmented reality apps for the self-management of stress and anxiety ... It's the world's first virtual and augmented reality media channel powered by brainwaves and heart rate via an EEG headband or Apple Watch."

Heather Hargraves says she uses Healium and virtual reality all the time for herself and with her clients. She is a trauma therapist in Ontario, Canada. Hargraves also suffered from her own traumatic experience in a car accident while she was in college. After using Healium, she told Fisher (2020), "I felt like my brain had been rewired from my accident." Fisher (2020) also notes, "As far as the hardware available in the virtual reality market, she (Hargraves) is looking forward to companies creating more personalized and portable headsets that can be taken home and used more frequently. Heather recommends her clients use Healium in between sessions."

Hill said, "We started doing brain maps to see how is this media impacting the user? And can we compound the media much like a drug to downshift their nervous

system and elevate the therapeutic brain patterns and de-escalate the ones that weren't? And the answer to that was yes, you can. And I had tried neurofeedback to help me quiet my own mind with insomnia. And I had invented stories for myself, because I found the experiences incredibly boring. And so Healium is just a combination of really me trying to fix myself, and finding a drugless solution to downshift my nervous system, but then also training my brain because that's what's wrong with traditional meditation, you can't see your own brain patterns or heart rate in real time.”

Hill suggests newsrooms install Healium stations like they have started implementing in schools. She said, “It's a clean box that's in the newsroom; it's always ready. And you know, essentially, much like you would like a vending machine. People can take turns using it.” She added, “Ideally, what these stations should do is to get a personal kit for each person. So that before they go to bed at night, they can do some training sessions and learn on their own. But not all of them are going to do that. So the lowest barrier to entry is they get one station, install it, it has a clean box in there and a year license of healing content, we add new content every 60 days, so it never gets old.”

Hill explained, “Newsrooms are not equipping journalists with mental health armor. And, you know, your stress and mental wellness can make more of an impact than if someone were to injure you physically. It's the cause of 60% of illness and disease. It's 90% of the reason why people go to see the doctor.” She continued, “What needs to happen is not reactionary, in that you experience something and you have an issue, it needs to be resilience. You need to be constantly doing trainings, on your own mental wellness, learn about your brain patterns, how you can control them, because if not, you

know, like me, and like you, you get back from covering a natural disaster and see a bunch of bodies. And you just, you don't have a way to process that.”

Hill added that newsrooms can be a tough sell. “They haven't historically poured a lot of resources into mental wellness, other than we've got counselors,” she said. “What needs to happen is that they need to be thinking about their journalists, as tactical athletes that need mental health armor, and mental health hygiene.”

In Summary

Most journalists love their jobs, especially when they can raise awareness and make a difference. However, most of the time the majority of their assignments are death and destruction. If it bleeds, does it really lead? According to Best (2021),

The issues of this phrase imply that the most shocking and horrendous events get the most attention in the scope of news. “If it bleeds, it leads” must be left out of newsrooms and replaced with a greater emphasis on exercising more compassion and empathy.

A lot has changed in journalism. Photojournalist Brian Wiedeke compared his coverage of Columbine to what he is doing now. Wiedeke said, “I think of that time where a lot of it was all on taped packages, fronting a live shot in this weird satellite city that popped up on the north side of the campus... to George Floyd where so much of the stuff was just, there was no editing because we were live wall to wall and you know, a lot of that is the technology changes, you know. I mean, we've gone from meeting a million dollar satellite rockin' two inch thick cable between your camera in it... to this backpack that plugs into your camera and you can go for hours and hours with a live stream.”

Many journalists feel overworked and exhausted. According to Fred Shropshire, it's hard to tell though when a journalist needs help. "Your success level is based on how well you present, right? So you're always going to present well, regardless of how you feel, regardless of what's on your mind, your heart, whatever, you're always going to," Shropshire said. "You're good at putting on an appearance. So we are very susceptible to struggling and very susceptible to people thinking that everything is okay."

Journalists have been working in unprecedented times. Poynter's Al Tompkins said, "I believe that a decade from now, when we're running the history of 2020-2021 and journalism, I think that we will compare quite favorably to the worst days of the civil rights movement coverage of the early 60's when real heroes of journalism emerged. I think that the work that journalists have done by and large through the pandemic has been heroic." Journalists should not immediately move on to the next story. They should know their work matters. "If I had told you a year and a half ago that you would be producing and anchoring and reporting from home via zoom, you'd say you're nuts. You can't mean that. You can't run a TV station from your living room. And yet you did. And yet you did," he said. "And by the way, you did unbelievably well, so well that people hardly even noticed that you weren't in the studio, and you're going like, oh my God, we pulled this off. We actually still told stories that changed lives, saved lives. It's unbelievable what you've been able to do."

Mike Walter said mental health for journalists can't be talked about once and then forgotten. "When you look at these conferences, it's not an issue that's brought up; instead, it's how do you like, connect with more people online? How do you build your brand, all that sort of thing? This is still an issue, but I feel like they thought, well, we did

this one year, and that's enough. But you know, 10 years later, you've got a whole new crew of people entering the industry.”

Jeremy Young added, “I feel like our industry has a real inability to look inward and to acknowledge vulnerabilities that we have as a result of the nature of our work.” He said, “As a result, it ends up being a lot of closed off spaces, as opposed to having, you know, much more open and honest conversations.”

Conversations and just talking with one another are key to ending the stigma of mental health. Many of the journalists surveyed felt alone or like they were the only ones going through this. If we all shared our experiences and had a more open and honest conversation, journalists would know they are not alone. We are all in this together and can help one another more than we know.

In conclusion, more is being done to help with journalists’ mental health since the COVID-19 pandemic. This research focused on journalists that have been in the business from two years to 44 years. The goal was to see what training journalists have received and what their stations have done to help with their mental health since journalists are sent to traumatic scenarios daily. Further research can be done on what universities are teaching the next generation of journalists.

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APPENDIX:

Interview Transcripts

Brad Borders - REBOOT Recovery

Sarah French Carpenter:

Hi, good morning ... I appreciate you just jumping on.

Brad Borders:

So I got an email that you were doing some research.

Carpenter:

Yep, so I work at the NBC station here in Charlotte. But I'm doing online grad school, and I'm studying journalists that cover traumatic events after I've covered the Boston Marathon bombing. Then my photographer ended up killing himself. So I started this research because there's like, not a lot of resources for journalists who see bad things happen day in and day out. And so I reached out to one of my friends who's a firefighter, and I was like, what training do you get? And he mentioned REBOOT. And so he went through it. And so I just wanted to talk to you guys about, like, what training you offer, what you focus on, how you prepare people, people that are first responders. But first, give me your name and your official title.

Brad Borders:

I have a couple of official titles. My name is Brad Borders. And I'm the Vice President of outreach for a nonprofit here in Statesville, called Purple Heart Homes. And we do critical home repairs for disabled veterans. But on the sideline, I'm also the regional rep for REBOOT Recovery, just as a volunteer gig. But I've been involved with them for the

last, really the last seven years, even since I was on active duty in the army. And so I found REBOOT through a friend of mine that I deployed to Iraq with. I was searching for some answers for my soldiers who were dealing with self destructive behaviors. And I served as a chaplain in the army. And so I was trying to find an approach that would, that would work. And lo and behold, we found REBOOT, and it works.

Carpenter:

So for people who haven't heard about it, what is REBOOT?

Brad Borders:

So REBOOT is a faith-based approach to trauma recovery. And it is a course. It is not a support group. There are, each week there are tools each week, and it's designed around getting people together in community over a meal, and then having a discussion about trauma, its effects, its origins. Then now where do we go from here and kind of treating trauma, talking about the issue of can your soul be wounded, like your leg can be wounded? And if it can, if it can be wounded, if it's an injury, then we know that if you apply proper techniques, injuries heal, they may leave a scar, but they'll heal. And so the course started out as a response to Evan and Jenny Owens are the founders of REBOOT, and Jenny was a occupational therapist at a hospital outside of Fort Campbell, Kentucky. On Fort Campbell treating patients that had traumatic brain injury clinic, they're veterans, right, who were coming back getting blown up and whatever. And she noticed that, that they were having more than just the physical, you know, aspects of their injuries, that there was an internal thing going on. And anyhow, long story short, they started getting some of these veterans and their families together and started having not only discussions about their trauma, but where does faith fit into that picture? And, and lo and behold,

people stopped wanting to kill themselves and their marriages started being cobbled back together. And they decided at that point, it was a good time to codify what they had stumbled upon. And they got together with some really smart folks who had written on our trauma recovery. Chris and Rinella Adsit out of Portland, Oregon, written they've, Chris Adsit wrote the book on trauma recovery for veterans and it's literally the book that the VA gives out. And he helped them compile REBOOT, and I'll just kind of show you. I've got the manual here. I'm preparing for my class for the night that I need for veterans. So this is kind of what, this is the combat version. It started with combat veterans, wildly successful. Groups started popping up all over the country on an off military basis in small communities like Statesville, where I live. And then they decided they were like, hey, this would be really good for first responders. So they created a first responder curriculum, that we held one of the pilot courses here. We've had about 100 first responders go through it in our county. And then just this last year, they've written, they've come out with this new curriculum called Trauma REBOOT. And that's just like for anybody, right?

Carpenter:

How do I get a copy of that?

Brad Borders:

So yeah, you can just go to RebootRecovery.com, actually, probably what we can do, I can reach out to Evan and Jenny and see if they'll send you one. But you can go to RebootRecovery.com. And you can order it right there. The manual, I would just get the instead of the leaders manual, you might want to just get the participant manual. It's, it's all-encompassing. So they have some PDFs and stuff that you can download. But it's a

really, it's a really neat course. And I'm actually teaching this now, I'm teaching this to my employees here at Purple Heart Homes. We do that at lunch on Fridays, because everybody's got something going on right. Everybody's got something.

Carpenter:

Isn't that the truth. And you see that in news too, just by the people we interview on a daily basis. Talk to me about some of the tools that you are implementing in this course that you think are like the key takeaways that are helping?

Brad Borders:

Yeah, yeah. So I think tool number one is this from a veteran standpoint, but this is true for everyone. Right? When people, when trauma, we have the sort of reaction to trauma, one of the things that we talked about in the total REBOOT course was the reactions, when we deny it happened, then we cry that it did happen. And then we get numb, and then we run, right. And we run away or, or we run to, you know the painkiller of choice, whether it's alcohol, or, or maybe it's even a self help thing, right. But there's no meat there. And it just doesn't work. And so the biggest threat to anybody's well being, in my opinion, and what I've seen over the last 20 years of doing stuff like this, folks in isolation. Right? And, and so when people get numb, they stop wanting to communicate with others, and they go into the hole. And then and then this begins to manifest itself. I'm the only one going through this. And so one of the, I think the sharpest, the most effective tool that REBOOT does, is it brings people back together in community to let them realize they're not alone and they're not the only ones going through it. And, and then so, kind of tools branch out from there. It's all about relationships. And so we connect each other you know, this is about where we are week four right now out of our

12 week class. And so this week, we start passing out phone numbers, right, and they start connecting with each other, and they start meeting outside of class and then we have leaders that come along and start grabbing people and going to have coffee with them and just slowly but surely. And then here's the proof is in the pudding like first week. It's all weird. People are like I don't know anybody in here and I don't know why I showed up for this. And, and then we finish up, we start at six, we eat about eight o'clock. And then everybody bolts to their cars, and they just boom, they're gone. They get out of there as quick as they can. But then about week four, and it really started last week. I can't get them to leave, right? I'm like, hey, you don't have to go home. But you got to get up out of here. Right? You've been here for you know, like an hour and 15 minutes after class is over. You're still chatting. And but that's what we want, right? We want that kind of atmosphere created because it's only it's only in relationships and community that healing really happens. And one of the things that we want the taglines for REBOOT is is overcoming trauma together. And so, but there's all kinds of, we have lists of resources that people can go to suicide hotlines, those kinds of thing. We've got a ton of partners that have come alongside us at REBOOT; we have vast and vast resources. There's a whole website that our participants can go through to plug in to, other things, other instructional videos, websites and things that they can plug into if they need something specific.

Carpenter:

So I was going to ask you and you basically just answered it, but do they go through the program and then okay, you're good? Or is this a thing where really it's community, it's a continual work in progress when you're going through trauma?

Brad Borders:

Great, great question. Yes, there is an endpoint. We do have a graduation and the class does end right. But what we typically find out is that anywhere from 50 to 60% of our course participants, take part in some way, shape or form because we're trying to build a legacy of community discipleship, mentoring. They will take part in the next class, right? They'll either go, hey, I'll help with the food right? Or, or I'll help be a mentor, or I'll just I will be, I'll be someone who prays and prays for the participants, that kind of thing. And so what ends up happening is, is now this, this community ends up growing. I've got I've got folks that my lead, I've got leaders that came through the first course in 2017. I can't, I can't get rid of them. Right. I don't want to get rid of them. Right, you know, but, but yeah, they just won't go away. They just keep coming back. And why is that? Because the isolation is caused by lack of mission and purpose. And, and so REBOOT helps establish that, that brings them out of isolation, gives them a new team to be a part of re-establishes mission and purpose in that mission and purpose begins to help be a part of the rescue team for someone else.

Carpenter:

Do you think there's any training you can do, whether it's for first responders or you know, someone in the military that can prepare you to see and cover trauma? Traumatic events?

Brad Borders:

Yeah. Well, that's, that's a really good question. I think that there is I would, I would say, there's nothing that prepares us for the things that we might see. I wasn't prepared for Iraq. I don't think anybody could have prepared me for that. And our army does realistic

training with medical training and things like that. But it's, there's nothing to prepare you for what it is that you see. But I think, I think awareness that this, these kinds of things do happen, and awareness of what the effects of that on the front side of it, so we're not being reactive, and we're being proactive, like so understanding and we talked about that. In our class, especially for the first responder class, I use a vignette, where a first responder responds to a car wreck. And in the car, the cars on fire. And in the backseat of the car, there's a little boy in a car seat. He's holding a blue teddy bear on the floor. There's Kentucky Fried Chicken all over the place and on the radio. Creedence Clearwater Revival is playing on the radio, but he doesn't have time to think about all that, he just goes in and gets the kid out, cuts him out, brings him out. But he finds out later on that night after the ambulance takes him away that the boy didn't survive, right. But then two, three months later, when he smells Kentucky Fried Chicken, he gets sick and anxious. He sees a child with a teddy bear and doesn't know why all of a sudden he becomes angry, or hear's credence on the, on the radio. And, and it brings up a lot of memories, right and, and so letting people know that when we go through a traumatic event, that that can come back later on down the road through triggers, right understanding our triggers, that can help us prepare for the effects of what trauma does to us. Because it's just like anything like if I work with a chainsaw, you can tell me all day long that the chainsaw is dangerous. And if you get cut, you got to do some thing when you get cut with a chainsaw. But it's not preparing you for actually what happened. You just know what to do when you do get injured. And so focusing in keeping that focus on that trauma is an injury that is done to us. Right. And then we can come back from it. We can be healed from it.

Carpenter:

So what do you tell like a first responder who is triggered by something like that, but they know there's going to be another event? They've got to pull a kid with a teddy bear out or something like, how do you help prepare them for when they know the trigger will happen? But they still have to do their job?

Brad Borders:

Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, I think then we bring them back to that we live in a broken world, right, where bad things are gonna happen. We also recognize too, that there's, because it's faith based and we bring God into the discussion is that we have to understand that there's purpose in the pain that we go through. Is that in that purpose that God is not standing up there with a stick waiting to beat us, but that He enters into that pain with us. That He's with us when we're experiencing that right. And understanding that we have this co-suffering God that serves alongside with us. And while our courses are faith based, and we don't make any bones about it, it's not a bait and switch thing, we talk about it up front. This is what we believe. I believe in the three legged stool of health which is physical, mental and spiritual, it doesn't work well, if you don't have all three of those legs in balance, or if you're even missing one, right? And, and so we don't make any bones about it, but just understanding that landscape and that economy that, that there's purpose in the pain that we go through and that God is with us when we go through it, that he's not separate from that understanding that we live in a broken world, and that ultimately there will be restoration completely. We won't experience that in here and now, but that restoration is coming and that gives folks a glimmer of hope for what can be, and then and then they can focus in on doing their job to try to bring some of that

goodness in that healing into the world. Because first responders are born rescuers, that's what they do, they charge in when everybody else is running out, you know, they go towards the flames not away from them you know, and that attitude and that, that personality is needed in this world, you know, so we've got to take care of those folks.

Carpenter:

And finally, just talk to me about this. My last question, the community aspect of it, how we can learn from each other and other people's similar experiences?

Brad Borders:

Yeah, I think everybody is so everybody's trauma is as valid as anybody else's right. Yours was a national trauma. Right. And while yours was national, mine happened on a little fort operating base in Iraq and you didn't hear about it, right. But both stories are valid and equal in what they and how they've impacted us. Right. And so when we have that discussion, we set that as the baseline where no one's trauma is any worse than anyone else's right. It's how it affected us. Right. What's traumatic for you may not be traumatic for me, right? I might just be able to go on, it's not that big a deal. But it might be horrible for you. And, and bringing that level of respect to everybody's story is critical.

Carpenter:

So good, Brad, thank you so much for jumping on and doing this. And I have your contact now. So if I have anything else, I may reach out to you. I'm attempting to graduate in December.

Brad Borders:

That's fantastic. And I would make sure you send a copy of that to our folks or friends up in Nashville REBOOT.

Carpenter:

Okay. Thanks so much. I appreciate it. Have a great day.

Daniel Brown - 12NewsNow Former News Director - Beaumont, TX

Sarah French Carpenter:

Daniel, can you hear me? I'm turning you down it's too loud. Wait, there we go. Oh, I miss you.

Daniel Brown:

How are you enjoying mornings?

Carpenter:

Oh, I really like mornings.

Daniel Brown:

Yeah, I figured so.

Carpenter:

Thanks for doing this. How's your house and your family and everything?

Daniel Brown:

We just got power back yesterday. So today, I've been running around just cleaning things up. Because when a house has no AC for over a week, it does not smell very good. So we've been just cleaning out everything. And we already got the yard 90% there. We've cut some trees in the back that we got to take care of. But the house is all good.

Carpenter:

Tell me what you're doing now.

Daniel Brown:

Right now I am teaching. My high school that I graduated from had an opening for a media teacher. So I'm doing that. And I also just started doing some consulting and talent coaching on the side.

Carpenter:

Do you like it?

Daniel Brown:

Yeah.

Carpenter:

How weird was it with the hurricane and like, not covering it on the news?

Daniel Brown:

It was very weird and in different ways than I expected. So like, leading up to the hurricane was where I was like, oh, I'm so glad I'm not doing that. I get to like, be with my family. And you know, prep the house and all that stuff. I was telling my sister I forgot what it's like getting ready for a hurricane. I haven't done this in like, over 16 years, you know, like, I've always had a place to go and always had electricity and all that stuff. So that was weird. It was after the storm I was like man I really want to be in the newsroom. You know, I feel like that's where people really see the impact that newsrooms can have, you know, getting vital information out and stuff like that. So that was the part I missed the most.

Carpenter:

Yeah. Okay, so talk to me about, like, you sent me like a list of some of the big events you've covered, but what would you say are the ones that like affected you the most?

Daniel Brown:

A lot of them were the smaller events more than anything. Obviously, Katrina was my first big event. Um, you know, I was still part time at the station, but I was still in school, just working part time when it happened. And it was one of those things where you really started learning to process things a little differently, you know, you kind of, I call it put the shutters up, you know, and you kind of do that news where you kind of have to take your emotion out of what's happening. Because if you don't, then you just become overwhelmed. So it's almost like what you're covering is not really impacting you, even though it really is kind of impacting you. So you put those shutters and those blinders on, for those big ones. But I think over the years, you know, and I'm sure you can relate to this, it's a lot of the smaller things, the stories that get you that you go home and just have like this emotional breakdown. And I remember the first one that for me that it was was in Ohio, and we were covering a story and it was this family who... mom, dad, and I think it was either two or three siblings... and they were just killed in this, like tragic accident. And I just remember that just like impacted me almost more than school shootings and all those kinds of things before. And over the years, it's been those types of stories that just like, I don't know, I feel like because they feel like they could happen to you. Because some of these bigger events, even when they are happening to you like natural disasters and stuff that you kind of saw removed. Because, you know, like, I was saying, you have power in the newsroom. You know, like you have food? Yeah, you know, they do all those things. So you're just, you're kind of oblivious, especially when you're producing because you don't really leave the building, you're kind of oblivious to what's going on around you a little bit.

Carpenter:

So do you think some of the ones that affected you the most, as you covered like, more bad events after that, it became harder? It wasn't like one event? And then you were done? It was like adding onto it?

Daniel Brown:

Yeah, that's a good question. I think this is one of the reasons why once you get out of the industry, because I was finding myself becoming numb to everything, you know, like, there would be, you know, school shootings, or, you know, the natural disasters, and it was just kind of like, just another one, you know, it was just, it was becoming kind of mundane, and I was just like, that's not who I am as a person. Like, I don't know why I feel that way. But I think it's because you have to train yourself to like, shut it out that you forget, in, even in your real life on things that, you know, aren't newsworthy that you got to take those shutters and blinders down, you know, and that becomes harder, because you put them up for so many things. And you know, and I don't know if it's because of how the news is covering things, or it's just the way the world is going. But it feels like there's more and more of these events where you have to remove yourself in the situation. And I didn't like who I was becoming as a person, you know, I thought I was becoming like, hard, you know, and I was just like, that's not who I am. And it's a long answer to your question, but I feel like it's that I feel like every time you cover one of these big events, or these emotional traumas, and you just put these blinders on the shutter zone. And it's just like, it's hard to take them down after a while.

Carpenter:

You've been in a bunch of different roles, like all the way to managerial roles. So talk to me about like, did you get any training? Or did anything help you to prepare to deal with such emotional stories all the time? And then once you answer that, like, what should we be doing after the fact? What would help you? As a manager, what do you think managers could do to help their staff?

Daniel Brown:

Yeah, you know, I really haven't had any training. And it's not something I thought about until you were posing that question, you know, it was just kind of like, wow, you know, I've never had that training. You know, I took some things that I did on my own, like, personal, you know, going to, you know, psychologists and stuff like that. So I took some of what I learned from that into what I was doing professionally, but overall, no, there was no training. And I even went back and was looking through some of my, some of my little folders and binders that I got at conferences and stuff I went to just to like, make sure that I didn't forget. And now they tell you like you know, how to be a better leader and all those things, but never about, you know, the psychological effects of those things. And it wasn't really until when I was News Director in Beaumont, and our station flooded that they brought in a counselor to talk to us about that. That was the first time that's ever happened in my career where someone from the outside was brought in. And I remember I went to talk to them. And I was like the only one that went, but I was just like, you know, that was a traumatic event. Probably the most traumatic event as a manager just because I felt like I had people's lives in my hands. And that just took a whole other toll. But yeah, there was no, no official training, even some of the leadership conferences I

went to it was never discussed. You know, the only thing close to that was discussed was, you know, lead with your emotions and stuff like that, but it was never like, how do you deal with those emotions? And how do you deal with those kinds of things? I think, you know, to answer the second part of your question, I almost think it's something that needs to start in the university level for journalists to get into, you know, how to handle that. And, you know, I do feel like we're trained or taught to, you know, I keep going back to putting those blinders on, I feel like we are trained to do that. But it's never about how to then emotionally, you know, deal with what you saw, or what you did, and all those kind of things. And I think it's even more traumatic for people that are in the field. You know, in my first station, I did a little bit of everything, you know, I produced, I worked the assignment desk, I would even go out and shoot, you know, whenever there was something new, I didn't have anyone else to go for. And, you know, I'll never forget going to my first, you know, fatal car scene and you see a dead body for the first time. And it's just one of those things where in the news, you're like, oh, yeah, that's just what happens ... I hate using this comparison, because we're in no way like police and firefighters and all but we get exposed to the same things that they do a lot of the time, especially our field crews, you know, and like, I feel like we're always scared to make that comparison. Because, you know, we're not doing heroic work, right. I mean, I think we are in different ways. But, you know, we're exposed to a lot of the same things they are, you know, and there was a situation in Atlanta, and this was probably the first time as a manager, I was like, really kind of exposed to it, they had a plane crash on the interstate there. And I remember having to look through the chopper footage frame by frame to make sure there was no bodies in that frame. It was just like, wow.

Carpenter:

Some of the experts I interviewed too, they said, you know, people don't think about editors, but editors are the ones who are trying to filter out what can go on the air? You know, and, and what can't. When they brought in the counselor, was that through like TEGNA or your GM?

Daniel Brown:

I guess it was through TEGNA, but our GM brought him in. You know, it was something that I had brought up to him I was like, look, I was like, you know, for a lot of people in the newsroom. This is the second time the station has been through something like this, you know, and for a lot of them they were stuck in flood waters. I was like, I think it's a good idea to you know, bring someone in so we did, and it was someone who specialized in traumatic events and stuff and she was great. But um, but yeah, it was because that you know, that flood was part of a tropical storm, but like no one forecasted anywhere near the flooding we got you know, and I, I was gonna go back and work like the morning show and work throughout the day. So I went home about four or five o'clock and I remember getting a call about 8:30 that night. And you know, there were reporters stuck and couldn't get back to the station. And so I go, I just run up to the station and then it was a few hours later where we're starting to take on water and I still got crews that are out and like all those kinds of things. So it was just like, you know, I remember dealing with phone calls with corporate and also trying to manage like, where my crews are at and, and all that kind of stuff.

Carpenter:

But you said nobody utilized the counselor?

Daniel Brown:

There were like just a handful of us. I think there was like maybe three total that utilized that. Yeah, it was just something I think there's a shame that goes along with mental health and I think there's a shame that goes along with you know, talking to someone about problems is something that I felt both inside and outside the industry, you know, throughout my life, it's just this stigma about, you know, not wanting to talk about it and stuff like that. And you know, I've been guilty of that myself, you know, I keep everything in, even before I got in news, I was someone who just kind of bottled everything up, kept everything in. And I think you got to the point where working and just like, this is not healthy. You know? Like, that's when I started talking to, you know, someone and, you know, not something that was like, necessarily long term, but I would just go for like, check-ins, if that makes sense. Something I still do.

Carpenter:

So talk to me about your decision to leave, because in your social media posts you posted about, like you said, mental health is important. So just take me through, like, I know, you had like some family stuff, too.

Daniel Brown:

Yeah, so the main thing, the main reason I left was, you know, my mom passed away in January. And it was just, that was just an emotional toll. You know, I mean, everyone's parents are gonna die, you know, and this one was just caring for my mom for, you know, extended time, and then to lose her and then to be away from home, and my job and company, they were great. And, you know, anything I needed, I could leave and be there and stuff like that. It wasn't that, but it was still that guilt, you know, like, you feel guilty

of being away from your mom, but you feel guilty about being away from your responsibilities to your job. And so that was one part of it. But it was also, you know, like I mentioned earlier, like, it gets to this point where you find yourself becoming a different person, and I didn't like who I was becoming, and I just needed that break, you know, and I feel like, you know, you keep shoving everything in and, you know, you become like, kind of like, oh, another school shooting, and like, when you find yourself doing that, it's like, alright, you gotta check what's going on here. Like, something's not right, especially when, you know, it's not who you are as a person, you know, if you find yourself becoming someone different, and I just wanted to kind of reground myself, if you will, and kind of, you know, you get older and, you know, family becomes a lot more important than it used to when you were in your 20s. And you move away from home and, you know, things that used to not be as important were becoming important. And, you know, the same is true, your job is not gonna love you back, you know, so you got to make those decisions.

Carpenter:

Yeah, isn't that the truth. Do you think you'll ever get back in the business?

Daniel Brown:

I hope so. Growing up, I never wanted to do anything else. Besides being a journalist. I didn't know what it was called, at the time. They call it a reporter and in different things, but, you know, I grew up with my mom watching Mary Tyler Moore, like reruns on Nick at Nite, you know, I mean, and I just, I wanted to be Murray. I thought he had the coolest job. He wrote the news and Ted Baxter screwed it up. You know, I just love that. And I love that memory. And my grandmother was someone who, like a lot of grandmothers

got the newspaper every single day. So I remember sitting on her armchair, when she read the paper, I was reading the paper, and, you know. They watched Dan Rather every evening at 5:30, you know, and it was these habits that I just picked up. And I was probably the only fourth grader watching the news every night, but I just enjoyed it. You know, I loved it. I still remember specific investigations, from our local news, you know, and I remember laws, they got changed because of investigations. They just stuck with me and so I love that aspect of journalism. And I do think that what I miss most about is the change and the things that we can actually do to bring light on things. But right now and the state of journalism, it's on top of, you know, the mental health thing. there's just like, I felt like it was a good time just to kind of step away. It's, you know, journalists are becoming like enemy of the state almost, I was just like, that's not, it's not how this was founded, it's not how this was meant to be. And I feel like the talking heads in primetime cable news overshadow even, like what local reporters or journalists are doing. Um, and we get lumped into that, and it's not even remotely the same, you know.

Carpenter:

When I put out that survey, I got like, an overwhelming amount of responses. I haven't even finished going through them all. There's so many. Some people were anonymous, some people weren't, but in reading the responses, so many people said similar things. I just thought, oh my gosh, if all these people could just talk, they would realize that, you know, everybody is feeling the same thing.

Daniel Brown:

Well, I think you're seeing it. I think you're seeing it right now, Sarah, you know, I mean, every time I turn around, I'm seeing you know, people that have been in the business, you

know, 15 plus years like myself get out and it's just like, I think the industry has to take a stronger look at, like, what's causing that? And what can we do to prevent that, because you're losing a lot of dedicated veteran journalists, you know, and when they're gone, who's gonna be there to like, to pick up the torch because we don't train journalists, like we used to, in my opinion, you know, you kind of get, you know, thrown in and in not properly trained. And I think that kind of goes back to some of the mental health training too. It worries me a little bit. So that's one of the reasons I don't want to leave totally. But, you know, it's, I'm still finding ways to dip my toes into it, you know, the coaching and stuff like now it's like, parts that I enjoyed about my job anyway. So I was like, why not do it on the side and make a little money doing it? You know?

Carpenter:

So talk to me about like the future of journalism. What do you think needs to change? I know you've touched on it some, but what should happen going forward?

Daniel Brown:

There's a lot of pressure on specifically local newsrooms, I think more local newsrooms, and even the network news, but ratings are just such a pressure cooker, you know, and I think you know, as well, that ratings don't indicate everything, because there's so many other things that go into it, people aren't consuming news, like they were 10,15, 20 years ago. They're just not. Even five years ago, they're consuming it differently. But I feel like the way we're judged and based, especially on a management level, has not changed, you know, and, and yeah, we're paying a little more attention to digital analytics and stuff like that. But at the end of the day, they're still like, what your ratings or this or your shares or this. Like I get that, but like, you know, look at this, like, big story we did and

look at the digital analytics, or look at our YouTube numbers for that. And, and that's not part of the equation, or is not strong enough part of the equation I should say. So I believe we got to take a look at how we're judging ourselves. Because I do think there has to be some accountability for newsrooms and stuff like that. But I think you know, that you feel like there's more people watching you than the ratings indicate sometimes. You know it's just so frustrating to see those numbers, it's just you know, your hard work is based on you know, just a few TV sets, a small fraction of your DMA. And I just, I hate that. I'd love to see some of the like, I think it's the FOX O&O's, they got rid of Nielsen and stuff like that, and they're not using them. And they're using different metrics. And I felt like the industry as a whole needs to do that. You know, I don't think ratings are everything. You know, so I think that's a big part of it is how we evaluate and judge ourselves and all those kinds of things. I think that has to change. I think that we as an industry need to take a stronger look at why all these people are leaving, you know, and, and like you said, it's a common consensus across the board. It's not just like one or two people saying it. So I think we have a problem and we're ignoring the problem very much.

Carpenter:

Daniel, if you go back, I know you said you were interested, maybe during that one year Mizzou program, I think you found your thesis right there on Nielsen and ratings. That's what you should do. That's what you should focus on. It's so true, though. Especially when we're like number one on the web most days.

Daniel Brown:

I know. It makes zero sense. Like how is that equating to you being last place in ratings like there's, it's just your audience is consuming something different, you know, you're there for your audience in a different way, in a better way, you know, and, you know, I look at my nieces even now, I mean, they're just in, you know, middle school, my oldest niece is in middle school, but the way she consumes media is completely different, you know, and it's just like, she doesn't even really turn her TV on anymore, you know, and it's just like, I love that TEGNA values digital so much, but it's still just still a small equation of how you're judged and all that kind of stuff. It's just I don't know, something that just isn't there. I never understood it, you know?

Carpenter:

Yeah. Well, is there anything else you want to add? Thank you for chatting with me.

Daniel Brown:

Anytime. I'm excited to see your findings. I think this is an interesting topic. And I hope you've gotten to talk to some different people about this. I'm gonna try to find this link and send it to you. It was a sweet story. I want to say a station in Chicago did it but for a whole year on crime scenes, they filmed the children watching crime scenes, and it was like, it was a certain Chicago neighborhood and they ended up talking to a psychologist. It was a fascinating story. I'm gonna try to find it for you.

Carpenter:

Yeah, like the secondary trauma you get from just witnessing it.

Daniel Brown:

Yea, and how it can lead the kids down the path and all that kind of stuff. So it was a very interesting story.

Carpenter:

Daniel, thank you. So good to see you.

Daniel Brown:

I know you too.

Carpenter:

I'm so glad that you're doing well. And you're teaching our future generations.

Daniel Brown:

Yeah, teaching high school, not something I ever thought I would do.

Carpenter:

Well keep me posted on what you're doing. And I'm glad to see your face and that you're doing well. And I appreciate you taking the time to chat with me.

Daniel Brown:

Absolutely. So good to see you. Tell the family I said hello.

Carpenter:

I will.

Erin Daley - Married to Photographer Neal Ernstrom

Sarah French Carpenter:

I am so thankful to you for doing this. I really appreciate it. I feel like Neal was kind of my inspiration for all of this. And obviously, like I had my own issues with anxiety and

the stories that we covered and everything. But I feel like when that happened, it just became apparent to me like, after the bombing, after Neal's death ... Nobody was saying like, if you're struggling, like we want to help, and then nobody wanted to talk about it. Like everybody was on this island alone. So, I put out this survey, and I got an overwhelming response. Some journalists stayed anonymous, some didn't. But it's just amazing. Everyone's feeling the same thing. Everyone's struggling. And I just feel like if everyone could see what everyone else is saying, they would know that they're not alone, you know. But I just thought it was important for me to talk to you because I wrote my admissions essay about my struggles, and then about what happened to Neal. And that's in this paper. And so I just thought it was important that I talk to you and kind of get your perspective on things too. So anyway, thank you for being so willing to be open, you know about everything.

Erin Daley:

Absolutely, I'm happy to do it.

Carpenter:

So first, just talk to me about Neal. How you guys met ... I don't remember, did you meet before he was in news or when he was in news?

Erin Daley:

We actually met through my best friend, who she worked at WMUR up in New Hampshire. And so she was a writer. And so Neal was working there as a reporter, so she had a crush on him. And so she would always talk about like, this funny guy, Neal. And so one time I went up there and she was like, oh, we're gonna hang out with a bunch of friends and she had to go to work. And so I ended up like staying with a bunch of the

people that she worked with at this bar and had the Patriots game was on, so of course Neal was like front and center. And so that's how we met. And then afterwards after that meeting, he was like, hey, Jenny, you know, your friend Erin was pretty cute. So I was like, awh. And I was living in Massachusetts at the time. And he was living in New Hampshire. So we started dating and would like, meet halfway. And then, over the course of years, it was years. It was like, we were together, then we weren't together. And then finally, he had broken up with me for a good reason. And he was like, Okay, that's it. We're over. And so I was like, okay, like, I'll go on with my life. And then two months later, he called me. He was like, yeah, I made a mistake. I just, I think that I've been thinking about you. And I want to get back together. And I'm like, well, you hurt me. And you need to prove to me that you're in this for the long haul, and not just like, oh, somebody better comes along. And so that's when we really like moved in together. And, and he was like, no, I don't want to be pressured into getting married. No, no pressure, it'll happen when it happens. So eventually, it happened. And we got engaged, and married, and then bought a house. And checked everything off the list. And then we went through fertility treatments to get pregnant and had two beautiful baby girls.

Carpenter:

So now, if there's anything I ask that you don't feel comfortable talking about, just let me know. But, um, so I put on this survey, I wanted to see, you know, journalists that had sought counseling before they got into the field, were those some of the journalists that maybe the counseling helped them? Or maybe those are the ones that, you know, their anxiety or whatever, depression was amplified once they got into the field? So do you know, did Neal have counseling or any of that before he got into the field of journalism?

Erin Daley:

I know, he, when we first met, he was on antidepressants for social anxiety, which, to me meeting him, like, I got the impression I was like, I don't understand that, you know, how can you be on something when you seem so outgoing, and then obviously, I also was on medication. My mother had passed away a few years earlier. So I was dealing with that. But then, like, from the social anxiety aspect of it, like, that was new to me. So I knew early on that he was on medication, whether he was actually seeking treatment, I don't believe he was. I think he was just getting it from his doctor who would prescribe it and there wasn't any sort of you know therapist involved. So when I look back I think that maybe if he had done the therapy as well, that maybe would have changed things a little. But I don't, I don't know.

Carpenter:

What were some of the most traumatic stories that he covered that he talked about with you? Or did he?

Erin Daley:

Um, he never really talked about them as much so as like, oh, I'm going here. Like, I'll never forget the day that he had the day off, and we were going to go to lunch. And then he got the call saying that he had to go to Newtown because there was a school shooting. And he didn't know how long he was going to be away. It was before Christmas. So he didn't know if he was going to be there through Christmas. He was there for over a week. And it was our first Christmas as a family with two eight-month-old babies at home. So it was hard for me to have to know what he was going through. And I was obviously watching the news because then I would feel like I was connecting to him. And so like

when he returned, it was like it was a switch that he just would, would turn it off and even with the Boston bombings after being up for so long. In that quarantined area, hearing and seeing everything that was going on, he was tired. He wanted to sleep. And it's almost like he just kind of just shoved it under the rug. And again, like that light switch, which, in a field like that, I imagine it's pretty hard to just be able to turn off those feelings. And I'm sure what was going on in his mind was a lot different than how he was displaying that to everybody else.

Carpenter:

I remember because he was the photographer that got all the footage in the shootout. I mean, he was like, trapped between police tape.

Erin Daley:

The Emmy Award winning.

Carpenter:

Yep, yes, yes. But I remember after that was over with, because I worked with him the day of the bombing, not the day of the shootout, but I remember getting in the car with him afterward. And he was like, you know, nobody said, like, good job, or thanks for putting your life on the line for being out there. So I just, you know, wonder, did he ever say anything about that?

Erin Daley:

No, he didn't. And I, I had said like, I wonder why, like, you know, when there is a school shooting, or even just a death in the school, like they have social workers there to, to help those around, deal with this issue. And I know, there's the whole insurance thing and everything else that comes into play with that. But, you know, reporters,

photographers, truck operators, you are sometimes the first responders as is the case with the Boston bombings when he and Adam were together. Like you're seeing things, you're hearing things, you're smelling things like, to me, that seems like something that you would want to have available to all those people, whether or not they take advantage of it is a whole other story. But he, I know he said that Adam had given him like, a gift.

Carpenter:

It was like a GPS thing or something? No, it was a radio.

Erin Daley:

It was Sonos.

Carpenter

I knew it was something because it was like in his car cause that's when he said, you know, Adam got me this gifted. And no, no managers, nobody said anything else to me.

Erin Daley:

So we still have that. Play it in our house. So, um, but yeah, it was a thankless job for whatever story was being covered. Because then the next story was the next story to move on to and, you know, that was what needed to be covered and worked on. So it was like, just forgotten about, door closed.

Carpenter:

Yeah. So when did you... Neal, I remember, before he died, he was gone for like a month, right?

Erin Daley:

Yeah, he passed away in March of 2014. And in November of 13. He decided it was going to be time to go off his medication. And so he did it on his own. Again, I think at

the time he was seeing a therapist, but it was on and off again, it wasn't consistent. And so I quit my job because the commute for both of us was wearing on us, it didn't make sense to pay for childcare when my salary was paying for childcare. So we made the decision that I would stay home with the girls and take care of them. And so at the same time, he also thought it would be better for him to go off his medication. And so, you know, it was a trying time for all of us. We had good times, and then we had some struggles. And so it was, we got through Christmas, and then I think it was in January. My birthday is at the end of January. So I think it was around that time where he didn't know what he wanted to do. And so he took some time off, and he went into a day treatment program. And the thing with Neal is that he always knew the right things to say to anybody, whether it's a person walking down the street, he always was quick with those one liners to make people laugh, but then any sort of authority figure he knew how to kind of get what he wanted, or to say the things that they knew, to say like what would make him like access to someplace or so he knew what to say. And I think that that played a big part in all of his treatment and whether it was an outpatient program. He did do a few days in the psychiatric ward at the local hospital. But again, he was writing down things, and he was telling people exactly what they wanted to hear in order to let him leave.

Carpenter:

Yeah, it's interesting. Another person I talked to, and in one of the surveys was talking about just how performance based journalists are, like, we know how to tell a good story. We know how to perform and be on and do whatever you need us to do. And it's almost like, but that makes people think sometimes well, you're okay. Yeah, no, you're okay.

Erin Daley:

Right. And with Neal, he, you know, from January, January to March, where it was the worst time he, his anxiety grew tremendously. He thought that every reporter and journalist in the city of Boston wanted him out. Like, he was a bad photographer, he was the bad person. He, like, nobody wanted him around. They wanted, they were gonna fire him. And I was like, I don't. I mean, you're good. You're a good photographer, but everybody in the city of Boston? So, um, that was just his mind. And it could have been part of the medication that he was on that just kept, like putting these thoughts into his mind. And I was like, well, why don't you reach out to somebody like you have to have a work friend, somebody that you trust that you're able to talk to about this, because he wasn't talking to me about it. And he wouldn't talk to his close friends that he's known all of his life. Because he was embarrassed by it. And at that time, it wasn't something that was talked about. You were seen as weak and you know it was just you put on a good front, and you move on. So I think he did end up telling a reporter friend of his what he was going through. And I don't know if Neal just kind of like, played it off, like oh, you know, I talked to him about it, it was fine. So I didn't really get the details on that conversation. So...

Carpenter:

So when he came back to work, and leading up to everything, I know, you said his anxiety increased, but did you, did you ever think he could do this?

Erin Daley:

There was a time in February when he was home. And then he was just like, he took off. And I didn't know where he was going or when he was going to be back. And then I got a

phone call from him probably an hour later. And he was on Palm Island beach where he lifeguarded growing up, in a place that he loved to fish. And it was just kind of his place. He called it his church, he would go there for sunrises and just fish and to like, clear his head, go for walks. So he was there. And I was like, oh, what are you doing? I was like, are you fishing? He's like, he was clearly upset. And I was like, what's wrong? And he was like, Erin, I've done bad things. I was like, Neal, what are you talking about? He was like, I can't even begin to tell you all these things that I've done. And I started getting scared. And I was like, oh, no, I'm home with the kids, by myself. Like, I can't go to him to get him. And I was like, Neal, like, please, please, don't do anything to hurt yourself. You know, whatever it is, we can work it out. We can talk it out. We can figure it out. And so his parents, I ended up calling his parents and they drove out and they called an ambulance. And when asked if he wanted to seek medical help, he said yes. And that was when he did the three days in the psychiatric ward and that was hard. And that was when he was like. He said, when I said please don't hurt yourself, he said... He's like, I wouldn't do that I'm too much of a coward. And so that stuck with me. I'm like, okay like, at least I know that whatever this is, it can be worked out, it can be, you know whether he just needs time to figure it out on his own. And obviously that sort of stress, but even more stress on a marriage with young kids, I didn't know how he was going to be if he was going to be upset, if he was going to be in a good mood. And so I said, well, why don't you stay with your parents for some time, just so that you can figure out who you are and what you want? And, and so, so he did. And so then he started getting a bit more treatment and different medication that made him feel differently. So but in the back of my mind, I kept hearing him say, "No, I would never do that. I'm too much of a coward."

And then March 27, 2014 came, and I got a phone call from the state police saying that they were going to be at my house in an hour or 45 minutes. And I said, well, I'm alone with sleeping children. Should I have somebody come to my house? And they said, yes. So then, my worst fear became reality. And I knew, they said, Oh, was this the wife of Neal Ernstrom. They didn't tell me on the phone what it was. And so like, immediately, my mind started racing.

Carpenter:

So did they not tell you anything until they got to your house?

Erin Daley:

Yeah. They said, this is the state police. And we'll be at your address in about 45 minutes. So I immediately got off the phone. I called my stepfather, who was in California at the time. And he was like, oh, it's, you know, maybe he got into an accident. And I was like, okay, but I was just thinking the worst. And then I called another local friend of ours who was a nanny. And she happened to be in town with another nanny, and they were having a playdate. So she was able to leave the child, but she was watching with the other nanny, and then come to me when I told her what was going on. So she was there when the state police who actually went to our neighbor's house first, probably gave them a heart attack.

Carpenter:

Did you see them go to your neighbor's house?

Erin Daley:

I did.

Carpenter:

And you're like, I'm over here.

Erin Daley:

Yeah. So it was all just a very confusing experience for me, because they were like, he jumped off the bridge. So I was thinking, like, there's water underneath the bridge. So maybe like, he was in the water, and he hurt himself that way, not knowing that. The part where he jumped wasn't above water, it was on ground. So, and they were doing construction. Or no, they weren't doing construction yet. But they I think they started construction like three days later on the Tobin bridge. So you know, that that timing of it was you know, and there had been that fire the Boston fire the night before.

Carpenter:

I was gonna ask you about that, because I remember someone saying that he was at that fire all night, or he covered it and these firefighters died. And so I just, I know, sometimes you just never know with these things...

Erin Daley:

Yeah, I don't know. He was at the fire. And then he came back to his parents house that night after probably the 11 o'clock news. So he got back probably around midnight. And his mom was up, and she said that he just looked tired. He smelled like smoke, because when you're across the street from a fire, you're gonna smell like that. So she washed his clothes, and he said that he had already been told that he needed to be in earlier because of this. So he normally, I think would go in for I think it was like three o'clock maybe. So he was told that he needed, he should be in for 11. And so she was gonna make sure like he set his alarm and he went to bed. And then he got up the next day. She had gave him some food for the way, and then I got the call, I think it was a little after 11. So I think it had happened just before then and of course, you're a photog for a news station that has

scanners, so when they hear that there's, you know, somebody on the bridge already there's people who know about it. And so they're like, okay, well, where's Neal, and he's not here. They're calling his cell phone trying to find out, you know, where he was because he was supposed to be there at 11 o'clock.

Carpenter:

How'd you know they were calling his phone?

Erin Daley:

Again, the circuit. Everyone knows everybody. And so I had just heard that. I had told like two people at the time. And then already people from New Hampshire were finding out, so it was just that, you know, social media I don't think at the time... it was relevant, and it was present, but it wasn't nearly as prevalent as it is now. So I don't think like, there was like posts immediately about it. But there were some that I, within time, like, Googled his name to find out, like what was out there. So then I was told by the state police.

Carpenter:

Did you call his mom?

Erin Daley:

His parents weren't home. And I kept trying to call, and they weren't answering their cell phones. They weren't answering the house phone. So my trusty nanny friend ended up going. And she knew his parents, so she wasn't just somebody who was showing up to give them bad news. But you know, his dad had been diagnosed with CLL. prior.

Carpenter:

What is that?

Erin Daley:

It's a blood disease, like chronic lymphoma, something. So, but they hadn't told Neal about it. So he was actually at the doctor being talked to about this disease. So Neal died without knowing that his father had this blood cancer. So that's where they were. And then they went out to lunch afterwards. And then it was probably, I don't even know what time it was that they arrived home to a car in their driveway and the news, and they were, they were mad. They were like, very, they were upset. They were angry. Because there was blame. They were just like, textbook at the time, where I was like in shock, and just couldn't believe what was going on. They were angry and like they didn't, they couldn't do anything to prevent it.

Carpenter:

How do you think his job, and like what he did for a living and the stories he covered contributed to his anxiety and some of these mental health issues?

Erin Daley:

I think it did. I think it was a lot of how he himself processed it. I don't think that it was, obviously I don't blame the station, or news outlets, anything like that. I just think that he absorbed it himself and that was how he dealt with it. And rather than, I don't even know if like any sort of therapy would have helped or even if it were an option if he would have taken it because he was too proud to, you know, seek help like he could, he could manage it on his own. Whether it was self medicating or, you know, cooking or going for a run or going fishing so I don't know.

Carpenter:

Yeah, one person said, I think it was they said they were covering Ferguson. And it was very traumatic for everyone, and their boss said raise your hand, if you want counselors brought into the station. And she said, nobody raised their hand, obviously, if you're sitting around and looking, and nobody's raising their hand. And she just wrote, and every single one of us needed counseling, but nobody raised their hand. So nothing was brought in. So looking back on it, like, I mean, you just said, you don't know if anything would have helped. But I love what you said about like, social workers on scene of like, school shootings or something. And that's something, you know, no one has brought up. So I think that's a great idea.

Erin Daley:

If it's there, and that's something that like, like you said, like, hey, raise your hand. I mean, if it's more, like, you know, due to the circumstances with this story, there will be somebody available, from whatever time to whatever time, and I, you know, I know it's hard to because new is 24/7, so whether you're getting back to the station at two o'clock in the morning, because you had to travel from wherever it was, you know, I think it's important. I think it would be something that even if it were somebody just literally sitting in a room available for anybody, at any time. And they can go on their own and just, you know, nobody else needed to know.

Carpenter:

Yeah, um, there's something else I was going to ask. And now, you know, when you get up at two in the morning, your brain goes blank sometimes.

Erin Daley:

So you've been up since 2 o'clock?

Carpenter:

Yeah, so I switched to the morning. So I was doing nights originally here, but I like wasn't, I wasn't seeing my kids like, at all.

Erin Daley:

Yeah, I think that has something to do with it too. Because you're, I mean, like, two o'clock in the morning is crazy to have to get up at that time. And Neal did that shift for a while, too. You would get up at 3:30 in the morning. And it's, it's so hard. Whether you're like, physically, like, I know, he would just be like, I'm just gonna eat whatever whenever I like, it's dinner for me now. So it takes a toll on you, the changeover, and there were times when, you know, he would be working the overnight shift, and then he got switched to the night shift. And then he'd have to cover somebody for something. So your body is in this constant, like, state of change, it's like is it day or is it night? You know, am I awake? Am I asleep? And it's so hard in the summer because he wanted to, like, go to the beach and do stuff, and then like, hang out with friends and have barbecues, but then he's like, well, I have to go to bed at seven o'clock at night when the sun's like, still bright outside. So I think that plays a part of it, too. And I know, you know, they're always out for you know, the breaking news, whatever time it is, but, I mean, sometimes I think that people need to sleep.

Carpenter:

Yeah, it's so true.

Erin Daley:

And they say that now especially for your mental health. Getting enough sleep is important. And I think now obviously, you know, years have passed, and there's a lot more out there about mental health and the things, the steps that people can be taking to improve it. But that plays a role too.

Carpenter:

Sure. You had mentioned him talking to someone, and I spoke to a friend of mine, he's a firefighter. And I was like, what kind of training do you guys get? What do you do? And he said, after you know, big things that can be traumatic, they always bring in a chaplain or whatever he said, but really, he talked about like a mentorship with firefighters.

There's always older guys, people you can talk to there. They really have this like mentorship mentality. And this counselor that I interviewed for this, she has worked with journalists. She said, you know, it's really hard for people in journalism to talk to like, sometimes friends and family that aren't going to the same scenes that they are and understand what it's been like. So to have a strong support system at work is so crucial. So do you feel like that was kind of lacking?

Erin Daley:

I was, um, we had friends over this weekend, and my friend who is a school psychologist, she was even saying she's like, I'm going to vent but I'm going to vent to people at work, I'm not going to vent to my husband, because he doesn't really know what I'm talking about. So I'd rather talk to somebody who knows what's going on than somebody who doesn't, which makes complete sense. And I think that would be great for, for the news circuit for photographers, for reporters. I know a lot of times there's like a distinct line

between like the reporter and the photog and truck operator. It's like he can you can be friends, but you can't be too friendly. Just in terms of like, kind of like the hierarchy, I guess. So he's like, well, I'm just the photog. You know, I'm not the talent. Well, you're, you're making the talent look good.

Carpenter:

Yeah, for sure. You know, Neal was the first photographer I worked with my first day at Channel 7.

Erin Daley:

He was?

Carpenter:

Yeah! I was like I need to shoot a stand up for my first package. And he's like, alright, you're like, you're going all in on your first package, let's go shoot this stand up. It was like a robbery at some, I don't know, like hat store something? They sold like hats. And maybe jerseys. I don't remember. But yeah, he was the first photographer I worked with, and then obviously, I'm on the bombing. And I was so scared that day. I just remember looking at him going, do you think there's gonna be more bombs on like the "T" below us? You know, I was so scared.

Erin Daley:

Yeah, I was scared for you guys. A lot of people were.

Carpenter:

Well, is there anything else you can think of looking back that you think would be good?

I mean, you really touched on a lot of it, but that that newsrooms could implement?

Erin Daley:

Yeah, I was thinking about that. And I, I don't really think there is just because a lot of it is so individualized. And you know, like having that mentorship I think would be great, just somebody to talk to, and that they, and the thing is like, they would need to feel comfortable talking to them too. Because, you know, men are men, and they're, you know, they're not really going to open up and share their feelings with just anybody. But even, you know, going into even going back to just the school and like experiences that we've had, like, we've had it going into a new school we've had, like a parent family. Or not parent family, but I like a buddy family. So that, like a family that's been in the school that can like answer questions. And it's almost like something like that like, like not a buddy, but like a mentor, like you said, that is there to kind of guide them. And even the older reporters or photographers who have been there because, you know, this is it's something that's there, and whether they've chosen to acknowledge it or just kind of hide it, like it's there for them. I can't imagine anybody going into those stories and not feeling something.

Carpenter:

Yeah, that's the thing with this survey that I did. I just thought people are so much more open when they're anonymous, you know? Yeah. And if they could just talk to each other you know.

Erin Daley:

And even like, a survey, again, whether it's I don't know if it would be like a sheet of paper, or how you did yours anonymous, like, even if it's like, there's always some like

skepticism just about how like, oh, well, if it's emailed then do they really? Is it really anonymous? Like, is there a way to like, find out who it is?

Carpenter:

Mine was through the, through the university. So um, yeah, I can't see who it is.. But I think there's like, Survey Monkey or something like that. You can stay anonymous, too.

Erin Daley:

Yeah, if there was some way to have that after like, I mean, you can have it after any story, because it doesn't matter if it... obviously, if it's bigger, it's going to have more of an impact, but something may trigger, another story may trigger those feelings and those like, all those senses, that brings up something that happened years ago.

Carpenter:

Right. Well, Erin I so appreciate you talking with me. And taking the time to do this. I know I'm sure it wasn't easy, but I really, I feel like this is so important, and anything that we can do to like, help people who are struggling because like, bad things are gonna keep happening. Journalists are still going to cover these horrible stories, unfortunately. And we need good journalists. We need good photographers.

Erin Daley:

You need them like mentally, as well as just, you know, you can see them and how they can't say it. Well, it's been my pleasure. Anything that you need I'm more than happy to help.

Carpenter:

I really appreciate it. And I'm hoping, knock on wood, to graduate by December. So I'll send you... I think you would be really interested in reading the report with everybody's responses and stuff like that. So I'll send it.

Erin Daley:

Thank you for keeping Neal's memory alive.

Carpenter:

I loved Neal, so I love seeing him through his girls and keeping up with you guys. I'll reach out if I have any more questions. But I really appreciate you chatting and being a part of this.

Erin Daley:

I'm happy to. So I can't wait to see the final product.

Carpenter:

Awesome. Well, I'll send it to you for sure.

Erin Daley:

Thank you.

Heather Forbes - The Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Sarah French Carpenter:

Hi. Thank you so much for doing this. I really, really appreciate it.

Heather Forbes:

That's okay. Pleasure.

Carpenter:

I don't know how much Mike told you, but I covered the Boston Marathon bombing. And then my photographer and friend ended-up killing himself. And so it set me on this path of what resources do we have? How much do people talk about it? So now this is my focus in grad school, and I moved from Boston. We live in Charlotte, North Carolina. So I anchor here now, but I would love to hear more about this program that you implemented that Mike was telling me all about.

Heather Forbes:

Okay, well, it started in 2006, and I had a conversation, I was working for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. And I'll call it the ABC from now on, but it's not like your ABC. Okay. And I was having a conversation with the head of international news. The ABC has 12 foreign bureaus around the world. And we got, he himself was a former Middle East correspondent, and we got talking about the current trauma that... Additionally, we were talking about foreign correspondents, covering wars and so on. And I said, well, I've kind of noticed that we've got a number of walking wounded in the newsroom. Some of them were return foreign correspondents, but some of them had been court reporters. And I'll tell you what, you know, you start going to court day after day, and you're recording the underbelly of human society, you know, the rapist, the murderers, the child pedophiles, I mean, it's just horrible stuff. Anyway, and I suddenly thought, why don't we set up a program you know, looking at, you know, a program to advise journalists on how to deal with trauma. And I said, listen I had an email a few months before from Cait McMahon from the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma. And she was conducting a survey and she wanted to survey ABC journalists. So I gave

her... I asked her to send me the survey, put it out through our internal email system. Anyway, do all of that. So first, the first thing I did is I made a DVD. And it turned out to be unbelievably powerful. And at the time, we had a brand new Managing Director of the whole corporation, new CEO, and I said to Tony, the head of international news, I said, look, I get the feeling the CEO is looking around for something to hang his hat on, something that will make him stand out. I said, why don't we why don't we show this DVD and he said, great idea. So we booked an appointment with them. We got an appointment with him a couple of weeks later. And in the meantime, I'd written out a business case for how much it was going to cost to run these workshops because I had this idea that I needed to run a workshop explaining to journalists the types of trauma that they're experiencing, what the symptoms of trauma are, because a lot of people don't actually know. And they suddenly start drinking heavily or smoking pot or, you know, taking in fetamines, or suffering from anxiety, depression, missing the deadlines, a whole range of things. And the other side of it was, I thought, peer support is the way to go. Because if you say to a journalist, go go and see a psychologist, they'll say, whhhaat?!

Carpenter:

It's amazing in this survey that I did... And that's why when Mike told me about this, I was like, I would love to talk to her. So many people said, yeah, but a therapist doesn't understand what it's like to be in our business.

Heather Forbes:

That's exactly right. And in fact, I mean, most organizations, including the ABC, we had a system at the time called the Employee Assistance Program. And it was outsourced to an outside company that had psychologists, and if you were being bullied by your

manager, your weekly EAP you know, there was the Employee Assistance Program, but a couple of journalists have been to it and sort of ran screaming from the room because the psychologists had no idea what they were about. So I thought, well look, journalists talk to each other anyway, they do. They go to the, they go out for a drink together, and they talk about what they've experienced. So I thought, what we need is a peer support program where the peer supporters are trained to help the person who has come to them. They're not a psychologist, they're not in any way, replacing a professionally trained mental health therapist. But they're a stopit. And they can often solve the problem for the person. In other words, they'll point that you're actually suffering from trauma. You know, this is what it is. Because a lot of people don't realize that that's what they're actually suffering from. Because in your daily day to day life, as a journalist, you go every day. And you might get sick to cover a terrible, you know, vehicle accident, and they'll be dead bodies sprayed all over the road, all that kind of stuff. So I then got in touch with Cait McMahon from the Dart Center. Cait is actually a trained psychologist. But she had spent some years working for The Age newspaper in Melbourne. So I then got in touch with Cait, and got her advice on how to set up peer support. In the meantime, we went off to the managing director, showed him our DVD. He was, he was stunned into silence and said, send me a business case and I knew he was going to ask for it. So I just kind of said, I've already got one across the table. And he came back to me a week later, but I asked for a lot more than what I needed. I asked for \$100,000. He gave it to me. The whole lot. So suddenly, I was up and running. And I didn't like I didn't waste any time. And Australia is a very big country. It's like you know, geographically it's the size of the United States. I mean, we've only got 25 million people. But I had to trip. We

had bureaus all around the country, and I traveled all around the country with Cait McMahon, and we set up these, this Peer Support Program and the general trauma awareness workshops. And honestly, we were playing to packed houses. The journalists just flooded it. And it was really, because I was a journalist myself, okay. And they trusted me and they trusted Cait because the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, they went on to that website, looked down at all these people, know what they're talking about. So we went from there. So I can send you a copy of my DVD.

Carpenter:

I would love that. I would love that. And so, when you went around to the training, was that training journalists to then be on these phone calls that Mike was talking about? Or was this just to teach them about trauma?

Heather Forbes:

Okay, well, there were two layers, the general trauma awareness workshops, were just to teach them about trauma. And each workshop was only one hour. If you make anything longer than an hour, people say I can't do that, can't, I got a deadline, you know, and I usually timed it around the lunch break time, so that people weren't feeling as I said, bring, bring your pack lunch, you know, bring your sandwich. And, and so that worked very well. The peer support workshops were two hours, and I had to get permission from the managers, the newsroom managers to run them. And some of them were really hostile. I mean, you know, it wasn't all plain sailing. But having the imprimatur of the managing director made all the difference. He was right on board. He was right on board. So the peer support workshops were more complex. And what we had to tell people was to, for them to understand, when in fact, they needed to refer someone for professional

help. And the next thing I did with the help of Cait, was to find psychologists who could, that were able to understand the sort of trauma that journalists went through. Now that was more difficult, but I got in touch with New South Wales Police, because I knew they had a trauma awareness program. And I got in touch with the New South Wales firefighting service as well. Because obviously, police and firefighters suffered terrible trauma. And they had their own program. So I talked to some of these psychologists, and suddenly, I was building up a network. And I went and spoke to the psychologists. And they were really good people. They were really good people. And they did understand; they totally understood. And so I had to go back to the managers. And by then, the ABCs human resources department hated my guts. Because they thought I was training on the territory, you know. And they started up, absolutely, really nasty campaign to try and stop the whole trauma program. And I keep going back to them and saying, the news and current affairs division is the ABCs bread and butter. Yep, we've got a drama department. We've got a children's department that make children's programs. We've got a drama department that likes dramas. But the news and current affairs is the bread and butter. We're on air every day, every single hour of the day. We've got a 24 hour news channel. On the main, the number one digital channel. We had a Breakfast Show. We've got a midday news. We've got a half hour news at seven o'clock, followed by current affairs, the daily progress, then we've got big current affairs 60 minutes type program. So you know we're on the schedule every day. So get lost human resources. There are times when it felt quite lonely. I've got to say it felt quite lonely. And there's nothing like a bunch of bureaucrats on your back to sort of... Just you go... oh, anyway, anyway.

Carpenter:

So how did you find all the journalists that were on this call list, and how did that work?

Heather Forbes:

Oh, I just sent out an email. I just sent out an email saying, listen, I'm running this program. Are you interested? And honestly, it was easy. They just came pouring in, they came pouring in, because I think they thought at last, we've got something for us. And it's by us, for us. And I keep stressing that they, they will, they were the key to the success of the program, and it wasn't something imposed by management. And you know, what journalists are like, they hate their managers on principle, even if they've got really good managers. They don't trust them, you know, it's a whole culture. But it was very, it worked. It worked.

Carpenter:

And did they call a certain line, or these journalists just gave out their phone numbers?

Heather Forbes:

Oh, yeah, yeah, they just gave out their phone numbers here. Yeah. I didn't want to do anything formal, nor do I have the resources to have a call center or anything like that. The ABC has, did have at the time, 1,000 journalists, so a fairly sizable organization.

Carpenter:

So what training did you focus on for the journalists that were on this call list?

Heather Forbes:

Of the Peer Support Program?

Carpenter:

Yes. And because you said they had to be trained, like, how did they know when they had to refer them to a psychologist or somebody?

Heather Forbes:

Okay. Well, it was when... I can actually send you my training notes as well. It was when they would recognize symptoms. If somebody said, I'm not sleeping properly, you haven't slept, had a good night's sleep for several months. If somebody can confess to substance abuse. Substance abuse is a serious issue amongst journalists. It's usually alcohol. And there's a lot of functioning alcoholics. But sometimes the drugs become more serious. I mean, alcohol is a serious drug as well, but if somebody said, look, I've been you know, I go home, I drink a bottle of wine a night, they will, you know, it's okay, having a glass of wine with dinner. But a bottle of wine a night is too much, and you're going to feel terrible the next day, and then you're going to do it all over again. So it's really recognizing a whole range of symptoms. A peer supporter's job is to say, listen, I'm here you. I understand what you're going through. They might even want to share their own experiences of trauma. But then they'll say, look, I think, you know, it might help if you went to see a professional, and usually journalists will say well don't send me to the EAP! And they'll say, no, no, no, we've got our own list of psychologists who are good. Sometimes they go and sometimes they wouldn't.

Carpenter:

I did see that the Dart Center is trying to train... it's research they're doing now. They're trying to train therapists and psychologists specifically for journalists.

Heather Forbes:

Yeah, yeah. In the end, it's the only way you're ever going to get a journalist to see a professional is if they feel that the professional knows, understands what they've been through. And I'll give you an example how useless the EAP was at the ABC. We had to insert them into sort of high rise buildings. One of them was only seven stories high, roof top terrace with a sort of cafe. And seven o'clock one morning, a young woman from the accounts department, the accounts department, threw herself off the roof and killed herself, and she landed in front of the doorway of the back entrance to the building which was seven o'clock in the morning. And from about seven to eight o'clock staff we would be arriving, while the security, the security guards had seen us on the CC-TV cameras, went rushing out. And they had to call the place that call an ambulance. They had to cover the body until the police arrived. All of that stuff. And they were deeply traumatized. Well, human resources, ran around in circles, and they got EAP. And the EAP sent this young woman, recent psychology graduate, wearing a tight skirt and high heeled shoes, and a ton of makeup. And here are these huge big burly security guys. And they, you know, and she was twittering away at the end. It was, it was a disaster. So then the boss. Oh, that's right. I had actually run a training course for managers as well. That wasn't so successful. But anyway, their boss actually had been to one of my training courses, and he remembered, and he rang me and he asked me if I'd go and talk to the security guards, so I did. And what I said to them, I turned the whole thing around, and I said to them, look, you guys, you look after us, you know, you're the people who walk us to the car park when we finished the shift at midnight, you know, because the ABC is on the edge of China Town. There's a lot of bad nighttime activity, you know, drug dealing,

all that kind of stuff outside the building, as I said, you're the people who look after us, you're the people. They're the people trying to use the defibrillator. For example, if somebody has a heart attack and you know, all that kind of stuff. And then I talk to them about the sort of trauma that people experienced in other parts of the workplace. And I talked to them a little bit about the journey, just so that they understood that they weren't the only people feeling the way they were feeling and it worked.

Carpenter:

So you mentioned that the training wasn't so successful for the managers, and a lot of people in this survey that I sent out, said, you know, I think the training is going to have to start with managers like they're leading how the newsroom is going. Why do you think it is that the managers were so resistant to all this?

Heather Forbes:

Because they hate being told what to do. And very often, managers are actually people who haven't done so well in the field as a journalist, you know, so they climbed the greasy pole. It's true. It's true. I mean, you know, it's just the way it works. It's just the way it works. So, you know, some managers took it all on board and others, not so much. Not so much.

Carpenter:

So where's the program now? Mike said you're retired, right?

Heather Forbes:

Yeah. Well, I got made redundant, actually. But that's another story. I got made redundant. The ABC is government funded, right. And we have a very conservative government here at the moment. In fact, we've got a prime minister. He's a complete oaf.

But anyway, he's a complete moron. But they slashed the ABC's budget, a whole bunch of people had to go. I didn't mind at the end, because I was close to retirement age anyway, and I got a back of money. So you know, whatever. But the ABC has carried on with this program. It's carrying on with it. And fortunately, it's fallen into the hands of Human Resources. That's not so good. But the Peer Support Program is going well. And in the end, that's all that matters is the Peer Support Program that really is the linchpin to the whole thing. And if you can get one of those going, then you're gonna do a lot of good, a lot of good.

Carpenter:

So what part of it is human resources in charge of if they're not overseeing the peer support, right?

Heather Forbes:

Well, they've now hired a trauma expert. The therapist usually only lasts about two years. That says to me that that person is the wrong, they're hiring the wrong person. But that person has always got in touch with the Dart Center and got the Dart Center to run the Peer Support Program. So that's why that succeeded. I mean, human resources did recognize, partly because journalists are not shy about saying what they think. And the first year after I left, it became a bit shambolic. And some of the journalists just took it upon themselves, to go to human resources and say, listen, you know, Heather Forbes did a great job running this program. You know, you've got to understand that it's a program by journalists, for journalists. And if you understand that we'll get on. If you don't understand that, all bets are off. So it has worked.

Carpenter:

When did this program start?

Heather Forbes:

2006

Carpenter:

And does it exist anywhere else?

Heather Forbes:

The BBC have now set up a Peer Support Program. And Reuters in New York, I think have. Well, they did have one going for a while.

Carpenter:

Yeah, I'm surprised it's not here in the U.S.

Heather Forbes:

Well, you should get in touch with Bruce Shapiro. He's the CEO of the Dart Center. The Dart Center is actually an American philanthropy. You know all about it. Well, let me let me just give you Bruce Shapiro's email. Okay. So his email is Bruce. Bruce dot Shapiro is h AP IRI it does.st all one word.org and his office phone number is 212-854-8056. And I think, I'm not sure why they haven't been able to set one up in the States. I suspect that most media organizations are very resistant. What it takes is a good court case. Now we've had two in Australia in the last three years. One brought by a photojournalist for The Age Newspaper in Melbourne. And she had been, she'd been covering the war in Afghanistan and became deeply traumatized. And she took The Age to court for lacking duty of care. And she lost. She lost. But two years ago there was another court case and this was brought by a court reporter I think again for the same newspaper. Cait McMahon

from the Dart Center was an expert witness. You should probably get in touch with Cait. Now that journalist won her case and that sent a signal out, a really big signal out to organizations that they couldn't get away with the seedy war, they had a responsibility to the journalists, that you can't send people out day after day and expect everything's gonna be alright because it's not. She was awarded compensation but it wasn't very much. It was about \$150,000. But by the time she paid legal expenses, and everything was, you know, but at least she won. That was the main thing. And what it will take in the United States. I mean, I know the legal system in the United States. I mean, mostly the systems are, it's incredibly expensive to hire a lawyer. But if you've got, if you're a union member... if the union backs you, then the union should pay for the lawyer, and then you might get somewhere.

Carpenter:

Well, I appreciate you chatting with me. I'm really looking forward to watching the DVD.

Heather Forbes:

I'll email you. I've got your email address. I'll email you my workshop notes.

Carpenter:

That would be wonderful. And if I think of anything else out, I'll email you. But I just so appreciate Mike putting us in touch. And it was a pleasure talking to you.

Heather Forbes:

It's been great, and Mike is a really, really good guy. Have you seen his film?

Carpenter:

Yes. So that's how I found out about him. In all my research I came across his documentary, which was like the only one I could find on journalists and trauma. And it was from a while ago, you know, but I watched it and I reached out to him on LinkedIn or something. And yeah, it was before 9/11 and the 20th anniversary so he said, reach back out to me after the 20th anniversary. So yes, he was great. He kept naming people I should talk to so I appreciate all of you

Heather Forbes:

For sure. Absolute pleasure. Well, let's stay in touch and good luck.

Carpenter:

Thank you so much, Heather. I appreciate it. Okay, bye bye. Thank you.

Annaliese Garcia - NBC2 Reporter - Southwest Florida

Sarah French Carpenter:

Thanks again for doing this. Megan told me your experience with Surfside was pretty traumatic. Have you covered anything like that before? Or was that like the first?

Annaliese Garcia:

That was the first for sure mass tragedy that I've ever covered. Um, I've covered you know, a lot of there's a lot of shootings here in Miami, but um, and have kids you know, but never anything of that severity.

Carpenter:

What was it like for you to just be there? Were you there every day? Did they send you down to the scene?

Annaliese Garcia:

So I was actually the first one there for my station. Um, I work mornings. So I got there around 3:30 in the morning and the building collapsed at like 1:45, so it was chaos. But I was there every single day. Because of that, they kind of liked using that in the toss... our first reporter on scene. And also I was just very aggressive with everything out there so they kept sending me to what they were calling the command center, which is where everybody would meet. all the first responders. And there were like, I think 10 blocks blocked off completely on... Have you ever been to Miami?

Carpenter:

Yes, once.

Annaliese Garcia:

So Collins Avenue is like the street, parallel to the beach. So it's the first, last street there. The last avenue closest to the water and that is... the building was on the water, so that was closed for 10 blocks. It's a very busy avenue. So when you would drive into this area that was kind of blocked off, and they were just, you know, trailers everywhere and first responders. It was like, if there was a cloud over it, it was like your mood instantly changed. It was, it was, um, for sure. I think I covered it for 14 days, 15 days straight. Maybe with like a day in between at some point. Um, it was just heavy. I would get there and I was like, work mode, you know, and but you're covering these stories and a few times on air, I got emotional. I couldn't control it, it was you know, you're saying these things out loud for the first time and, and to viewers who you know, are glued to their TVs. And, then I would leave and it was like, if something like if my strength all of a sudden was just like pulled underneath me like a rug, you know, like I and I couldn't

really communicate with anybody about it. Because nobody really fully understood. A lot of people were reaching out in the community because I'm from here. So I have a lot of friends. You know, born and raised here, you're my roots, all my people are here and reaching out, you know, saying like, you're doing a great job. And, but it's, I mean, obviously that means a lot. But it's not the same as to come home, and not really be able to communicate what you're feeling. And I would I would curl up into a ball some days and just like cry, I didn't know how to control it. I didn't. I felt like I shouldn't be feeling like that, because these families were going through so much worse. Not to mention, I had two family friends who were involved in the building. So it was just that much closer to home.

Carpenter:

Did they die? Or were they...

Annaliese Garcia:

Yeah, both. Both families lost. A friend of mine, she lost her parents. And that was their vacation home. And then another friend of mine lost her uncle and his wife and their two little girls. Very intense. But anyway, so it was very heavy. And I still, I think it took me like two days of removing myself from it to finally bounce back and be like, okay, you know, it was almost like a reset. And I was able to kind of look at it differently, but it still brings kind of chills to my neck.

Carpenter:

What did your station do during all this?

Annaliese Garcia:

They sent us a lot of emails, you know, saying thank you for you know, for what we're doing and stuff like that they sent. And a lot of them were very deep, I just read one, I was going through my emails, deleting things, and I just came across one that said, you know, beautiful things in an email. I think it was a mass email, though. But nobody really, they didn't really, they mentioned like, if you're going through something, like reach out to HR kind of thing, we have those things available for you guys. Um, but I don't know, it was I didn't seek anything out at the time, well through my station. I actually ended up speaking to a priest. Because through my mom, it was kind of like, she just saw that I was bent out of shape. So but yeah.

Carpenter:

So did you ever have any training like in college or at any other stations on what to do if/when you cover a traumatic event?

Annaliese Garcia:

No, um, no, not at all. Zero training in that regard. I do feel like the best training is like going through it. You know, and being there that you can read all these things and, but going through it and, and I feel like addressing it when you're going through it, which fortunately, I'm not, you know, like I didn't go into a deep, deep, dark hole. I was able to kind of pull myself out because I have a strong support system. But for people who don't and if you're not in your hometown, and you're not you know, I just feel like, I don't know, you can go into a really dark place after something like that.

Carpenter:

What would be on your wish list of things, or looking back, what you think would help the station? What resources do you think would've been great if we would have done this before, during or after?

Annaliese Garcia:

I think during, we did we had wall to wall coverage for four days, five days so there was not much you could do. I think everybody being positive, and you know it was you were showing up to do your job during, it would have been hard to actually like address these issues. But if anything, I feel like maybe they should have done some things. Without asking, like kind of just like, done, you know, some type of meeting or scheduled meetings, without any, you know, how they schedule meetings for us to do training with, you know, everything, all the things like how to speak, how to look... why can't you do that with mental health, like make it a requirement almost, after something like this, just so you can have a conversation with a professional because a lot of people have too much pride, I feel like. Like me, for example, I wasn't going to seek that out myself through the station. And even if I felt like I really needed it, because sometimes you don't even realize that you do. So I feel like they should have probably just made it like a, like something like that, like somebody reaches out to you. And I mean, if we have it so available to us, just like these other people who train us how to report, why wouldn't you send, tell somebody to email us and say, hey, let's schedule a meeting and talk for 10 minutes, you know?

Carpenter:

Yeah, yeah. Is there anything else you can think of that you want to add? And if I think of anything else, I may even text you or something to get another soundbite. I will say, I interviewed Al Tompkins of Poynter. His daughter works in our web department. And he was a reporter for like 40 years. And now he works at Poynter and his wife is like a psychotherapist. So now they have this thing together where they'll do training, where they talk about covering traumatic events. And so I pitched it to my bosses to have them do it at our station. And just because, I want to see like what they do for part of my research too, but that might be something you can pitch to your bosses too.

Annaliese Garcia:

For sure. Anything else I can think of? I mean, I just I feel like when we got when we cover it... how long have you been in the industry? Probably a few years?

Carpenter:

Yeah, like 17.

Annaliese Garcia:

Oh, my God, you look amazing. Um, but I've been in the industry for five, so I, so I can't you know, but um, it's not necessarily comparable. But still, like we understand what it is to cover tragedies, what it is to cover traumas, but something of this nature. It's almost you show up because you feel like you have a duty, you signed up for this, you're there in the moments like the first responders are. But um, but I definitely think that this is not talked about enough. What the reporters are going through, when they walk away from the scene and when they get home, because that's something that you know, I just didn't feel like I could talk to anybody about it other than maybe people who were there. Like a

friend of mine was in law enforcement out there every single day. I spoke to him a lot. But definitely something that I like, I'm glad you're doing this. This is what I wanted to add because it's I just think it's not talked about enough for sure.

Carpenter:

Well, I will say going through, I got an overwhelming response with the surveys and just reading through them, it makes you feel like you're not alone. Like everyone is going through this, we all are going through the same thing. And we all feel the same way. And so reading through this, I was like okay, there's you know, you don't feel alone.

Annaliese Garcia:

That's definitely comforting to know that we're not alone. Even though I spoke to some journalists out there though. And, it was almost like everybody was kind of uncomfortable to talk about it. Like they felt weak or something saying that they felt a certain way. So I kind of, I tried opening up to a few that were even at my station, some on the national level who worked for ABC. And everybody kind of was just hush hush about how they felt. And I just feel like it shouldn't. I mean, I know that this is like a very trendy phrase right now but it should, we should normalize the fact that, you know that you feel this way, it is what it is.

Carpenter:

Anyway, I'm hoping to get all of this compiled... I'm trying to finish by December, but I may have to push it to the spring. So we'll see.

Annaliese Garcia:

Well, good luck. I think you're doing great work, and I'm glad to have been a part of it.

Carpenter:

Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

Annaliese Garcia:

Yeah, have a good one.

Rick Hancock - Former News Anchor/Reporter

Rick Hancock:

Hey, let me turn my camera on. Hey, how are you?

Sarah French Carpenter:

Good. Thank you for doing this.

Rick Hancock:

Well, I'm an academic. So you know, it's always good. My parents live in Denver, North Carolina, which is right outside of Charlotte, like Lake Norman area. And so when I go visit them and you pop up, my mom doesn't believe that we worked together.

Carpenter:

We love it here. I mean, the weather is so great. And you're so close to like the beach or the mountains or whatever. So after living in New England for so long, it was like, during the winters I was like, this is perfect. I can drive to see the snow if I want to.

Rick Hancock:

Right, right. Yeah, I'm in Atlanta. So I feel yeah, one of the reasons why I love it here. Even though today, it's a little fallish. You know, I, I'm rocking my, my blood has changed. I'm like, you know, if it's 60 degrees, I'm like, man, this is kind of chilly.

Carpenter:

I'm the same way.

Rick Hancock:

Well, I'm really proud of you. When do you finish?

Carpenter:

I'm hoping to finish my project by December. If not, I can graduate in May. But I started this like, right before the pandemic, which was like crazy. But see, my parents tried to get me to get my master's right when I graduated, because if you went to Mizzou, they had like a one year master's program, if you graduated from Mizzou in Journalism. I didn't do it. I was ready to go work. But after I covered the Boston Marathon bombing, I just realized, like, there was no resources. We had like no meeting at work. And then my photographer, they sent him he covered the marathon bombing, covered the shoot out. And they sent him to Sandy Hook. They sent him to everything. He ended up killing himself. And so I talked to his wife. But there was also no like, here, we're going to talk about what happened. He didn't want to ask for help, which is like a thing too in the news business. But the more I started researching it, there was a woman at Mizzou, she's left now. But she told me she was the only professor. There was one other one I think she said in Colorado that specifically taught a covering traumatic events class in college. There's no other ones. So anyway, it just got me interested in talking to journalists and saying like, what training did you get, if any, what did your station do after a traumatic event? And like, what's helped you? What do you think needs to be done that could help a TV station because we know bad news is not going to stop happening and people are going to continue to cover it.

Rick Hancock:

Well, I'm happy to talk to you. You probably made the right move, with graduate school I waited 20 years after I graduated from undergraduate to go to graduate school. And it was a much better experience. It was the beginning of a hybrid, online on campus experience. I like that some things were online, but I did have to go up on campus a few times. But just being able to contribute and bring real life working experience, the graduate program is much more helpful than, you know, just following an academic process. From undergraduate, you haven't learned anything, you haven't gone through anything that you've gone through to bring context to your experience and your research that you're working on right now. You wouldn't have been able to pull this project off right out of undergraduate.

Carpenter:

Right, I would have never even thought of it. So I didn't even realize you left because of Sandy Hook or like what happened to you leading up to that.

Rick Hancock:

It was a culmination Sarah. I mean, from my very first stories, as a journalist as a broadcast journalist, after I had a career in politics, and when my boss went to jail, the local station in DC WRC, the NBC station hired me as a freelance reporter. Clearly, I was excited. I had no experience, but I had experience in communications because I was the mayor's Press Secretary, Director of Communications. My first story was a triple homicide in southeast Washington, DC. I can't tell you how excited I was, because I knew this was a big story. And it was pouring down rain, no one was really out. They had the police tape up. And there was just one person just standing outside watching the

police process the scene. So my producers told me you need to get sound you need to get sound. I didn't really know what that meant. They said talk to somebody. So I kind of like meekly walked up to this person and said, hey, it was kind of a crime ridden drug infested area, but you know, I say hey, can I talk to you? What do you think about this happening in your community, in your neighborhood? He didn't say anything, just kept staring. Like he was transfixed on the building, the house. And he finally said, that's my son. His son was one of the victims and in the house, you know, so it went from exhilaration for me, for the first time I was like, wow, this, this is like real life affecting real people. But the equation for me of the excitement of getting the story, you know, was larger than my compassion and empathy for a family member. It really was, you know. But as I progressed, then I worked in Baltimore at WBAO. In our newsroom meetings, it wasn't like, oh my goodness, it was a shooting. It was like, what shooting are we going to cover? Are we going to cover the 90-year-old grandmother that was, you know, sitting on a front porch? Are we going to cover the three-year-old that was caught up in the drive-by. We're going to ignore the gangbangers who are just killing each other because that doesn't matter. And it was so desensitized. I mean, we were joking about it. It was, you know, but again, I was still kind of developing myself as a broadcaster and not really understanding. But it was in the back of my mind like, Man, you know, and then I had some colleagues who just loved it. You know, I think you know the black humor. It's like, you know, they protected themselves by making light of it. I couldn't, I did it sometimes, but I didn't do it sometimes. So fast forward. Hartford. 9/11. Probably, you know, we're so close to New York. My Godmother survived the first bombing attack at the World Trade Center. A few years before she was in the second tower when 9/11

happened. She called my Godfather. They live in Charlotte. My Godmother and Godfather live in Charlotte now. And after the first tower got hit, she called her husband, my Godfather. The building told them to stay inside. He told her to get the hell out. Twenty minutes after she got out, that building got hit. And obviously, we have FOX coverage. That pretty aggressively affected... remember, Doug Stewart, he sent out a note to a couple people asking for you know, their memories of that day, from some, this is before you and I connected. I didn't participate because mentally I've moved on from that, you know, so knowing that happened, watching our coverage, knowing other people that died or were injured, my family was still in New York, my parents are still in New York, my sisters were still in New York. We were so close to it. That was really kind of the first time I had already started thinking about going to graduate school. I'm an entrepreneur, dad's been an entrepreneur, that's really my passion. That's really what I always wanted to do. And I think as we fast forward through our conversation, I'll mention it now. For me how I coped, ultimately, after I progressed through my broadcast journalism career, was that it wasn't my, my true passion. Like I didn't. It wasn't like I had to do this for the rest of my life, because I knew I wasn't going to do it for the rest of my life. So I was able to better compartmentalize and recognize what I was seeing, not only the tragic stories we had to cover, but as we get older in the business, our producers get younger and they they do crazy things, they want us to do crazy things, like that's not a news story. What are you doing, you know, we want to do real news. We got into business to do real news and the type of stories that's why I covered politics before you and I met when you came to FOX. That was my second stint at FOX. I mean, I was an everyday day in and out weekend anchor, political reporter, I had to beat, reason I covered politics it kept me off

the streets. It kept me from knocking on doors, kept me from going to the fires, chasing car crashes, it sent me to the Capitol to kind of do stories that I wanted to do even though the producer you have you know, you have 30 seconds to you know, tell this complex budget story, but I'd rather struggle with that than the craziness on the streets. So I was beginning to cope that way and recognizing myself that this isn't my passion. I got good at it. I won awards, people recognized me for it, but I didn't go to sleep thinking about it. In fact, I would wake up sometimes dreading going to work, you know. Because my eyes were on a new prize for me personally was to have this dream of starting a business. I think that's what helped for me, and I think that's sometimes if the help and the resources were there inside newsrooms. You can be passionate about your career as a journalist and that's all you want to do. But it can't be your entire life. I've worked with enough people and you probably know where their identity is television is tied to that. And the stereotype of the persona of a journalist, whether it's broadcast, digital, print is that you know, we're immune to the chaos that we see. We're not. We're not immune to it. And management needs to know that. So when we met, I was hybrid. I came back to the newsroom as a digital manager. But they also threw me back on television, I still I talked to Rich Graziani last week. And I still get I say, man, I came back, I didn't want to be back on television. I didn't want to be on television. When I came back, they threw me back on television. When I came back, I didn't want to do that. But I did the tech stuff. So it was more on my passion lane than, like, doing the political stuff or hard news. So I was cool with that. I had fun with that, you know, I never had a script. You know, you and I used to just rip about stuff, your stuff. And because I was living my passion. Then Sandy

Hook. I was in the newsroom early. Because I don't know if you were still anchoring the mornings?

Carpenter:

I had just gone to Boston I think. They had me on air the whole day because I could talk about Connecticut.

Rick Hancock:

So I was in, did the morning show. So I was there early, three, four or five o'clock, whatever it was. And folks started to come into the newsroom, and I'm listening to the scanners. And I hear active shooter which became a buzzword. We didn't know what active shooters were, and it gave the address. So I'm at Google Maps, I went, I put in the Google Maps and nothing came up. I put in the Google Maps, it was just woods, it was just open land. And I'm thinking I say active shooter. I said there's nothing around here except that school. I was like, oh, shit. Cause the address they gave was not a building per se it was land. Like, oh, no. And then you start hearing over the scanners, you know, what, what's transpiring. You know, so actually, you know, I take no honor in, you know, saying like, I alerted the newsroom, like, hey, there's something big, big going on here. And, you know, that was kind of the beginning of the coverage for CT One Media FOX at the time, they, you know, they were working with the current. And as the, the minutes progressed, and you can hear over the, you know, the state troopers going in, looking into the classrooms, and identifying two bodies here, three bodies here, five bodies here, and then it was kind of... I may be off the count, but it you know, it stopped. And I'm thinking oh my God 5, 6, 7 people or kids who are probably dead. And then it picked back up. And then the count got up and up. At the time, my two youngest children were

eight and six, not too far removed from the first, second and third graders that were there. Already I have been laying the groundwork. I had told Rich when I came back to FOX, I'm giving you two years, two years. And I'm out. At that point, I was about to turn 50. I'm about to turn 60 now. I said, if I don't start this business, if I don't follow this dream, I'll never do it. I'm gonna go back and be on television. I see what's happening. I'm going to do what I don't want to do. Which I just didn't want to do. I had spent the time, got my master's, I left Quinnipiac went to UConn was on the full time faculty started a whole new program there on digital journalism, entrepreneur journalism. But it was around 2008 when the recession hit. I was doing a lot of consulting including with FOX because I was doing the Rick's RSS or whatever with text segment we were doing, I was doing that kind of as consultant freelance. But the recession hit and Rich said I don't have any more freelance money for you. You got to come back and run our digital platform. And the money was good. I mean, I was actually getting paid more money doing that than I ever made on air at Fox, and I made I was okay, you know, I mean, you remember the constraints of FOX but you know, I was at the top tier of the salaries, but I was making more money as a manager and on air. So I was like, okay, I'll, I'll do it. But I've given you two years. When that happened, and I don't know if you remember Bill Leukhardt who was a Courant reporter, his girlfriend was a teacher at Sandy Hook, she got killed. So we got some insight early on what was going on. Obviously, that impacted just that kind of nature of a news story. We had a lot of folks that had young children including myself. And we had Bill's girlfriend who was killed. You know, it just was around Christmas time and it was just it was just a whole bunch of emotional things. So graduate school, I had a great friend, great buddy was still just a friend, went to graduate school together.

And every year around Christmas time we would get together to have lunch or dinner. And because of Sandy Hook we missed the time we normally do it. So we finally, and he lived in New Town. So we said, okay, let's meet at the Panera Bread in New Town. I get there. This is after 10 days of just craziness in the newsroom. Finally just say I got to take it, I've got to go down there. So Matt was running a little late, and I'm sitting in Panera Bread. And in walks this huge, white guy. I mean, he was like, I mean, I use race only because I'll explain in a second. He was and he was in camouflage gear, like camouflage gear. And I can see his boots were caked in mud. And it was just a sense that even though we didn't make, you've been on television long enough, you know, when people are looking at you, you know when people spot like, I know her, she's from TV. And you don't want to, you either got to acknowledge them or just kind of do your thing and just okay, they know who I am. And you just kind of move on from it. But I could tell with this guy was just looking at me, just looking at me. And I'm looking down not trying make eye contact with him because this guy is in all camouflage, caked up boots, looked kind of distressed. And I'm looking at that. And I finally look up. And he says, he just looks at me says please tell the truth. Please tell the truth. Then he proceeds to go into his back pocket. Now I'm getting scared, goes to his back pocket and pulls out this big black wallet. And he flips it over and has a state trooper badge. And he said I was the first one in the building. I was the first one to see the children. And we can only surmise that they were human beings because the effects of the, of the weaponry that was used, exploded. These kids whose parents didn't identify these kids by their face, there wasn't there was nothing that they... the kids exploded. He was so traumatized. He ended up quitting, ended-up resigning. Later on, I found that out. But he just said, you know, please tell the

truth about what happened. He says I haven't been back to work. Then his girlfriend came in. And she just started saying, you know, the nightmares he was having, the problems he was having, how she was trying to help him cope and give him the resources or have him access to resources. Here's this guy and state police did have resources. He didn't want to access them. He was tough. You know, I'm a tough guy. This is my job. I'm not, I'm not supposed to be impacted by this. But he clearly was impacted. And I, to this day, still think about that. And I thought about that at that time. And at that moment, I said, you know what? This guy is scolding the media because at that point, the first day we covered breaking news, it's kind of probably the truest sense of how you cover it because you just are covering stuff, you know, that you see. But then we have to do the day after stories and the day after stories. And that's when sometimes our world gets crazy in journalism, because sometimes we go in directions that we probably shouldn't go in and that makes it difficult for us, makes it, hurts our credibility with the viewing public. And we've we rationalize that because we're in the business because we want to tell stories we want to you know, provide you that transparency, we want to speak truth to power, we want to speak for the people who don't have a voice, we want to do all those platitudes that's why we got into journalism. But you have to have the passion to do that. And talking to that state trooper just crystallized, you know, I don't have I don't have the passion or the want anymore to do what he's telling me to do. I don't. And so there's, there's really no sense of me staying, and just the basic trauma of just knowing those kids were killed, they were around my kids age. And I didn't, the rationale I had in the first story of the triple homicide where I was excited and motivated. I had absolutely no interest, primarily for the subject matter that we're talking about now. I couldn't help Christie, I couldn't help

Mike. I couldn't help, these folks we're searching, you know, and now we were you know, we were getting pressure from management. FSB has this and VIT has this and TNH has this. And I'm like, do you know, these guys haven't slept? Because we've been working around the clock and pretty much people are traumatized. I don't know what to tell them. You know, if I use my personal devices to tell them... I'd tell them to chill, go home, don't come to work. They would get fired, I would get fired for telling them that. We did have, there was some resources primarily because of Bill, what I was telling you is there was some resources, grief counselors, specifically brought in for that. And we did have some newsroom chat. So I can't say it was totally absent. But it was more reactionary and not structured. There wasn't a playbook. And I don't know if you can write a playbook and maybe hopefully, that's something that you will help. Initiate, you know, make people more aware. So there are more kinds of institutionalized resources available to people, and newsrooms and managers. But, you know, everybody's flying by the seat of the pants at that point. And I think even though we're 10 years removed from that people still are impacted. I connected with some FOX 61 people yesterday, because we're 20 years for 9/11. Still, I mean, those raw emotions, those telling those stories, I mean, it comes it goes back 20 years, it's still very impactful. So I'm sorry, I've been long winded. You're supposed to be asking me the questions.

Carpenter:

No, no you're good. So what do you think should change like in the field of journalism going forward that would help? Because journalism is losing people right and left, so what should change to help people cover these stories?

Rick Hancock:

I mean, look, the news business, I mean, it's our job to go out and provide that, that first draft of history, that's not going to change, and I don't see us changing how we do our job. All the debates about, you know, the new digital age and how we do that aside, I mean, we go out, we want to tell stories. I think it's just having better access, I think, because I think we could probably talk to an HR leader, and they would probably tell us that those resources are there. How easily accessible, are they? And should they be reactionary, to like, we'll let you know about them and showcase them when a big traumatic event happens, as opposed to having a regularly indoctrinated into the daily life of a journalist. And I think that some of this still has to come on the journalist, you know, of taking personal responsibility. I have become a huge advocate, Sarah, since I become an entrepreneur, on mental health, becoming a broadcast journalist was the most competitive thing I ever did. Being an entrepreneur, is the hardest thing I've ever done. It's a tough one, every aspect of your life, every aspect, personal business, and yourself. And being able to openly talk about mental health to myself, not being crazy, but just acknowledging I don't know if I would have been classified as clinically depressed but there have been times in the last 10 years since I've been running my business. It's been some bad times, you know, we're doing very well now. You know, very happy, we're growing. But that wasn't always the case. I was sharing with somebody I remember our business bank account, we had negative \$46.95 cents. That's, that's not a fun thing to have to deal with. I mean, and with two kids at the time in college, you know, that's not a fun mental health experience. But that's just one marker for me that I speak openly about my own mental health. I speak openly to other people to make sure that they are aware of,

even if you don't talk to a professional talk to someone, talk to someone about what you're going through, they might have resources, so they might be able to help you, they might, they might not be able to help you. But in these, you're not holding it inside, you're sharing things that you can't maybe totally articulate at the time, but there's something going on that you're trying to progress to get to some semblance of where you can manage it, you're not, I don't think you can, or you should ever be able to cope with a triple homicide, a bombing of a building, or kids getting shot, I don't think the human body/mind, we should ever be that we are comfortable with that, we shouldn't feel like, oh, I can cope with this, like we should always feel anxiety and fear and anger and sadness, and sorrow for all of those things. As journalists, we should feel those things I think will make us even better storytellers and access and that we're just sticking a mic in someone's face and just asking for a response, you know. That's a displaced kind of a way to approach the way we do things. So if we, if we're clear in our minds and understand and can connect with our own mental health needs and emotions as we go about that, and then access to resources that are available, and our managers and leadership can, you know, really, really make that an important part of making sure people know that they have access to that. Because every day, and it could be you know, look, the triggers could be different. You might have somebody in the newsroom, they lose it over someone jaywalking, and they get arrested, or, you know, different minority groups. You know, it's I know, you know, the the number of the police interaction stories, I know how that impacts black journalists, that we saw in the news that we have to go cover that, and we have to cover it from to be fair, from an objective standpoint, from the police standpoint, from the community standpoint, from the victim standpoint. But if

truth be told, you know, those are people that look like me that are being mistreated. And this is the system that, that, that plays to your head, you know, and so anyway, I'm rambling now.

Carpenter:

So what do you think should happen like with men? Like you talked about that guy who came in and was very macho and his girlfriend said he wouldn't ask for help. And I've just seen this repetition with, with men in journalism, feeling like they don't want to ask for help or looked down upon or no one's saying here this is required or you need to do this.

Rick Hancock:

You need more people like me that, you know, I've posted on LinkedIn, I've posted. I've talked to people, I'm very open. I mean, it's why I responded to your survey. I mean, you could have been, you know, hey, it could have been a lot of other things. I'd say good luck, Sarah, wish you, you know, success. But this topic is very important. It really is. And so anytime I can talk about it, I'm not an expert. I don't have any formal training. My bottom line, first step is talk, talk, talk to someone, it doesn't have to start with being a professional clinician, just just be open about, you know, your issues, your concerns, you know, you don't have to, it doesn't end the feedback doesn't necessarily have to be a fix or a solution. But the first step is to talk about it to talk about, and that it may or may be oversimplifying it. But that's the best advice I can give anybody because your particular issue or problem may have to be really further worked on by someone with PhDs or whatever. But if no one knows about it, if no one if you're not talking about it, and, you know, I'm not sure what, what's the hesitancy? Is it because the perception that someone

might think that you're weak? Or is it you are just too scared personally, to share or you can't articulate? The first step, you don't have to know what your problem is. You just have to know their problem. And hopefully, there'll be a number of different ways to cope with it. For me, it was everything that I've done. Everything I've ever been able to do successfully in my life has been rooted in passion. Like if I'm not passionate about something, I have no goal. Right, like I'm either all in I love you, I love what I'm doing, or I'm selling, I don't have anything to do with you. I don't care. So I've had to work on the gray part in my life, but I do exploit the passion part. So if I'm passionate about something I'm going, I'm going forward. When I had to finally acknowledge that I wasn't passionate about journalism to the point that I was going to do whatever I had to do, to keep progressing in the career, I knew it was time to move on. Conversely, in my business career, when I had negative \$46, I wasn't going to quit, I was going to do whatever I had to do to turn this situation around, because I had the passion, and the want to do that. And so my questions about myself, were rooted in okay, I need to get my mind, right, because I need to continue on this path for my passion. So I think just tapping into so while your job is journalism, your passion, may be your family. So maybe the focus should be on identifying like, what, what do you care most about in life. And let's redirect to make sure that you're okay. So you can continue down that path of fulfilling your passions and enjoying the things that you find passionate in life that you will do, no matter what, going to work, telling a story, producing a story, anchoring your story that took to be your job. Now, there are people that we know that they love it, this is what they want to do, and they're going to do whatever it takes. And so if they have to find ways to get resources to manage the tragedy that they do in their job, great, do that,

let's give that to them. Because that's their passion, they want to keep doing this job, they love it so much. They just need these tools. But if you don't love it in a passionate way, and you still deal with all that, you just need to find out, you know, what's motivating you to come to work every day, because, you know, you knew coming in, this is a potential outcome of your daily job, you're gonna see crazy stuff, you're going to experience crazy stuff, either to you or to the people that you cover. So, you know, if you just do it, because you love being on television, or you love the, you know, notoriety. You just need to know that, you know, what's your motive, what's motivating you to do this job to deal with these outcomes. And on the business side for me, I now have tools and resources that people I can talk to that when I'm hitting bumpy roads. I know what to know what to do or who I can talk to. So I don't know if that answers it. But I think that might help.

Carpenter:

Yeah, I think that's good. Is there anything else you want to add?

Rick Hancock:

No. If you need anything else, any other follow-ups or you know, just give me a shout.

And, you know, I hope our paths cross again, one day ... I'm in the area a lot.

Carpenter:

Next time you're here for sure.

Rick Hancock:

Maybe grab a coffee or something. Yeah. I don't miss the television world. But I still applaud all my friends who are still fighting the good fight, and that's the truth. Keep doing what you're doing and God bless.

Carpenter:

Thank you, Rick.

Sarah Hill - Former Anchor/Reporter, CEO Healium

Sarah Hill:

Hey, I'm so sorry.

Sarah French Carpenter:

You're totally fine. Thank you so much for doing this. I really appreciate it.

Sarah Hill:

Absolutely. Tell me what you're up to. And I'm sorry, I've been so hard to get a hold of.

This entrepreneurial ship thing is like a lesson.

Carpenter:

It's great. So I'm in Charlotte now. I was in Boston for almost seven years. And then we moved here. And we love it. We're closer to family. It's a much better work life balance and everything. But when I was in Boston, I covered the Boston Marathon bombing. And so that kind of sent me on this journey of like, what are our resources? Why are newsrooms not talking about traumatic things that journalists are seeing? And the photographer that I was with on the day of the bombing, ended up killing himself. I interviewed his wife as part of this project. And yeah, she had some really powerful stuff to say just like the shame with mental health and him not wanting to ask for help ... But anyway, so that sent me on this path to now being in grad school and wanting to research journalists and traumatic events. And so at first I was like, do the stories that we cover affect us?

Sarah Hill:

Absolutely.

Carpenter:

My professors were like yes, they do. Let's build on that. And so basically, my final paper is about what are the solutions. So I put out this survey and got a great response from journalists on what they wish their TV stations would do, as far as like counseling or services. But in my last class was with Professor Flink, he's talking all about the future and 5G and he's talking about Healium and I'm like watching this and I'm like this is amazing. Maybe I can write about this in my paper as a solution as well like a future solution to treating job stress and trauma, something I haven't seen in any of my research that I've done so far and so that's why and he kind of touched on how your experience and so that's why I wanted to hear from you about with the job, the stories that you covered and everything to now I just think it's so amazing. So I'm so eager to hear and I forgot her name, I'm trying to think...

Sarah Hill:

Alyssa

Carpenter:

Yes, Yes. She did a great job, and it was just I feel like it gave me more of an understanding but still it's something I never thought of before so trying to wrap my head around like measuring brain waves and how this can help with stress and trauma is just so fascinating to me.

Sarah Hill:

Yeah, so we have so much to talk about. I didn't know about your journey, and I'm sorry to hear about your photographer and to make a long story short you know as all reporters do, we're all covering trauma and it wasn't necessarily the trauma that bothered me that much. We went in with the trauma teams in the aftermath of the tsunami in Sri Lanka and Indonesia and you know, we went to third world countries but it was when people lost children and we had to go in and talk to their parents about how they felt like that is what just really you know, like rocked me and to that combined with seeing the negativity every single day and and you know, the bodies that we all became desensitized to I mean, journalists are invited to executions to watch that and you know, encouraged to watch that and there's no regard for you covered a murder in the morning and then now you're being sent out to, you know, cover a rape or something like that. And police officers you know, there's brakes built in, but not journalists. And so it wasn't necessarily the trauma it was that combined with the job of having to constantly I mean, I'm preaching to the choir, you know exactly what I'm talking about feeding your social media feeds you're always on, you're in the middle of the night recording a thunderstorm or hail because, you know, you're, you're constantly supposed to be feeding it. And anyway, that lifestyle is what made me sick in the form of insomnia. And it started first as insomnia. I was like, why am I not ever able to sleep. And my husband is a psychologist, and I can send you my story that that, you know, details through all of this, but ultimately led to panic, panic attacks. So I had to get out of the business to save my health. And anyway, we got into virtual and augmented reality, because we were giving virtual tours to this group of veterans who weren't able to physically travel to see their

memorials in Washington, DC. So we created these VR experiences for them. And noticed that VR was impacting their physiology, they usually would take off the goggles and those bodies would soften, they would raise their arms, when people told us that they you know, wouldn't normally be able to write raise your arm. So we started doing brain maps to see how is this media impacting the user? And can we compound the media much like a drug to downshift their nervous system and elevate the therapeutic brain patterns and de-escalate the ones that weren't? And the answer to that was yes, you can. And I had tried neurofeedback to help me quiet my own mind with insomnia. And I had invented stories for myself, because I found the experiences incredibly boring. And so Healium is just a combination of really me trying to fix myself, and finding a drugless solution to downshift my nervous system, but then also training my brain because that's what's wrong with traditional meditation, you can't see your own brain patterns or heart rate in real time, and know, am I doing it right? And when I closed my eyes to meditate, I saw nothing, you know, they're like, imagine a green field or whatever, I saw nothing. I'm thinking about this and that. And so we're just using media, to fight media. And I had a very poor media diet. As you know, journalists do because you're feeding yourself crap every single day of all the world's negativity. And so you know, what we're forming here is positive fiber in your media diet, that has the ability to counteract, you know, some of the crap that, you know, we're, we're ingesting. And so are you currently working at a station now?

Carpenter:

Yes. So I moved here to be the evening anchor. And then my kids started school. And I was like, I'm not seeing my kids at all.

Sarah Hill:

I was the same way.

Carpenter:

So now I'm doing mornings, which the 2 a.m. wake up call isn't great. But I'm done around noon. And I'm here. So if you hear kids yelling upstairs. So yes, so I am, I'm working at the local NBC station here. And I'm hoping to graduate by December. But again, I didn't even think this was going to be part of my research or include it. But I'm just, I think this is so fascinating and might be the future or a solution that people never even thought of that could be a solution. So you guys have the app? And then you have the virtual headset, so they so both work kind of in the same way?

Sarah Hill:

We also have a mobile app that uses just augmented reality, it's not as therapeutic but to train with a wearable. It is helpful so we sell them as kits. It comes with virtual reality goggles and EEG headband and our software. So think of us like an immersive media channel for any wearables. We have two compatible wearables, right now the BrainLink Lite EEG headband and then an Apple Watch for your heart rate. And then we also sell Healium stations, which we're installing in a lot of schools. That is like a box that you put the headset in, it cleans it and then it's ready for the next person so those virtual piece of virtual escape media, beautiful, immersive media, at the ready anytime you want, and you can get it out there but you know, essentially, it's an easy way to describe it as a media channel and it's fascinating that you are in Charlotte. And you know, I'm sure it's no coincidence, but maybe I'm supposed to do something with you. Beyond just interview because we just pitched to your Charlotte Angel group. And it's a group of angel

investors there and they passed us on. They're like, this is amazing. We know you're not from the Charlotte area. But one of our investors, Tidewater capital who invested in our round introduced us to Charlotte, because they're from that area. And so yeah, your story is amazing. Have you had any, not to get into your own personal stuff, but have you struggled with insomnia or anything like that?

Carpenter:

No insomnia, but anxiety, major anxiety. And so I really think, at first, I would say, oh, it started after the marathon bombing where I was just... every story I did when I was in the car with a photographer or on a car crash scene, like I went on Klonopin.

Sarah Hill:

Yeah I tried Keppra, all kinds of seizure medication, that my panic attacks, were not panic attacks, has to be a seizure has to be something physical. It can't be in my mind.

Carpenter:

Yeah. Yeah, it's crazy. And, you know, looking back, though, like, in my first market, we, we had a colleague that was murdered, and we had to cover that on the news. And so now that I've done this, some of this research, and I've interviewed people, and I've been looking over these surveys from journalists, I'm like, you know what, I think the marathon bombing was like, the tipping point for me where I started to go downhill from there, but like, really, it was probably building since that first experience of having just covered traumatic story after traumatic story. But yeah, it is a lot. It is better anchoring, and not having to be in the field so much, but still, now that I have kids, the constant, crazy way every child or person has died. You're not just on one story, you're like reading every single one of them. And really, you know, I've talked to people, and they said, well,

since COVID, at least they email out and say, here are your resources. But really, it's not anything beyond that. And most only get like three counseling sessions, you know.

Sarah Hill:

And here's the thing... journalists, we have the attention span of a gnat. And we're not going to go and sit and talk to someone, and you as a journalist, you are a tactical athlete, with your mind every single day. Newsrooms are not equipping journalists with mental health armor. And, you know, your stress and mental wellness can make more of an impact than if someone were to injure you physically, it's the cause of 60% of illness and disease. It's 90% of the reason why people go to see the doctor. They just don't, you know, necessarily want to admit that it's just a little stress. But, you know, in newsrooms, we sell a lot to hospitals, any area of acute situational confined stress, nurses for compassion fatigue. And it's burnout, and what needs to happen is not reactionary, and that you experience something and you have an issue, it needs to be resilience. You need to be constantly doing trainings, on your own mental wellness, learn about your brain patterns, how you can control them, because if not, you know, like me, and like you, you get back from covering a natural disaster and see a bunch of bodies. And you just, you don't have a way to process that, which leads to poor sleep and all of the different things. So I absolutely feel your pain. And I would love to see, you know, what research you found. We've approached newsrooms before and they're just kind of like, you know. They don't see it as an issue.

Carpenter:

So how do you envision that because I know, Alyssa talked about how you had done some of the research in the hospitals. And you said you have it in school. So what, I

know like Google they have like zen rooms. But is it, would it be like one where the station has it and everyone can utilize it? And when do they utilize it? Like how is it pitched to the newsrooms?

Sarah Hill:

So they can install a Healium station, it's a clean box that's in the newsroom, it's always ready. And you know, essentially, much like you would like a vending machine. People can take turns using it, I mean, ideally, what these stations should do is to get a personal kit for each person. So that before they go to bed at night, they can do some training sessions and learn on their own. But not all of them are going to do that. So the lowest barrier to entry is they get one station, install it, it has a clean box in there and a year license of healing content, we add new content every 60 days, so it never gets old. What these are waterfalls, nature based escapes magic, snowglobes, anything you can imagine, we can either create it in a game engine, or we can shoot it with real video and their stories. They're just meant to be healing stories to allow the user to unlock the healing powers that they have inside themselves. And to learn to self regulate their brain patterns and heart rate, which is something that we should have learned in kindergarten. But you know, they're not teaching that. There's physical fitness, but they haven't taught mental fitness. But they should.

Carpenter:

So when you do it, it's not like a one time thing? Like the more you do it, the more it's going to help you?

Sarah Hill:

It's like training wheels. And like ankle weights for a marathon is a good way to describe it. You won't always need those ankle weights to run the marathon. Because you kind of know how to train. And, same thing with training wheels, but every so often, you need to wear the headband, and not just experience the virtual reality. But you know, wear that headband. So that you have that self-awareness. To know when I think about this, this makes my brain patterns associated with focus calm go up. When I think about this, this makes them go down. And it takes you know a while to get that feeling. And then you don't need the headband all the time except for kind of like maintenance sessions. But the majority of ways that people use it is just to peace out in the virtual escapes. And even that can shift brain patterns associated with the stress response. So much so that VR has been shown to be just as effective as a dose of hydromorphone, boredom, or dilaudid, which is a powerful painkiller. And so you'll see a lot of these DTS or digital therapeutic companies coming up, because people are recognizing with the opioid epidemic, they don't want to take a drug, they don't like the side effects. You have the rise of the wearables, which is spatial computing environments, and spatial computing environments, where the world is no longer flat. It's becoming a place that you step into. And so there's great value and digital drugs, and we call it a digital cuticle, or a VR surgical or an AR cuticle, which is just healing, immersive stories in simplest form.

Carpenter:

And so how would you explain to someone how it's measuring your brainwaves, because sometimes that's like hard to wrap your head around.

Sarah Hill:

And people are like, that's woo woo. They're like you do what? But your brain is a muscle. And with neuroplasticity, you can absolutely learn to control different brain patterns in heart rate. So your body has electricity, your heart rate is electricity, and you have electricity coming from your brain, from your forehead and all around your scalp, that are associated with different brain patterns. An alpha brain pattern is a slow brain pattern. A beta brain pattern is a fast brain pattern. A gamma brainwave is a fast brainwave. And so we use neurofeedback protocols and particularly the protocol that we're using inside Healium measures your brain patterns associated with your focus calm or your flow. And, you know, athletes get enough flow; journalists get in a flow when they're writing. And so there's great value in learning to increase that flow among your own brain patterns. And so we have a ratio of alpha and beta activity, and the more that you increase this ratio, the more your brain patterns associated you know you see this little firefly on the screen, the more you're meeting the mark and your focus calm goes up, that firefly goes up. If it goes down or dips below the threshold, the background turns red as general feedback to you that you need to focus on an object or sensation, or work on your breath or get out of your head, those ruminating thoughts, and then you'll see that firefly go back up again. And Alyssa, I don't know how much she shared with you, but she's created a jaguar, that's a stress animal.

Carpenter:

Yes, she showed us that.

Sarah Hill:

Okay, learn to control, you know, different rainbows that you can change the colors of the rainbow. And so they're meant to be interactive. It's like a video game that you play with your brain patterns in your heart rate. It's not therapy. You know, nothing talk therapy. It's a training tool and a self regulation tool.

Carpenter:

So you said your husband's a psychologist?

Sarah Hill:

He was a psychologist, and then he got burnt out. Sure, yeah, after about 15 years in and went into commercial real estate. And so he and my co-founder, Dr. Terry, we're business partners. And now Jeff and I are business partners. But Rob was originally the one he's like, because I was struggling with taking psychotropic medication didn't work for me. It made me feel weird, weird side effects. And he's like, you should talk to Jeff. He's doing this weird stuff where you glue electrodes to your forehead. He is like, I know it sounds like really wild, he's like, but people report that it really works. And so this was, you know, 15 years ago, this was the neurofeedback and neurofeedback has been around since the 60s. But you know, it just did start to come back into resurgence. And now the headbands don't require electrodes to glue on. They're all dry sensors and EEG is being baked into the earbuds. So what we did is develop a product but also the technology that allows wearable devices to communicate with media. And we patented it and developed the system. And so while we sell a product, we also sell the IP and licensed to other companies that went to biometric that control their media for, you know, opioid chronic

back pain, suture removal, labor pain, there are all kinds of different use cases for digital tools, essentially.

Carpenter:

So do you think this is a replacement? If someone wants to go to therapy or counseling or it works with it? Or how do you view that?

Sarah Hill:

So Healium is not a replacement for psychotropic medication. And it's not a replacement for cognitive behavioral therapy, which we know is one of the best things that you can do for yourself. Think of it as an adjunct. And as a self awareness tool, it's not diagnostic in any way, the headbands only capturing on the front of the forehead as a training tool, much like you would not diagnose your heart condition with an Apple Watch. You use it as a training tool that we would then go back to your primary care physician and say, you know, they do the diagnosis. So it's a fitness tool. It's not a medical device or medical tool, although we do have clinical validation in for peer reviewed journals that quickly down shifts the nervous system and improves mood, it changes brain patterns. We have two others coming out about our augmented reality products at the end of this year and then at the beginning of next year, but certainly not meant to be a replacement and not diagnostic in any way. We're not subject to FDA clearance because this is a low risk general wellness device. It's video that just happens to have research behind it to show that it quickly improves mood and downshifts the nervous system.

Carpenter:

What do you think the future of this is? Do you think this is going to be where a few years down the line everyone's doing it, where now people are unsure of it like newsrooms are unsure of it? Is this going to be the new thing where we're headed?

Sarah Hill:

We hope; we certainly hope so. Yeah. When people think about stress relief, you know, it's like in the old days of the “Calgon Take Me Away” commercials. They're not going to take a pill; they're going to take Healum first. They're going to try that first, before they go to you know, pharmacological interventions, because we know that drugs can also make you sick and addicted. You know, there's a unique opportunity to use something that's completely drugless. And everyone has one of these in their hands. And so the rise of digital therapeutics is, you know, only going to get higher, as the research shows that some of these GTX drugs are just as effective as some pharmaceutical medications. So with newsrooms, newsrooms is a tough sell, because they're not necessarily, they haven't historically poured a lot of resources into mental wellness, other than we've got counselors. But do they really, who really goes and talks to someone, and what needs to happen is that they need to be thinking about their journalists, as tactical athletes that need mental health armor, and mental health hygiene. And just as you're encouraging everyone to wash their hands, well, they also also need to be doing some maintenance on their brain, because their brain will also make them sick. And perhaps even more so. Then, you know, stubbing your toe, or something like that, but I think newsrooms are and will continue can continue to be, and they're resource strapped too, you know, and time strapped.

Carpenter:

That's true. Well, Sarah, I'd love to stay in touch. And I'd love to know, as anything develops here in Charlotte, and anything I can do to help. I think it's amazing what you're doing.

Sarah Hill:

Thank you, I appreciate that. And have you shared your story, your own personal journey anywhere?

Carpenter:

Um, no, I haven't. I have talked about what research I'm doing. I've made a couple posts online, which I think when I finish I'll post more about it. I'm doing the paper. And then my project is basically an online resource guide. Basically, journalists' wish list. stuff from the Dart Center. But then I wanted to put a section on Healium, some things people can do. And so from some of the journalists that I interviewed, I asked them if it was okay to talk about some of their struggles. And so I put like, I don't have enough resources to do like a whole documentary, which I really wanted to do. Stacey is my chair and like you're getting ahead of yourself, like one thing at a time. But I have a little teaser video that I'm going to put at the top of this web page that I'm doing. So I feel like after I put that out there, some people would probably ask me like, we have some local podcasters here and stuff that I could see but no, I haven't really put it out there.

Sarah Hill:

Yeah. It's tough to talk about when you have a public persona. It was for me, too. And I waited, you know, until I was out of the business. But I'm glad that at some point, you know, because your story is going to help somebody else. In a similar situation, find

some of those resources. And I'll absolutely keep you posted on how it goes with this Charlotte Angel group. And keep going, and what you're doing and when you do get ready to publish, let us know because we would love to amplify that on our own social channels. And yeah, keep going, you're doing important work. And more of those stations need to know that there's, there's a problem.

Carpenter:

Well, when I put out this survey, I got such a great response within the first few days, but reading through everyone's responses was just, it was just like, oh my gosh, all these people... well, one they're all just like crying out for help. But two, they all think they're alone because nobody's talking about it. I've just thought if all these anonymous people in this survey could just talk to each other. I mean, even just talking to someone else who's been through it, I'm sure would help just to know that you're not like on an island alone.

Sarah Hill:

And combine that with the fact that they have public personas. And so admitting anything is a point of weakness for them. And it's you know, I mean, you have it in your contracts that you can't change your appearance or, you know, whatever. You know it's uh it's setting up people to self destruct really or not reach out.

Carpenter:

A guy that I interviewed gave me one of the best sound bites ... he basically said that we are all paid and our job is to present well and so that's what we do, but just because we present well doesn't mean we're okay even though everyone thinks we are but we're just so good at putting on that front you know?

Sarah Hill:

Yep. Yeah, absolutely. Well, we are kindred spirits in name and also in struggles and thank you for including Healium in your report. Like I said, nobody's ever heard about it yet. And that's one of the reasons why we're, you know, trying to get the word out and we haven't really focused on stations because for whatever reason, you know, mental wellness wasn't you know, a focus.

Carpenter:

Well if they're resistant to counseling, they're probably gonna be resistant to this.

Sarah Hill:

Yeah. Yeah.

Carpenter:

But I think it's great, and I'm so appreciative that you took the time to chat with me today. And if I think of anything else I'll shoot you an email if I think of any more questions but please keep me posted if you ever do anything here in Charlotte.

Sarah Hill:

I appreciate it ... We're in a mental health emergency right now. Just with calls the hotlines have doubled and 25% of youth and young adults have suicidal ideation I mean it's just it's a real mess out there, but yet there are resources and not just Healium but you know a bunch of different products that people don't even know exist and you know, that's the sad, the sad facts.

Carpenter:

Right, so I'm trying to combine all those so if there's any other resources or recommendations you have send them my way and I would love to have your story...

Sarah Hill:

I'll send it to you.

Carpenter:

Sarah, thank you so much. I appreciate it.

Sarah Hill:

Keep going. I remember when my kids were the exact same age spread as you and just you know trying to keep all of those balls in the air, but you made the right decision on you know switching you'll never you know regret that... and my kids you know when they were younger sometimes they resented me because I had you know, I was working full time and granted I did the five o'clock, so I got home at six but now you know, they recognize that I was just doing and trying to juggle that full time job and you know, the the kiddos, so keep going. And don't forget yourself, self-care Mama.

Carpenter:

I appreciate it. Well, thanks again. You have a good night, and we'll stay in touch.

Sarah Hill:

Yep, see ya. Bye bye.

Hayden Ristevski - WDRB Anchor/Reporter - Louisville, KY

Hayden Ristevski:

Hey, hey, can you hear me?

Sarah French Carpenter:

Yes. How are you?

Hayden Ristevski:

I'm doing great things. How are you?

Carpenter:

Good, good. Thanks for doing this.

Hayden Ristevski:

No problem ... Well, it's really admirable that you're going to school and you know, continuing your education. I've always wanted to do that... I just like literally wonder how people in our business find the time to do it. So I really, really admire you.

Carpenter:

...How long have you been in the business?

Hayden Ristevski:

I've been in the business about seven years.

Carpenter:

Talk to me about some of the traumatic events you've covered.

Hayden Ristevski:

So really like beyond murder scenes. And maybe like some fire scenes where you know that there's people involved, I really don't think I experienced much trauma on the job that had like a lasting effect until last year. Prior to that, I can probably think of a couple instances, there was a shooting on Easter in 2017, where like several women were killed. And I was assigned to go with a photographer. And when I got there, it was not a very easy scene to process in terms of who was killed and the people that were around and everybody was dressed up and like in their big Southern Baptist like Easter hats and dresses, like wailing and it was very, that was like a time in my career that I was like,

alright, this one's not going to be easy. And then a seven-year-old boy in our city was shot and killed. After his birthday party, eating a piece of cake before bed that his mom let him have like, only because it was his birthday. He was supposed to be in bed. And people were playing dice in the back alley behind his home. And a stray bullet went through his kitchen window and like shot him in the neck. So that one like I think rocked like the entire city at the time. It was at a time when Louisville was seeing its largest spike in homicides. We were all exhausted. We felt like we were constantly going to shootings. And then like this poor young innocent boy was killed. I talked to his mom first, like the first round of talking to his mom. She was only 21. Like you could like, really feel it. And I think everyone will always remember what talking about Dequante's death will be like so those were the only times where I would kind of go home and be like, wow, that was a really hard, hard day emotionally. Of course, there was other hard days workwise where you were just stressed and tired and trying to make deadline and stuff like that. But those were two days that I was like, oh, this job can get like kind of tough. Sometimes it can weigh on you, sometimes you think about it when you go home. And then last year happened. So I think it's important to talk about like when our protests started with you. On May 28th of 2020, I was supposed to be anchoring that night. And we have a very large staff at WDRB. We had crews out all over the place. And there was like some Facebook lives going on, some stuff happening downtown by like City Hall and the courts and the jail. And on these Facebook lives, they kept like growing and growing and growing. And I was like, I don't think I've ever seen like this many people out downtown before I think we need to go and my executive producer was like I don't know if I want to like pull a reporter I'm like, is there a photog? Like, I don't anchor till

11 like why don't I... It's like nine at this point. I'm like, why don't I just walk down with a photog and just get some video, talk to some people, see what's going on. It's literally two blocks away... So I walked down with my really good friend Dalton who has since left the business. And I believe that this is why, a lot of things from last year, but he's honestly the most talented photographer that I've ever met in my life. He's like a creative genius, and is so good at his job, won the photog Emmy like four years in a row in our region, like is just really fantastic. And so we walked down. And I'm like, wow, there's a lot of people here, they've got like a mega bus blocked in an intersection. The people on the mega bus are like yelling at the protesters. And what was so odd about it is that at first we were like, is this for George Floyd like in Louisville? Because it was a few days, like a week ago, like a week after or something and we're like what's happening? But then we started looking at all the signs. And they said, Breonna Taylor. And what's so interesting about the Breonna Taylor case is that Breonna Taylor was killed on March 13th of 2020. Her family didn't want to do an interview, like the police held a press conference that there was an officer involved shooting. We never heard about it again. Then now, two and a half months later, there's hundreds of people in our streets screaming her name. So somebody organized it after George Floyd's death started to pick-up some steam and some acknowledgement. And now all of a sudden, there's this massive crowd calling for justice about this young girl that was shot and killed by police in Louisville two months earlier. So we were like taken really aback. Because we were like, oh, and the story that we had heard and that we had been given was that they served a search warrant and someone shot inside, they returned fire, it went bad and someone was killed. So there was no body camera footage, which was against policy. And we did report that at the time.

But it just kind of seemed like an open and close thing. Then the protests happened. And I'm out there and they're growing and they're growing. And they're growing. We have a 10 o'clock news, because we're a Fox affiliate. So I'm like, guys, I gotta stay out here. Meanwhile, I'm in literal target flip flops, and like a Ralph Lauren dress. It's like really hot, but I'm like, whatever. It's fine. We're like, walking all over, but I think we need to get some more crews down here, like this is huge. I've never... I didn't see anything this large over the ICE protests or anything. So we come and a couple more crews around the downtown area. The police stayed away. For hours. You could see them closing streets down in the distance, but like they didn't bother them. I was surprised they let them take over the entire square of the city. It was almost like they did not ever think this would occur in Louisville, and that they really didn't have a plan. And it was like, okay, this is what they're doing. And then they got kind of annoyed that the police were not giving them interaction, and they started walking. And that's when things really started to take a turn. In terms of like the energy level of the protesters. It was really peaceful but loud. People were holding hands and chanting and had signs and all that kind of stuff. But then they started walking. So I was like, okay, we're walking. And coincidentally, it was like seven minutes before the newscast started. So I'm like holding the tripod. My photog is like walking along trying to get the shots. We're trying to figure out where to send other crews to kind of intercept these groups. And then we get to a part of downtown where there's a bridge that goes over to Indiana. And when they got there, I think is when the police were just like, alright, we can't let them like walk to other states or shut down a major interstate bridge. We can't allow that. So it's like 9:59, and they stopped at the base of the bridge. I'm like, okay, I guess that's good timing they're stopped for the live shot.

And then they start the show; they tossed to me. I start to talk... I say it's chaotic down here. And then hundreds of police cars just come wailing in. Like we laughed about it to this day that I don't understand if they were like sitting in their command center and waited for our news to start. Because for hours, nothing was happening really besides chanting. And then our newscast rolls off the top, they throw it to me and it's chaos. Like I could not even, you could barely even hear me over the mic. The sirens were so loud. The people were so loud. Then all of a sudden there's SWAT trucks and special Response Team trucks everywhere and guys in full like military gear and batanes like it happened within a split second. I was like, we are not in Kansas anymore. This is not just a peaceful march around the city. And then there was pushing and shoving and yelling and throwing the water bottles, and I'm trying to explain to our viewers for the first time who are tuning in. This has been happening all night, but it looked very different. And here we go. And that launched into I think it was almost 170. But certainly more than 150 straight days of protests in Louisville, Kentucky over the death of Breonna Taylor. So that night was the first night. And later on that night, we walked with crowds. What started as 50 turned into probably 5,000. In a matter of about four or five hours. They looped their way back to that first area I was telling you about near City Hall in the jail. And at this point, we are all crews on deck. Everybody's down there. Everyone's been pulled off their stories, we're in wall to wall, we're like bumping back and forth. And it's definitely like heated, there's been some shoving back and forth with police. There's no tear gas or anything yet. And then they pulled up a paddy wagon. And they parked it right by all the protesters. And there was a thickening in the air. And the protesters just swarmed this paddy wagon, started popping tires. While we're live on the air. One of my colleagues is doing, you

know, explaining this is happening. I'm actually standing next to him up on the steps of City Hall because we could have a better vantage point of just the sheer size of the crowd. And they're just pushing and pushing and pushing and pushing and trying to flip a paddy wagon. And we're like, oh my gosh, what are they gonna do? Well, at the exact same moment, you just hear pow, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow. And we're like was that the cops, but we can see the entire vantage point. And in a split second you look and the cops didn't move. And you're like, those were gunshots because we just know, right? Like we go to these neighborhoods, we cover these crimes. And it was like, now all of a sudden, we're in the middle of a mass shooting. And I looked down and there's a crowd running away, there's crowds running up the steps to us. There's people screaming, there's people jumping 40 feet off the side of City Hall, I run over to look if I need to do that, because you don't know where the shots are coming from. And I'm like alright I'm going to break my legs if I jump off there, I can't do that. And when I turn the corner, I looked down and I just see the people that have been hit. And I can see police officers trying to make their way over to them. And I'm trying to figure out if I can see where the shots are coming from. But they've stopped, I have no clue. And there's a lot of gang violence in Louisville. They've never been caught who was responsible. Seven people were shot. But the assumption was that someone knew where someone was, and showed up to do that, or that there was some sort of confrontation between clashing, clashing gangs in the crowd at the time. And immediately after the shooting, I'm obviously explaining how I'm processing it in my brain, but it happened much quicker. Then it's flashbangs, tear gas. So we're in the middle of a mass shooting, but now it's a protest response. And you don't blame the police officer. Because they know that several people

have just been shot, and they need to get to them. They need to figure out what the heck is going on. So it was like, so loud. And then I've never experienced tear gas before. I had a mask on because of COVID and like tried to put it over my eyes. And it was so bad. And it felt like relentless. It felt like the noise and the screaming and the panic and so I just like hid behind a pillar with my crew. We all stayed there and waited and the police came up. And I remember my eyes were closed because of the tear gas. And I was like on my hands and knees with my arms up just screaming we're with WDRB, we're with WDRB, like screaming because heavily armed police officers have turned the corner not knowing what they're going to encounter. They don't know who's just fired the shots to our knowledge. One of them heard and said, "Media?" And I screamed, "Yes, media." He said you gotta get out of here. And we're like, we know because we're like trapped on some big stairs and he's like, let me get you. So he's like screaming to all these guys and they almost like created a line and they're like, get the fuck out of here, excuse my language. So we were like running behind them, and our crew across the way actually caught us on air because they don't know where we are at this point, like we dropped out. We were live when the shots went off, and they just went back to the anchors because they did not know what happened. No one like... they're totally tap dancing, I felt so bad because nobody knew what was going on. If any of us were okay. We had like producers, and I think even some of our managers like crying, our phones were all getting blown up. But like we couldn't answer in that moment. Some of us were still dialed into IFB. And they could hear us screaming through IFB, just like really like traumatic stuff for everyone involved that night, even if you weren't out there. And so, we like, they caught me going down the steps of City Hall with my hands up with just a bunch of cops

pointing rifles at us. And it's very chilling to watch that video because I never thought I would ever be in a situation like that in my life, that I would ever have that. So the rest of the night is chaos. There's fires and tear gas, and then it starts pouring rain at like 3am. And people finally go home. And so we're all like, what just happened? Like, what on earth just occurred? That was insane. I was on the phone all night with like fellow reporters and anchors throughout the market, people that used to work in the business, law enforcement sources. Everybody was calling and checking up on me and wanting to know how things were going. I was consoling other reporters from other stations who were out there. Someone called me at 6 a.m. and was like, I'm sobbing uncontrollably. And I just need to talk to somebody who understands. We don't even like... I don't even know how she got my phone number. And I was like, okay, like, what do you need. And it was really like the coming together. It didn't matter what station you worked for. At that point. Like you just went through a crazy night. So I was up the entire next day, when you talk about trauma. I work night side, I tried to go to bed a million times. I tried to put the phone away. I have blackout curtains, I could not sleep. I have never been physically wired in that way in my life. It was pure adrenaline, it was running on fumes and I was wanting to go into work because I knew it was important coverage. But I also felt like if I have to go into work tonight, and go out into that again, I'm going to be a bad teammate. And either I'm gonna get hurt or someone's gonna get hurt. So then I had to call my boss on like the second day of what's the most important story I'll probably ever cover here and be like, I'm coming in if you want me to, but I haven't slept. So. I don't know if I'm doing much good on the anchor desk ad libbing for hours. And I think I'll put someone in danger if I go out with them in the field because I feel like I'm living in a fog

right now. He's like, go back to bed. I'll call you if we need to. I'm like, Okay. I have wonderful bosses, like the best bosses ever. I thought I would stay in Louisville for one year. I've been here for five years, because they're the best bosses ever. And it's a wonderful place to work. So the second night, I watched from home. I didn't experience it. It was worse. Groups from out of town came. The people all dressed in black, cars on fire, buildings and businesses totally blown out, Molotov cocktails thrown in, absolute sheer and total chaos. And it's funny, only one crew from the first night we're covering it. All the rest of them, like people must have been calling my boss all day being like I'm so sorry, but like I'm still trying to recover from the first night. So those two nights were crazy. Then on the weekend at the time, I was the weekend evening anchor so on the weekend I anchored seven hours straight on Saturday. I think like four and then this just became what we did. We had protest crews every single day. We had crews looking into the Breonna Taylor case every single day. And then we would rotate so some nights I'd be on the desk anchoring wall to wall coverage. Some nights I would be out in the field. There was a few other nights I think I mentioned in my email. A photographer that was like a freelance photographer and kind of a social justice activist. His like uncle is like a really well known columnist for the newspaper here, like very well known family. He was shot and killed because they created like a they called it a justice square downtown, and they created like a home base for the protests where they would have speakers and art and all sorts of barbecues, but it was always like where the protests started and ended. And then people started living in the park. And they said that they were like taking over the park to like send the message to the city, and they'll leave when Breonna gets justice. And then there was homeless people showing up like, well, if you're letting all these

people live there, we can live there too. And there was a crash, and a homeless person had gotten in a fight with someone, they tried to kick them out of the little combine area, and came back with a gun and just started firing into this crowd. Just like firing. And it's amazing... they don't... I mean, it was horrible, but only one person was hit. And unfortunately, he died there. And he was really well known. And I was there that night. So that was, that was a lot. And then it took months for the Attorney General to make a decision. And he did not make a decision that people wanted him to make. Out of all the officers that were there, only one is facing charges for firing bullets into a neighboring apartment, no one was charged for what happened to Breonna, which is what a lot of people wanted to see a different outcome. So then there was thousands of people in the streets, just groups from all over, the social justice groups like Until Freedom. And then Crump was in town and all those people. So there was really big protests. And one night, two police officers were shot. They were not like riot officers. They were one was like a major of a division like a top brass officer. And they kind of were just like at a command area. And someone just walked up and shot them both, they both survived. But that is like the most succinct version of what I went through and what we went through as a station. It was very odd. I never thought I would need an armed security guard to be able to do my job, but we did need them. We didn't wear logoed gear after like the first week. We tried to blend in as live streamers as much as we could. We would ditch the big cameras and do things on the live view app on our cell phones because we felt like the cameras made us a target. Thankfully, none of our crews or our vehicles were like broken into or assaulted on like a bad degree. But other stations like people went to the hospital,

someone got beat with his own tripod. So really, it changed the game for me of physical and mental and emotional exhaustion in news.

Carpenter:

Tell me what you did after that, that helped with your mental health. What did your station do? Or what do you think looking back on it would be good for stations to implement or do to help journalists?

Hayden Ristevski:

I think the fact that my boss just said like, okay, get some sleep, that first time took like a huge weight off my shoulder. And then throughout the protests, they were very much like, do you want to go to this? Like, can you do this today? And a lot of people said no, they surveyed, like, does having security make you feel safer, or more of a target? Just doing this? How do you want to do this? And just they were really communicative? We had like surveys put out about like, would you cover a protest during the day? Would you cover a protest at night, like they were very much trying to accommodate everyone. They did give mental health days. So everyone worked four day weeks for a while, but your four days were long days. But it really did help because everyone got a three day weekend for a while. Because it was just too much. It was just too much to try to do your regular job, work on stories that you were working on and passionate about before. And then with COVID, there was a lot of people very nervous, understandably, about COVID in our newsroom. So they instituted mental health days that were like, I don't even think they talked to their HR. I think my bosses were just like, you're gonna get Monday's off, you're gonna get Tuesday's off.

Carpenter:

What company is this?

Hayden Ristevski:

We're owned by Block Communications. So we're a small family owned, which is another reason why I have not left. Um, so yeah, my bosses have been an assistant news director / news director team for over 20 years. Yeah, it's like unheard of. And we have a female assistant news director.

Carpenter:

So do you feel like you see a difference in male or female?

Hayden Ristevski:

Yes, my boss. That's a guy is a wonderful man, is a very understanding man. That's who I called to tell me to get some sleep. But having a woman in the conversation of leadership is so evident all the time, and makes such a difference all the time. She's a badass, she's a tough cookie. She's from Jersey, but she so often brings in a perspective that like other people just don't think about right away about like safety or about workload. I don't know. She's just, she's a rock star. He's also really amazing, but I think he's the guy who has to make tougher calls sometimes. So it's a little bit easier to see it as like good cop, bad cop. They always joke about that sometimes as well. But we do this mental health days, one thing I'll say about it was it did create a little bit of an issue, because it felt like there was a section of the newsroom that didn't have to cover protests. So then the work fell on those of us that said, we'll do it. And I'm not judging my colleagues for making the decisions that were best for their safety, for their families for their mental health. But it did feel like for some of us, like, I don't see it as that I could say no, like, this is what I

signed up to do. Yeah, no, I didn't sign up to get tear gas. But I signed up to be a journalist and document history and be that first draft and be the eyes, the ears and the voice for these people. And I, there was a bunch of people who never covered it, and we had 170 days. So that meant that people that did cover them worked for like 14 days sometimes, like it did create a little bit of a not like an us versus them mentality. But like, I know that the people that did say, yep, I'm covering protests kind of resented the people who said no, I'm not comfortable covering them at all. And so that was kind of another newsroom morale thing I think they had to work through because I think that started to become clear. But you don't know if someone has PTSD. And that they experienced, I don't know, I think I would know if someone was a war veteran. But you get what I'm saying. Like, you don't know what someone's using for not covering a protest that gets violent is what I was trying to keep in mind. But, um, you know, there were times where like, someone canceled their vacation because there was word that we might get the decision. And they knew that like if they weren't there, that someone who didn't want to cover protests might have to cover protests. And I was like, well, you shouldn't cancel your vacation. Like, just so it was kind of... I'm old school, even though I haven't been in the business very long. Like, I'm old school in that like, I got to do it. I call it off the second day. You know what I mean? But I regrouped and I processed, and I figured out how I can cover it in a way that's comfortable for me. I felt like some people were unwilling to try because they were scared. And they had every right to be scared. It was scary. It was a scary situation. But I, I don't like tornadoes. I'm actually like, deathly terrified of tornadoes. How many times have they sent me out during tornado coverage, I literally am like digging my hand into the car, like, driver, you know, passenger side,

like, I don't want to get out of this car. I don't want to get out of this car. But I get out of the car. And I just felt like I wanted more people to get out of the car and just truck.

Carpenter:

I talked to Al Tompkins from Poynter, and he was kind of saying, it sounds like it'd be like the opposite at your station. But like, sometimes people don't want to cover something or it's a trigger for them. But they are too afraid to say I can't cover this trial, or I can't go to this protest. Most people in the news business are scared that they'll, well, they'll lose their job, or they'll give the opportunity to someone else. But it sounds like in your situation, though, people - it's like a rarity - almost like you have a boss who would say, okay, fine, you don't have to cover that. But instead, instead of that tension being with the boss, it's like in the newsroom.

Hayden Ristevski:

Yes, yes, that's kind of how it was, it was like they made it clear that you're not going to like, lose your job, lose opportunities, or be looked at any differently from making a good, comfortable safety decision. But then, there was some people, I mean, I think I'm being kind about it, I was kind about it, because I'm just a kind of person, even though I did get a little frustrated sometimes. But there was people who were behind people's backs, not kind about it. And we're not that kind of newsroom. Everyone really gets along well, they really value company culture. So to see something like that happening for the first time kind of made me sad, because I had been there, you know, over four years at that point, and was just like, gosh, we don't really talk about each other like this. And I see why you are because you have a right to be upset and you have a right to feel a little resentful. But now, I wonder like the repercussions of that management decision.

They were helping in some regards, hurting others, protecting in some, driving a wedge and another and I mean, I'm not judging them. They did the best that they could do. Absolutely. They, they were trying their hardest to, you know, do that. It's weird though, Sarah, like, the first weekend was like, alright, this is insane. I'm like, totally floored and in a state of shock here, running on fumes, but then you get the reps in. And it became like every other story of my business to me, to me personally, I know, I know that's not the case for others. But I was just like, alright, this is what we do now. I know how to do it now. I've been there during the worst. Give me all you got. Hopefully it doesn't get worse than that. I really can't fathom how it could... people have been shot and like, businesses have already burned like, what else? I don't know what else could happen that's worse? So let's go. Like, let's just do it. This is what we do now. I never expected it would be what we do for so many months. But it was I mean, it was so it, it was tough at first like it was that shell shock moment. But then I just adapted. I think we all just adapted mentally and just kept going.

Carpenter:

So did you have any training in your past that you feel like helped you prepare to do your job? And then also like, what kind of training do you think would help say to those that said, we don't want to cover the protests... like that will prepare you to be a journalist in any kind of circumstance?

Hayden Ristevski:

I think we didn't have any training before. We did have some seminars during about like zoom seminars about like, best practices for covering protests. And then we did get training by our security who were ex-military, like, okay, when we do a live shot, we're

gonna stand at a place where we have two corners behind us. So the photographer then me then you, then I'm going to be able to have a view for your back. And we've got two corners covered. Nobody's throwing anything at us from behind, like just things you never thought of before, like turning off your lights, don't draw more attention. It's just like, all these little things. And what to do if an angry protester comes up to you, like, our security guards would totally handle it. And then they'd be like, who are you? And they're like, oh, we're a field producer. And that was on them. Like, we didn't say like, oh, you should probably say you're a field producer. Like, I was so shocked. The first time the guy who was heavily armed with me, was like, he looked like a total normal dude. And just like kind of buff. And they were like, they were coming over to yell and he was just like, please back up, like, please back up, we're on the air, like, I need you to back up, I need you to back up. And they were being aggressive. Who are you? Who are you? I'm just a field producer. But you could tell he wasn't a field producer. Like you could tell and people were so like okay, whatever. And like would leave. So that helps. On a personal note, since you are focusing on mental health, I had a highly traumatic childhood. And I have been through therapy. So I'm very good at processing, I'm very good at working through. And I'm very good at like, knowing my limits and tapping out, taking a break. Or when I can push through. Some of those skills that I received as a child are like invaluable to me, like I won't get into too many personal details. But I mean, it's like a running joke between people that are close to me in my life. Like, I literally say the only reason that I'm not entirely messed up is because I have a super strong mom. And I went through therapy.

Carpenter:

What are those? Like, if you could break down those nuggets? Like, what are those things that you think could be transferred into journalism that journalists could take to help them?

Hayden Ristevski:

I think if journalists are struggling with a story that they're covering and assignment that they're covering, a toxic newsroom, a toxic work situation, they need to talk to someone about it. I think that oftentimes, we are really afraid to speak up for fear of retribution in news. And I totally understand that. So why not seek out like a neutral person to hash it out with to ask for advice, like maybe that person will help you put things in perspective and help you navigate it. Maybe that person will say, no, that's harassment or something, you know what I mean? Like this is not normal. This is not what you should be feeling. And, again, I'm very lucky that I don't experience that in my current job. My first station was not the same. So I think that kind of going back to your other question, like, I do think journalists need more mental health training like I think that needs to be part of what we learn. And that's okay. Because you know how it is... people will leave the business. And I feel like this just started to change over the last year with COVID. Now, when people leave the business, you're like, alright, COVID, the protests, like you're burnt out, because I'm burnt out, and I get it, right. But people have been burnt out for decades and for their own reasons, and what would we use to do? Oh, they can't hang? Oh, they're going to PR, or, like, I would hear like, chief photographers saying stuff like that. And, like, in my first market, and you know, there was the saying, in my first market, you know, like, the big tell is if someone gets a third job in news, because it's

easy to get your second job, but like, you got to be actually good to get your third job and just like, toxic crap that like doesn't help anybody. And it's what small people who don't like their jobs say to like, bring other people down, you know. And I just don't believe any of that is true. Like, if someone wants to leave news, they don't want to do news anymore. They want to work nine to five, have weekends off and spend holidays with their kids. Oh, my God, you're lazy. Like what? Like, of course they do. Like, there's like this weird thing of like, if you sacrifice more, and if you work harder, and if you are like the wolf in the room that goes after every big story, then like you deserve to be praised. And like seen as the best, it's like, what about someone who just like, is a supermom, who comes in every day at 4am, who anchors for four hours straight, who turns a package, leaves and goes and picks up an infant from daycare, has two hours, and then drives and picks up their other kids from school. And it's like, oh, my God, like, where's that instead, it's, oh, you've got to leave 15 minutes early to pick up your kid again. And it's like, I think that I'm so lucky again that I work at a station where like, there are people who have a nine to five shift, Sarah. I've never had the pleasure of working it. I do not have children. But we have a nine to five shift. And when you have a kid, you almost certainly get to move to it. And I think that's awesome. Like, there are like, schedule shifts where people work splits. My boss has let since I've been there four women go part time when they've had kids. And they've all been main anchors. For him, and I know... he's let these four women go part time. And they've all since left because they just kept having more kids. And then they're like, no, we can't do this. More like now we actually need to make a decision. But like, it's crazy. And then I think after, I mean the woman who first did it was an anchor who just retired last year after 20 years at her station, I took her job. So it's

bittersweet because I did not want her to go, but I have much better scheduling now. And she did it first. She had been there for I think about 12 years and like walked in and was the nighttime evening anchor and was like you know, I've struggled to have kids, I went through IVF. I've done all these things. And I'm pregnant now. And I can see the value in this. And I love this job. And I love being here. But I got to go part time. So she worked. She did a four o'clock news, which our four and our 10 are like our flagship because they were our first newscasts. And she's like, I'm gonna do the four. That's okay. And she worked from one to five every day, for years, for years and years and years. And that's what she retired from. And then the midday anchor used to do midday and report after, and she just did midday. And when she got pregnant, and then another. The kind of evening anchor that took over for the other one. She got pregnant then she just worked seven to eleven. Like he was just like, alright, and you know, I guess if it's how I keep all my talent that I love, and the community loves then sure. And I don't have to pay your benefits and sick time I guess. So like it was I feel like we are at a very trailblazing shop for that particular like work-life balance. And I wish more new stations would give people that opportunity because people don't really leave my station as evidenced by even me, like they just don't leave because I feel like the risk is way too high. Like do I get offers from bigger markets? Sure. Would I like to explore a little bit more probably. But like I'll be 29 next month and I don't know like I just don't want to work for a bad boss. I don't want to be in a toxic shop and like, you know, like today like I have to have my gallbladder out. TMI. And I have a surgeon appointment and they moved it to, of course, the start of my shift today. So I like went into my boss yesterday and I'm like, alright, I've got this appointment I gotta anchor the five, I'll let you know at 3:30. Like, if I'm still

sitting in this office and I'm not in the car, we should just have someone else fill-in. So he's like, why don't you just take a half day? I'm like, I don't feel like I need to, like, I don't want to make someone else read for several hours straight if they don't have to. I think you should take a half day like, what if he tells you something stressful? I'm like, I'm like, I think I'm okay. But I'll let you know, like, but just like, they're very much like they'll just like call you in randomly, like, how's everything going? And I don't know, like, is that what happens at normal places? Because now, I hear that from my friends. Like, I just I don't hear that from my friends very often that work in other stations. And it's so funny because like, you sometimes think about like, I wonder if people like wonder why I stay in Louisville, like and then literally all my friends in news are like, no one wonder why you stay Louisville. But everyone completely understands why.

Carpenter:

You think there needs to be like this cultural shift with most TV stations?

Hayden Ristevski:

I think my station would be an excellent case study for how to make it work. Um, the number one thing that's going to prevent it from happening is that it's expensive. And I know that it's expensive, because we have a 100 person newsroom and market 48. And we have six reporters paired with photographers on every shift. And we have our long newscast. So it makes a little bit of a difference. We do like to fill with local content. But it's expensive, which is why I think it's going to be hard. The reason I went to WDRB is I had anchor offers to be weekend anchors in smaller markets, but this wasn't about market size. For me, it was really about the job. I was coming from a bad situation. And I wanted something different because I almost left news. So my first job, I almost quit after a year.

And I've wanted to do this since I was in the sixth grade. I don't think I'll ever want to do anything else. Um, and I almost quit because it was such a bad toxic place to work, and that I was so stressed out all the time and MMJ and all these things. So one of the main reasons I came here is because I didn't have to MMJ, and then the other reason was the pay was \$20,000 more than any other offer that I received. And I've been promoted four times since I've been here ... So they've invested in me to stay... They know that if I get the right offer, I would leave. As much as I love it because I'm a career-oriented person, and I'm nowhere near my family right now. So they make me deals to stay. They make offers; they invest in their people. And that's expensive. They don't want to lose you, so they'll let you go part time. They don't want to lose you. So when they looked around and saw their entire newsroom hanging on by a thread, they started giving mental health days. They expanded our PTO policy, everyone got an extra week of time off in 2021. After 2020 they were like no, and everybody it went with like your accruals but as it should. It's seniority right? But like everybody got an extra week. We have a new General Manager over the last couple years who's a lovely guy but our general manager before his name is Bill Lamb. I'm not sure if you've ever heard of him. He wrote a book that might be helpful to you. I don't know why I can't remember the exact name. It has excellence in it.

Carpenter:

I'll Google it.

Hayden Ristevski:

Yeah, if you look, I can try to find it too. And he was our General Manager for 18 years. He's at FOX LA now. And he really instituted like, we are going to invest in our people, we're going to invest in our culture, we're going to make sure that we are one of the best

places to work, we're going to give people resources, we're going to give them what they need. And in return, we just are going to demand one thing, excellence. It's really easy to achieve excellence. When you feel like your boss is listening to you. It's really easy to achieve excellence when you feel like you're paid fairly. It's really easy to achieve excellence, when you've got nice gear, and clean news cars that are safe and reliable. And it's really easy as a reporter to achieve excellence, when you have an award winning photographer that's worked at your station for 28 years. And I'm not talking about one WDRB, there's multiple like that. And it's just not like any other new station in America. I really feel like it's not. And it's funny, because we are such a small company. People like don't know about us, unless you know about us. Like if you're from this region, you know about us, because we dominated every award show when all those you know what I mean? Like, people were laughing over this last year being like, our Emmy ceremony was three weeks ago, and they're like, it was the WDRB Emmys. Like, it just was, we knew it was gonna be the Louisville Emmys because of the protests. But it was the WDRB Emmys. We were nominated for 47 this year. Yeah. So it's, and we are also I mean, this also translates into business success. We are the dominant ratings leader, like absolute dominant, the third best performing FOX station in the nation. Like, it's not just like, we're gonna try to make our people happy and ask them to do well, like it didn't happen overnight. I walked into this, right. This was hard work and a fostering of an environment.

Carpenter:

I do want to ask you, because you mentioned MMJs and a lot of people were talking about that on the survey I did and about being scared for their safety in certain situations.

So I know that you had mentioned they hired security for you. You weren't an MMJ. You were out with your photographer. Talk about like how important those things are to doing your job well, but also like feeling safe.

Hayden Ristevski:

I would leave the business before I was forced to do it. It would be so sad and heartbroken, but I won't do it again. I would drive around in the middle of nowhere and no cell service with a car that would break down regularly as a 22-year-old girl in the middle of the night, in the early mornings. I felt like regularly, it was only a matter of time until the worst happened to me, and that my company would not care at all at the time. And I would carry thousands of dollars of equipment. I would run my own live shots. I think that should be absolute, like every union shop in America needs to ban that from occurring. There's not enough union shops, I think and I know a lot of people feel like their news unions don't even really do much for them. So I also think that needs to change. But I think that like part of it with your mental health, is that you're not going at it alone. Right? That makes you feel good on a safety sense. But two hands are better than one, four hands are better than two, so on and so forth. And these companies shifted to this during the recession. And don't get me wrong. The Brendan Keefes of the world, like there are some phenomenal MMJs out there. There are some MMJs that want to be MMJs. My friend Jesse is one of them. I've never met someone who was like annoyed when they had a photog with them on a shift. I'd be like, what are you doing? Stop complaining. But I think that needs to be like a personal thing. Like, there needs to be more options for both. I do understand that. It's going to be tough though, because they've already run out all the photographers who are now working better hours and less stressful

jobs and making more money. So it's really tough. But it's about like mental safety and physical safety. For me when you're talking about MMJs, like the workload is just simply too much for most people. If you're an MMJ, that gets to... there's a really good one at the spectrum in Louisville... gets to do features. And you're really good at features and you don't have to do day turns, sure go be an MMJ. Like he loves it. He's great at it. He gets all the time in the world to do stories. They win awards every year. They're fantastic, wonderful, meaningful, impactful stories. And I don't think he's that stressed out because he gets to work on his own. Like, I think there's a mechanism in which MMJs can work. But for the day to day news grind, MMJs do not work. They just don't, they don't, like people not eating lunches, going to bathrooms in fields or in the nearest gas station, they can find women pumping in gas station bathrooms or in the back of their live truck and hopefully they have a good relationship with their photographer that day, or God, I just totally discounted the women who are MMJs doing it in their news cars by themselves while they're trying to render a package like it's just absurd to me and I got lucky. In so many ways that I landed at this station where I'm not faced with that. But I wish so many more people had the opportunity because if I MMJ'd again, I would have left news. I know in my heart, I know it deep down. And now as long as I can find a position where I don't have to, I won't leave news. I believe firmly that like I'm a lifer. Like I will be, like you, I will try to figure out how to make it work with kids. Like I will work my hardest. When that day comes, hopefully if I'm blessed like that. And I'll try to work it out. And I mean, jeez, if I'm here I could but I mean, it's also like I understand it's like going part time. It's not possible for everybody, it wouldn't be possible for me and my relationship. I'm the breadwinner in my family. So that's just how it is.

Carpenter:

I love what you said like your mental health cannot be okay if your physical health is in jeopardy.

Hayden Ristevski:

Yeah. Like if you're feeling unsafe, that affects you mentally. You're feeling like someone could come up and rob you for your live view. And if you're feeling unsafe, physically and mentally, are you really writing your best story? Are you really getting into the best storytelling that you could write? Are you really being innovative and demonstrative? Are you being demonstrative in a good way? You feel like you have to look over your shoulder while you're doing your stand up. It doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense. And unfortunately, the people who make these decisions for the most part, sit in a boardroom in Texas, or New York or Los Angeles. And they don't know what it's like. A couple years ago, we did a... reporter sit with a producer for a day and producers come out in the field with reporters, shadow swaps for a few weeks, and it was really helpful. And I wish that CEOs of these corporations would go on the streets with an MMJ in Market 125. They would be shocked. They would be shocked. Then I would really hope that every one of those conversations would be, and how much do I pay you to do this? Oh, less than McDonald's. Okay.

Carpenter:

I can't think of anything else. Is there anything else you want to add? I may email you if I have any, like, follow up questions but you give me some really, really good quotes to use.

Hayden Ristevski:

Well, let me know when it's done. And I'll definitely blast it out for you. Thank you.

Fred Shropshire - WCNC Charlotte Evening News Anchor - Charlotte, NC

Sarah French Carpenter:

I'm known for forgetting to press record. I did it once with an interview. Alright, okay, so I won't take up much of your time. But first, just talk to me about some of like, the most traumatic stories or stories that were hard for you to process that you've had to cover over the years.

Fred Shropshire:

I think the very first one was my first job. I covered a story where a mom killed herself, and her three children. In a first job, working in a bureau, so not only was it you know, a first job and a first big story, but I was in a bureau. I didn't have a lot of oversight in terms of a newsroom. I was at my bureau is about 30-40 minutes away from the station. And that story, basically a mom who had a great reputation, she was kind of she I think she was low income. And she was one of she was a manager like what do you call it, she kind of was like just the manager of like this apartment complex, but it was not like a great apartment complex. It was kind of a low income apartment complex. She herself too, was low income, but she had a great reputation. Church going lady. She had a reputation for being a good mom and being ethical and all these other things. But anyway, the police started investigating her and apparently she was embezzling some money. And she had a toddler. And I think somewhere like around a three, let's see like a toddler, maybe a five-year-old and maybe a child that was not much older than that. So

kids are really young. And, you know I got, I got my hands on the 911 call. And the 911 call was her husband coming home, finding her and her, their three kids in the garage with the car running. She had laid out blankets on the floor, in the garage, they had pillows, blankets, stuffed animals, and he found his entire family deceased. And that 911 call. It was you know, it was really hard. And I followed that story for several days for like that whole week. And I was breaking new angles of that story. Stations from the Raleigh area had come down to cover that story, stations from the Wilmington area had come up to cover that story. So it's kind of a big story. And then I got a call from ABC News. And ABS News wanted to record me talking about the story. So I ended up as a kind of a reporter soundbite in one of their radio broadcasts, so it was a huge story. And there was never any I just, you know, had to process that by myself. There was never any kind of talk about it at the station or anything like that. So that was one story. And, you know, then I also covered a story where an osprey aircraft crashed and killed I think it was for four Camp LeJune Marines. And that was that was a national story. Again, 60 minutes ended up doing a story on that, but just trying to talk to family members. And those are the first big stories that I can remember affecting me for a long time.

Carpenter:

Have you ever had looking back on your career, any training that like helped you cover these events? Or What do you wish you could have had?

Fred Shropshire:

Um, no, there was never any training. It was mostly just learning from experience for me. I guess because of my temperament. I noticed that in situations like that reporters can really detach themselves from that kind of thing and it manifests in how they deal with

grieving family members. They can be very aggressive. Kind of very insensitive, that kind of thing. And so I was never taught how to process that for myself or anything like that. It was just kind of on the job, almost common sense. Consistent with my temperament and the type of person I am to learn how to deal with that and how to treat people, but also how to cope with that myself.

Carpenter:

So I know when you first got here, they sent you down to the Charleston church shooting. And then of course, this year, we had George Floyd and you had that social media post about listening to him, and you said that had a different affect on you. And then on the newscast, you talked about, you know, what you do with your ID. Can you just kind of talk to me about what it's been like, being a journalist covering these stories, but also feeling like they hit close to home?

Fred Shropshire:

It's hard. You know, part of what makes us credible, is our ability to be objective, and tell stories without putting our personal opinions in them. But also, part of what makes us good at what we do, I think, is understanding the human element of the real emotions that are involved in a story. And it's a fine line, you know, in doing your job, and not losing your humanity. And so for me, it's been very difficult, because the stories are heavy. You know, we're dealing with the past, I guess, you could say 18 months, two years, between George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery. And, you know, all these stories that have happened, in addition to the pandemic, and that the pandemic in and of itself, you know, having things shut down, working from home, not being able to travel, not being able to see people who you love, that has an effect on a person that has an effect on the entire world.

We heard about that from people. But then when you're sitting at home, and you're paying attention to these current events that involve, you know, police conduct, and that have a race, racial tinge to them. It, it makes it very difficult. And it's been very, it's been hard. It's been a lot of emotions. I've had to purposely unplug, which I do anyway. But even more so. Like, you know, I have to really watch my thought life. You know, it's hard to, you know, especially when you there's not a lot of distraction, when things are shut down. So you had to really be careful with how long you allowed yourself to, to think on those things.

Carpenter:

What are some of like the coping mechanisms you do that help you or hurt?

Fred Shropshire:

Well, fortunately, I've not been a person, you know, because I know, there have been stories. You know, like ABC's Dan Harris talked about in his career, how he self medicated, that kind of thing. That's a pretty common thing, not just in our business, but in a lot of businesses where people, they come up with coping mechanisms, one of mine, which I'm so thankful for, when I started working in Chicago, which was really early in my career, you know, I'd been three and a half years in the business. And when I got that job, and I found myself covering the types of stories that I that I described, in my first job, those kinds of stories on a weekly basis, to the point where I got used to knocking on people's doors, you know, and I can I learn how to talk to people and get people to talk to me on camera. And, you know, like in situations that I myself could never imagine talking to people with a camera pointed toward me. And one of the things that I learned really quickly is that I felt the weight of the stories on me when I would go home. And I

used to back in the day when you would carry a business card. I used to carry a business card. And I used to write stories. I used to write names of people, family members who I'd interviewed or subjects that I would collect that week. And I my schedule back in the day when I worked in Chicago, I used to be off in the middle of the week, I was a low person on the totem pole. So I used to be off on Wednesdays and Thursdays. The church I attended used to have a prayer meeting on Wednesdays. And so I would have that card. And I would pray for the people who I'd covered, people who I'd interviewed, it was kind of for me it was a way of getting the weight off of me and saying, you know what, I've covered these stories it's out of my hands. I've done what I've done, what I've been gifted to do, I'm handing it over to you, God. You know, I can't deal with this in my own strength. And so that became a coping mechanism for me, that has taken me through my entire career, even to this day. I keep a list, you know of stories that we cover. People, you know, who we talk to, even some things that I read about that I don't personally touch, I keep a list of those things. And that's what I do. And it's funny because I say it's kind of a trite phrase, you know, keep people in your thoughts and your prayers, but I find myself, like trying to convince people, I'm a praying person, I will add you to my prayers this week. You know, and that's been a coping mechanism for me. Of course, you know, I've had some people in my life who I can share these things with, I talk to if I feel like I need to talk about a story, I talk about it. And then during the pandemic, I actually started seeing a therapist. So, you know, I do see a therapist, I do talk to a person, you know, and it's about various things. It's not just about, you know, necessarily work or anything like that. But that helps to, you know, so I mean, there. And then, of course, I like to work out. So that's, that's a coping mechanism for me as well.

Carpenter:

Can I ask you, did you find the therapist through work or outside of work?

Fred Shropshire:

It was completely outside of work.

Carpenter:

So what are some things that you think might be helpful that a station could do? And you can name if we've done it, if another station you worked in has done it. Or things you think, like going through the things we've gone through, hey, this would be super beneficial if we offered something like this.

Fred:

Yeah. Well, I mean, I think I'm TEGNA has started talking about, you know, therapy sessions that were available, those kinds of things. To me, that should be standard. Like that's not, that's not exceptional. You know, that's basically making up for a gross oversight. I think in our business that's been there for all this time. We're no different from first responders when it comes to dealing with traumatic situations. So there's that. I think that newsrooms need to make a more concerted effort to make sure that a reporter is not covering 50 homicides consecutively, or covering, you know, whatever that story is a tragedy. You know, if a person covers it does a continuous round on a particular story, that person gets, you know, a breather in terms of the heaviness of the story that they're covering. We can do a lot better with that. I know that resources are stretched, I know that we have to make decisions, sometimes based on personnel availability, but I do think, you know, in a lot of newsrooms, in the markets where you're going to cover stuff like that all the time. There's no reason why you can't do that.

Carpenter:

I know you come from like a military family, so have you ever had a conversation with family members, or your dad, like, how do you compartmentalize? Or how do you deal with sad news or traumatic events all the time?

Fred Shropshire:

Well, my dad is my dad is what I would consider a pretty disciplined Christian man. But he is also from a generation that fought in Vietnam. And, you know, there are a lot of conversations that I have with him now. You know he just turned 70 years old. There's a lot, there are a lot of conversations I have with him now that I've never had with him. I hear about experiences that he's had in his life that I've never heard before. So no, not really with him. No, it's kind of I mean I think in his age has gotten mature and realizes that these things weigh on a person. But growing up, and even, you know, for most of my career, there hasn't been a ton of, there hasn't been a ton of that from my dad in particular. My mom, you know, she's, you know, she knows that these things are what they are, and she'll ask me about them. But again, she's married to my dad. I think they come from a different generation. So I don't think you get that as much.

Carpenter:

What would you say to someone like who's just starting out in the business? I know a lot of answers on the survey. I did have a wide range of like ages, but I had a lot of young people like in their 20s really struggling with covering these stories. What kind of advice would you give them from someone who's been in the business for a while?

Fred Shropshire:

I would say that investing in your mental health is just as important as anything else that you will invest in that will help you in your career, actually investing in your mental health will take you beyond your career. It'll take you in your personal life, you know, your relationships outside of work, which help you flourish in the work environment. So I would say therapy, I would also say, you know, have, really take stock of your relationships, people who are close to you, people you can talk to, you know, if you're younger, whether it be your parents or your siblings or your friends, you know that they know that you're in this type of job, or they may not, they may know that you're in this job, but they may not know that it affects you the way that it does, or that things weigh on you. So I mean, having people close to you who you can talk to is very important. I think it's just, you know, again, I think having those relationships and therapy and not getting caught up in a unhealthy behavior, because it's very easy to do when you're young, you know, because you, you can recover, if you find yourself binge drinking, you know, go on, you know, doing certain things, it's you're younger, and you can, you can bounce back a lot easier. But that's not sustainable. That's not sustainable. I just had, you know, I just read a terrible story about a former colleague of mine, in Chicago, who looking back on that situation, from the very first time I met this colleague, I knew that the balance in that person's life wasn't there. And you just can't imagine a person being able to continue life like that ... you know that their behavior is not sustainable. For a long time, you can only live life like that for so long. And yeah, I mean, people choose alcohol, people choose risky behaviors, risky relationships, and you just, you know, those kinds of, it's

not a coincidence that we see that kind of thing, you know, with people and in our business and entertainment.

Carpenter:

Well, I think sometimes too people in our business, they think, oh, they're on TV, they're happy. And sometimes those are the people that are the most susceptible. Do you think?

Fred Shropshire:

Yeah, absolutely. Because our business is based on your success level is based on how well you present, right? So you're always going to present well, regardless of how you feel, regardless of what's on your mind, your heart, whatever, you're always going to, you're good at putting on an appearance. So we are very susceptible to struggling and very susceptible to people thinking that everything is okay.

Carpenter:

Was there anything else you want to add?

Fred Shropshire:

I think you've covered it all ... Good luck with your work.

Carpenter:

Thank you so much.

Al Tompkins - Poynter

Sarah French Carpenter:

Let's just get into what are your concerns with journalists covering traumatic events and their mental health?

Al Tompkins:

Well, there's quite a lot of research around journalism and mental health; until now, it has almost been completely focused on photojournalists. But now, the studies from MIT and from Dr. Anthony Feinstein at the University of Toronto, and a few others, there is a growing body of research that says that we've only seen just the tip of the iceberg of traumatic stress in journalism. It turns out that it's not just the people in the field, who are suffering measurable traumatic stress, but also the people back at the station. So the producers, the online journalists and others, also have significant levels of traumatic stress. And, there are lots of reasons for this. One of them is because they often are the ones who are taking in the most graphic, disturbing images that never even make air or never make it online. So for example, the first video from the Afghanistan bombing this week, some of that was so graphic that had never made air. And, and remember, those journalists also are exposing themselves to these very violent images. In the next 48 hours, no doubt, we'll see death and destruction from a hurricane. And somebody is gonna have to look at that video. But it's not just looking at video. It's also listening to it with your headset on, so it's going straight into your brain. It's writing those stories, it's writing the headlines, it's talking about them. It's pitching them, it's following up on them. It's the repetitive injury, right? So it's like working on an assembly line where you get injured over and over and over again, from the same injury, the same thing happens with traumatic stress. So it's not the one time you do the George Floyd story. It's the seventh time you've done the George Floyd story, right? It's repetitive injury. And every time you do that, now, compound that with the fact that you yourself, have experienced some traumatic stress. So let's just take your certain situation. So you covered the Boston

Marathon bombing. And then when you see the bombing stuff from Afghanistan, guess what, whether you like it or not, you've experienced bombing carnage. So you get reinjured. Sometimes you don't even know it. But you're seeing images you've seen before. It's a reinjury. It's very similar to journalists who have been sexually abused covering a sexual abuse trial. Think of the reporters in Boston, for example, who were sexually abused by priests and covering the Catholic priests scandal. So it's, it's the misunderstanding or the lack of understanding that we've had until now that keeps us from knowing the depth of this. There's brand new data out from Oxford, that shows that the measurable stress and trauma that journalists have covering COVID is similar to first responders. And I like to say that I think journalists are often not just first responders, but also last responders. You don't just leave the scene with the patient. You're still there. You're still there for the four o'clock, for the five o'clock, for the six o'clock, for the 11 o'clock. Oh, and by the way, you're there for the funeral. You're there for the memorial. You're there for the trial. I mean, you keep doing it right over and over and over again. And very often, particularly during the pandemic, the difference between you and other first responders is they almost always work in teams. But journalists in the last year and a half and very often worked with no other support, nobody really to talk with about their experiences. And that's, that's troublesome as well. So there's just a sort of a witch's brew of ingredients here that, that lead up to that. There's one other thing worth noting. And that is the newest research from MIT from a researcher named Tara Swart, who's a neuroscientist at MIT. The newest research shows that younger journalists suffer traumatic stress at a greater level and recover less well than older journalists. And that's really interesting. So Tara Swart data seems to indicate that younger journalists are

suffering at a very high rate. And it's not because they're too tender. It's because they come to this with a very different context. They understand loss and trauma differently than an older person who's seen and done a lot of things. It's the difference in life experience. But here's the other thing that Tara Swart found. She believes that what you can describe in these younger journalists is mostly not PTSD, which tends to be incident related. But instead, it's probably moral injury, which is more similar to what soldiers often feel when they don't believe in the cause that they're involved with, for example, it has more to do with guilt than it does to do with shock. And, and reporters, it seems to me, it increasingly is true. I think that we wonder, why am I doing this? Why do I go out there and put myself in front of people who hate me, who call me fake news. It's not worth it, what we're doing isn't worth it. And moral injury works that way, when you think that the harm that's being caused, is greater than the good that comes from it. What Tara Swart found and what others now have supported is that the elixir for moral injury is if you believe that your work matters. So Tara Swart, and others Dr. Anthony Feinstein at the University of Toronto has also found this that if you believe that what you do matters, you will recover fast. From moral injury, what you're doing is just for ratings and clicks, and shares and views, and that I think is encouraging. But we don't spend enough time in our news operations to talk about the value of what we're doing.

Carpenter:

So what do you think needs to happen with training? Do you think that needs to be a course on a college level? Is it something that every TV station needs to have? Or if you become a new employer, you go through this training, to prepare to cover traumatic events?

Al Tompkins:

Well, all of the above, it's not an either or it's a nonstop it's sort of like saying, well, when do you learn about ethics? When do you not learn about ethics? Right? It should be a part of your everyday conversation, to say, look, let's pay attention to what's going on here. So we know the cost of not doing this, we can see it very clearly, for example, in the military, what happened after the Vietnam or Korean wars, right? Nobody ever talked about traumatic stress after World War II. And yet, you know, we all had grandfathers or uncles, or in my case, father, who was traumatized by the war where we didn't talk about it. They were shocked, what they call they were "shell shocked." No, they had actual mental illness because of what they experienced. Right? They experienced horrific things. Let's not pretend that it wasn't. And it seemed like we didn't learn anything. For decades, until we finally in this last engagement for Afghanistan and Iraq, we started seeing suicides go through the roof. And we started saying, well what's that about, what's going on here? Do you think we could actually talk about what's going on here and actually do something? Or are we just gonna let this keep going on? And it seems as though we finally reached a place where we can talk about mental illness without talking about weakness. And, and honestly, that's the breakthrough. The breakthrough is not seeing mental illness as a weakness, any more than you see kidney disease as a weakness, right. It's a disease, it's a condition. And until you recognize it as a condition, then you're going to see it as some sort of moral weakness or, or something. In journalism, it shows up mostly as young people who don't talk about it, in women who don't talk about their stress. And so you and I both know that if a woman were to say, you know, I'm really kind of stressed out by what I saw, if you were to say, wow, you know, I covered the

Boston bombing, and I'm really kind of freaked out about it. Oh, you poor thing. We'll let the boys cover that. And so what do we do? Well, we make it okay for anybody anywhere to talk about their concerns, to talk about their experiences, to say, look, it's normal for you to have seen horrific things and are bothered by it. Let's talk about it. Right. So we don't vilify the people who are willing to stand up and say that they're suffering from it; it's a cultural thing, Sarah. It's a cultural thing that we have to do in our newsrooms, to say, it's not weakness for you to talk about your mental health any more than it would be if you had a kidney disease, right.

Carpenter:

So what can managers do to set that precedent in a newsroom?

Al Tompkins:

Starts with awareness. It always starts with awareness, to say, we're putting our people in some pretty hazardous places. Now, when I started out as a reporter, way, way, way back, people were generally glad to see you. Oh, it's that guy from Channel 6. Wow. You know, that's pretty cool. And now, journalists, anywhere, often are met by fake news, you're a liar. What are you doing here? It's all right? And so it starts with recognizing what a very difficult world journalists are working in right now. It's a divisive world that's not necessarily welcoming of you being there. And let's recognize that. Let's be sure they have the security that they need; let's be sure that we're not sending them out alone to dicey situations. And when they raise concerns, let's listen to those concerns. That's a big piece of it. Another piece of it is to recognize that people generally aren't going to come to you and say, I'm having problems. Quiet doesn't mean okay. And

newsroom leaders have to recognize that part of their job is not just to give critiques about your live shot, but also to ask how you're doing.

Carpenter:

I put out that survey and got, like, over 50 responses in the first day, I was pretty overwhelmed with all the responses. But when I was glancing through them, I haven't been able to go through all of them yet. I was surprised how many people didn't know how to access their resources through their job, or it took multiple times for them calling to get ahold of a counselor if they were trying to do it through work. What do you think should happen with mental health services for TV stations and newsrooms?

Al Tompkins:

Well, first, I mean, it's great that they have services, right? It's great that they offer something good for them. Then check in with people. Are you having problems? Do you need help with this? Look, I'm here to walk you through it. You know, you can remind people... look, in the last three weeks, nobody has accessed this. I'm sure that there's a reason that you are not doing it. Talk to me, tell me what would make it easier, right? Keep reminding people, constantly remind people, this is something... this is not a luxury, this is something we've paid for. Right? It's no more luxury than the electricity and the water that comes into our building. This is something we paid for, and we expect for you to use it. You know, I know trucking companies, there's a trucking company called Averitt Express that has mandatory couples counseling every year for married couples or couples who drive for their trucking company. And, and at first, it was like, Oh, no, no, no, no. No, no, here's the thing. This is not optional. If you're going to work for us, then we need for you to do this. And so they just said, look, we're gonna pay you for every

moment that you're there. We're going to, we're going to, we're going to be sure that this isn't an imposition on you. But it's really important that you, that you have a good solid family life because you're going to be dangerous on the road if you don't. Isn't that interesting? JB Hunt and Averitt Express both have the lowest accident rate of any trucking company in America and really, both of them spend enormous amounts of time talking about mental health and family relations. It's so important. I think it's so cool.

Carpenter:

I was shocked going through this thing where I said, did a manager reach out to you after covering a traumatic event? And just going through said nothing, nothing. What did a manager do after you covered... Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing. How do we change that?

Al Tompkins:

I would say this one thing. And that is it's a tricky thing for a manager to do to call you and say, how are you doing? Because it might imply if I don't have a relationship with you, it might imply that I think something's going on with you. So building relationships with people before there's an emergency is always better. Right? You have to know that your boss actually cares about you. So I actually had this conversation about two weeks ago with the vice president of the Institute where I work at Poynter, who's in charge of Finance. So she is basically accounting and finance and budgets and stuff, right? She sent me an urgent message or sent me an email about five o'clock on a Friday, two weeks ago, and said, are you around? And I thought, Oh, man, what have I done? What's going on? Because what typically happens on Friday afternoon, somebody gets laid off, somebody gets fired, you know? So I thought, first of all, why is this person calling me I haven't

talked to her in months. And so I'm thinking it's going through my mind, what are the 100 awful things that could be going on? And I said, look, I'm teaching right now. I'll get back to you. But what's going on? She said, it's not urgent. Just wait till Monday. I said, there's no way. There's no way. I'm gonna wait till Monday to talk to you. Call me. You emailed me on a Friday afternoon, you be near a phone by God. And so she called, she says, What, what's the problem? And I said, the problem is, I've obviously done something awful, or you wouldn't be calling me. What have I done? And how do I make it right? She says, It's none of that. She says I think that we underpaid you, and I just caught it. And I thought, I said, you've never ever, ever called me to say you've underpaid me. Never. And she said, oh my god, you only hear from me when it's bad news. And I said, Yes. That's the only time I have ever heard from you in the 23 years I worked there. And she said, why that's terrible. And I well, it's just real. So to bring it back to your question. When have you ever had conversations with people? Right? When have you ever had conversations with people? Do they know that you absolutely care about them as a person, not just what they can do for your newscast?

Carpenter:

Talk to me about you and your wife. I don't know when you guys started doing these speaking engagements. And I was trying to go hear her speak when she was here. And then it got cancelled right before the pandemic. I would have loved to have seen that. But talk about how you guys started doing that, and how you've seen it grow, and the importance of it.

Al Tompkins:

About five or six years ago, the State Department asked us to do some things for some journalists who were working in conflict zones in Africa and Eastern Europe and so on. People who were involved in really violent coverage of various things, and they were just a wreck. The first time we ever had that conversation, I asked how many of them have been physically assaulted, you know, in the last two years or something. Every hand went up. I mean, if you've been robbed, every hand went up. How many of you have been, you know, captured in jail, every hand went up. It's like, Oh, my God. So we started having these conversations with these journalists, these international journalists. And then we for whatever reason, I don't remember why NABJ called and said, would you do a workshop for us? And I said, sure. So we did this workshop and there was a journalist in this workshop, this NABJ workshop, who had covered Pulse, then covered... She was attending a wedding in Las Vegas. I don't think she was part of the wedding party, but she was attending a wedding in Las Vegas. They were at the Four Seasons Hotel, which is across the street from Mandalay Bay, where the shooting occurred. And when the shooting happened, she got a phone call from the desk. It was a Saturday, she got a phone call from the desk. And they said you're in Las Vegas right? Right. Are you anywhere near the shooting? She says, yes. They said could you cover it? She was there for a week. So she started immediately started covering this mass shooting that was literally across the street from where she was, I mean, actually across the street where she was. And then not long after that she covered Marjory Stoneman Douglas. Now, she covered all three of these major, one after another after another, major events and we started talking to her. She talked about this openly in this workshop that we're doing.

How is all this affecting you? She says, the one thing I can't stand is the smell of burning rubber burning tires. Anytime I smell burning tires. That smell just, it just wrecks me. Why? She said, you know, it was the smell of those tires screeching up to the scene in Las Vegas, the smell of those police cars screeching up to the scene, the smell of that burning rubber. She said I can't get it out of my head. And why did they end up sending you to Marjory Stoneman Douglas? She said, Well, because I was in the newsroom, and they said, wait, you've covered this stuff before you know how to do this, go do it. And she said, so it's like a punishment. If you have any experience, they send you back. Well, we sort of recognize then that there were a lot of people like her, like you who have seen some really awful things. And there was no place for them to process it. So the fact that I've got 46 years of journalism, and she's got 40 something years of therapy seemed right for us to say, maybe we have something to offer. So we started doing what we had been doing internationally domestically. And we did workshops, first for IRE, investigative reporters and editors. We expected maybe 50-75 people at the convention might show up, you know, in our session we had a double convention hall with standing room and in the hallways for it. There's probably 1500 people in the room. Did the same thing for SBJ. Did the same thing at RTNDA. Did the same thing at NABJ, NAHJ, over and over and over again. And so, then newsrooms started calling us to say, you know, our people saw you an IRE or our people saw you at SBJ or something, we need this. So we just finished doing 18 newsrooms for NBC O&O's... Boston, New York, LA, California, San Francisco and so on. We just came back from doing Grey Communications, which is the second largest owner of television stations in the country. We just did all of their news executives two weeks ago. This morning, I got a note from TV station in Portland,

Oregon. And just while we've been sitting here, I just saw a note from SBJ, wanting me to do something at their convention. I mean, every hour, almost of the day, we have this conversation, the conversation I was having, just before I was coming on with you was with a television station in Louisville.

Carpenter:

We need to get you at TEGNA. Or I want to sign up for something online.

Al Tompkins:

I would definitely do that. I mean, I think, you know, I think everybody needs to be having this conversation in, in intimate ways, not, not in, you know, I'm just going to turn on my zoom and everybody everywhere can do it, it needs to be at a safe, intimate place. So station, by station is the way to go. Because you need to be around people you can trust. And that, you know, feel like you're not going to be judged. Right. So it's essential, I think. But so yeah, I mean, one of the things we always tell people is, it's not therapy, what we're trying to do is give you tools, we're trying to give you awareness. So we say it's awareness, knowledge and skills, we're going to tell you things you don't know, we're going to help you understand things you do know, and we're gonna give you skills to deal with that and do something with it. And it's not therapy, but it may lead you to be aware that you need therapy. It may also, some people say that what we do for them is give them comfort that what they're feeling is normal. And it is normal, it would be I would be far more worried if you endured all the things you endured and felt nothing. That's a sign that you have shut down. And that's even worse. So one thing that I think comes from knowledge is to understand that what you feel is completely understandable. I mean, of course, it says that you're normal that you feel these anxieties. You've been through

unbelievable amounts of things in the last year and a half. You've had a pandemic, a racial reckoning, a political season, unlike any in 150 years. You know, you've been stuck at home with your kids trying to do your work while your kids can't go to school. You're worried about your health, you're worried about your parents health, you're worried about I mean, come on, how many more things can we throw on you? And now you got hurricanes coming up your back door? And, you know, it's like, come on, what could I possibly do to make your life worse? And yet, I believe that a decade from now, when we're running the history of 2020-2021 and journalism, I think that we will compare quite favorably to the worst days of the Civil Rights Movement coverage of the early 60s when real heroes of journalism emerged. I think that the work that journalists have done by and large through the pandemic has been heroic. I mean, if I had told you a year and a half ago that you would be producing an anchoring and reporting from home via zoom, you'd say you're nuts. You can't mean that. You can't run a TV station from your living room. And yet you did. And yet you did. And by the way, you did unbelievably well, so well that people hardly even notice that you weren't in the studio, and you're going like, Oh my God, we pulled this off. We actually still told stories that changed lives, saved lives. It's unbelievable what you've been able to do. And I think that we're too close to it to see that right now. We're really too close to it. But a decade from now we're gonna look back at that and go, whoa, whoa, whoa, what just happened?

Carpenter:

Well, I love what you guys are doing. Thank you so much for taking some time today. I may email you if I have any follow up questions as I gather more of my research and stuff. But is there anything else you want to add on the topic?

Al Tompkins:

No, but I'm here so I'm not going anywhere. You got my number. A friend of my daughter's is a friend of mine.

Reverend Sidney Tompkins - Licensed Psychotherapist

Sarah French Carpenter:

Thank you so much for doing this. I actually interviewed Mr. Tompkins on Saturday. And then I pitched to my bosses to have you guys do your training for our TV station. So I think my GM is reaching out to him. But I'm studying journalists who covered traumatic events for my final project for grad school. I went through the Boston Marathon bombing. And then I had a photographer that killed himself. So I've really tried to focus on what resources do journalists need, what training do journalists need. So a lot of my papers leading up to trying to put together this final project has included a lot of the articles and stuff that you and your husband have written. So thank you for everything that you've done with this.

Sidney Tompkins:

You are so welcome. So it's been heavy lifting, actually, there is so much stress, and so much trauma, that it's tough. It's tough.

Carpenter:

I put out a survey, and I'm trying to go through them all and just reading through everyone's experiences. It's so heavy. I think I didn't think about that when I started doing this, but, um, you know, one thing I noticed, too, I guess, for me with the marathon bombing, you know, I was really focusing on these big traumatic events, wanting to talk

to journalists who covered big traumatic events. But from reading the surveys, the ones I've gotten through so far, I've noticed, really, it's not the big, traumatic event, always. It's covering your 30th homicide in a row.

Sidney Tompkins:

That's right. And recognizing that post traumatic stress for journalists is essentially missed. Because you cover traumas, often multiple traumas every day.

Carpenter:

So how do you train someone who... it just comes with the job, to be able to still do their job, but cover just bad news on a daily basis?

Sidney Tompkins:

I think one of the biggest challenges, one of the biggest challenges for people is to recognize that in order to do the work that you do, you have got to take better care of yourself. Recognize, I mean, what I say all the time, is you better know your backstory. Because if you... I mean, the two particular points that I think are very telling for journalists are that you are most often experiencing vicarious trauma, and moral injury. And vicarious trauma is just saying that it's very easy to slide into the position of the person or the story that you're covering. Whether that's I mean, we've heard over and over for covering stories of, for example, we could go back you're talking about the Boston bomber, which is just awful. Go back to Sandy Hook. Think about a journalist who has small children covering that story and what that would feel like if you had small children, and you're covering a story where needless, senseless crazy killing of small children is, is what you're doing. All of these drive-by shootings that I mean, there have been several within the last handful of months where someone, a drive-by shooter will kill the child or

the baby in the backseat instead of whoever it is that he or she is targeting. Unless that is the target. Crazy.

Carpenter:

Is there training? Like what are the key things that journalists should do to prepare to cover events like this? And then what can they do after the fact?

Sidney Tompkins:

Well, as I said, I think one of the most important things is to know your backstory, because when you know your backstory, who you are, what you've been through, if you're a person who's been pulled... your black, you've been pulled over by police, you know, any of those things that you have experienced in your life, like physical, emotional, sexual abuse, whatever, all of those things have the potential to rise up on any given day in the work that you're doing. So recognize what might trigger you to begin with, is that, for me, that's, that's knowing what your backstory is. And then also recognizing that you've got to get in the habit of common sense, good sense about taking better care of yourselves, particularly in this last year and a half or moving on to two years now, with journalists, and many working at home, many working alone at home, not having the support of staff, and colleagues that you are accustomed to working with cuts-off for many people the opportunity to be able to talk about what's going on, in your day to day with someone else who understands it, as opposed to going home, and talking with your family, with your spouse, with good friends or whatever. But they really don't, much of the time, do not have the ability to be able to understand what the gravity of what you might be feeling and experiencing on a daily basis. Exercise, sleep, drinking a lot of water, paying attention to what you're eating, you know, making sure that you're

not over indulging in alcohol, or, you know, coffee, to just really be able to take good care of yourself, and seek help when you need it. Or if you need it.

Carpenter:

So what's your advice? Say, you know, your backstory, you were raped, and you have to cover a trial, or you're a parent, and they send you to Sandy Hook? How do newsrooms handle that? Do you go and see, like, let me see if I can cover that. And I know I'm gonna maybe have to talk to a counselor afterward or tell your manager, I don't think I can cover this even though we know how journalists are, they don't want to like miss out.

Sidney Tompkins:

Because you have that experience in your backstory does not mean that you're a bad person to cover it. It doesn't mean that. It can mean that you are absolutely the best person to cover. But be able afterwards to recognize, I mean, you recognize when you're going in that this is not going to be an easy piece of work. But then after to recognize the need to be able to destress to be able to let down and to just absolutely allow yourself to experience what you're experiencing in a way that can be healing, as opposed to let's take a second anchor, for example, as opposed to stuffing it in holding it tightly because you know that you have a job to do and because you've got to present this picture. As you're delivering the news that says that, you know, life is under control or whatever. But then not to be able, not to take the time to let go and respond to that after. It's nuts because what you don't deal with continues to just build up inside of you and those things don't go away. Stress is in many health issues is the number one risk factor, like heart disease, it's right up there at the top heart disease, cancer, all of these things have a link to not dealing with the stress in your life.

Carpenter:

So I know you guys do training for journalists, but how do you offer training for managers? And how important is that? Because I know a lot of this and maybe if you need to take a mental health day or something is going to fall on how your manager runs the newsroom too.

Sidney Tompkins:

Yes, we do. Yes, we do. We have completed a huge piece of work with all of the NBC owned and operated stations along with Telemundo. And with each of those areas, we each time we will do that we would also.. I mean, these were in regional groups, like there might be three or four different big cities that would come together, or two or one or whatever. But also the managers participate in these groups. I mean, they participate in the same format that we do. And then a number of times, we take an opportunity with them afterward, to debrief and talk through with the managers, because every manager is going to gain insight about what's going on in his or her studio, in his or her TV station, in his or her whatever. Particularly if people are comfortable enough and feel safe enough to be able to talk, and we have had that experience over and over and over again.

Carpenter:

What else can managers do? I noticed in a certain survey that I did a lot of when I asked like, what are your mental health services? Or what did your company do after a traumatic event that you've covered? And almost everyone just said, we got an email that says here's a link to your services, or here's a link if you need more help, and then that was the end of it.

Sidney Tompkins:

That's pretty cold and unfeeling. That's the opportunity for a manager or for the news director, or whomever to be able to relate. We're all about.. people are geared for relationships, to be able to relate to staff, to be able to relate in such a way that says, you know, if you need to take time off, let me know, let me know. And we will be glad to make whatever accommodations we can make. But also to be able to take time to reach out to individuals. It's like if I know that you have small children, and you're getting ready to cover a really tough story involving something horrific that happened to a small child, I'm going to want to touch base with you after to see how you're doing. It's about listening, learning to listen and relate with each other. And that goes both ways.

Carpenter:

I don't know if this has come up in your training or working with other companies. But I can imagine that some people, you know, they don't want to use their PTO or vacation days for a mental health day. They want to save it but the company doesn't necessarily have like a paid Mental Health Day. So then how do companies tackle that? Because of course, so many companies are just worried about their profit or the bottom line, you know?

Sidney Tompkins:

Yeah. I think that it's important for people to recognize, okay, you get a certain number of days. And generally, companies do not separate vacation days from sick days. Usually, it's 10 days the first year, 15 the second or whatever it is. But to be able to recognize that it's just as important to you as a person who feels the need to take off. I mean, you're feeling really fritzed on Sunday, and you've just got to have a break. You need a mental

health day. Take it. That's more important in many respects than being able to take a vacation.

Carpenter:

What can you do say like, I look back at my friend, Neal, and I'm going to talk to his wife too about like, what she thinks might have helped. But like, he would have never asked for help. He just like suffered in silence. You know, he was a photographer. So it's just, he just went through it. And they sent him to the Marathon bombing, Sandy Hook, like everything, name it, and they sent him to it. So what do you do for the person who is not going to ask for help or say I need a day off?

Sidney Tompkins:

Well, I think that, that is part of the relationship that you develop with each other at the station, okay, or in the office space, or whatever it is. Because, I mean, for example, one of the best, one of the best illustrations that we had of that was that one of the TV stations .. one of the newsrooms that we were talking with one person and this, we've had examples of this over and over and over again, where one, one person will recognize that co-worker, has just done all of the things that you just said, your friend Neal did. But after each one of them let's say for that co-worker who saw that and who recognized what he or she was going through to be able to touch base. Gawlee, what you just did was really, that must have been really difficult. How are you doing? What are you doing to take care of yourself? Now? My goodness, how do you keep this up? I mean, whatever it is, but to be able, in that way to ask questions, open-ended questions, not closed ones, not like, are you having a good day? But to be able to phrase it in such a way that you're actually taking the time to listen to the response?

Carpenter:

I noticed too, in the survey, you know, I asked people, how do you think covering trauma has affected you? And they said, well, it's made me more understanding, you know, but then they also said, it's also made me desensitized. Words like that.

Sidney Tompkins:

And I don't know if Al talked to you about that or not, but that's dangerous. Then that is absolutely a sign that you need some help. Because if you have sown yourself up so that you're not affected by the work that you're doing. That's, I mean, as he says, because he would be the journal of journalism half of this team. That's a real sign that you need help, because you're likely to fall into bad habits and, and not do justice to the work that you're doing.

Carpenter:

I also, you know, asked about covering trauma, if it made you feel like something bad is always going to happen to you. And a lot of people did say yes, like, they thought, well, when am I going to be in the car crash, or my family is going to be in the car crash? Like, what do you do? What do you say to those people who feel like that?

Sidney Tompkins:

Well, I think it's important for people to recognize that the vast majority of us are able to drive wherever we drive every day and not get in a wreck. I mean, all of those things is like, for me, the ability to focus on the moment that you're in, as opposed to look at them online and say, you know, a terrible thing could happen tomorrow, or this afternoon, or whatever it is, is not helpful. I mean, it's helpful to be aware of what's going on, but not hyper vigilant about what could happen.

Carpenter:

I was also surprised how many people talked about how they really struggled with talking to loved ones or people who had just lost loved ones. They felt really bad about it. How do you talk to someone like that and, and, you know, you feel their pain, especially like you said, if you're a parent... But that's also part of the job. So how do we do that and keep, you know, our mental health intact?

Sidney Tompkins:

Talk about it to be sensitive, certainly, as you are to be sensitive to the issue that is involved, that is revolving around the person that you're interviewing. After, once again, it's so important to be able to have someone that you can talk to... a colleague or a friend or somebody else, but just to write it down. And I've told people this for years, you know, write it down, if there's not someone that you feel comfortable talking with about this, but just get it out. It's about getting it down and out of you.

Carpenter:

I'm so appreciative of you taking the time to do this. Thank you.

Sidney Tompkins:

You take care and what a blessing that you're working on your masters in this area, because, golly, it's so needed. It is.

Mike Walter - CGTN-America Anchor

Sarah French Carpenter:

Hi.

Mike Walter:

Hey there. Can you hear me okay?

Carpenter:

Yes, thank you so much for doing this. I really appreciate it.

Mike Walter:

You bet, you bet. So you're from Arkansas?

Carpenter:

I grew up in Arkansas ... I went to Mizzou for Journalism School. Then I worked in Hartford, and I was in Boston for about seven years so I was there during the Boston Marathon bombing. I can't remember if I told you that in my email but now I'm in Charlotte, North Carolina. I decided to go back to grad school, and it's all online. But you know, I didn't know a pandemic was about to happen, my kids are going to be out of school and everything. But after covering the Marathon Bombing, I just realized the lack of resources that we had, and then my photographer that I worked with, on the day of the bombing, he ended up killing himself. So I interviewed his wife for part of this research because she said, you know, he was really struggling but was too ashamed and didn't want to ask for help. So anyway, I decided to make that my focus for this final research project, I have a paper and then a project. This is basically going to be a compilation of like resources that journalists can use and maybe based off these interviews and surveys that I've done what journalists suggest or would like to see their companies do, so I came

across your documentary and I watched it and I loved it. So I'm super grateful that you were willing to chat with me.

Mike Walter:

Oh, sure. I think this is fantastic that you're doing this because, you know, you went to Mizzou, it's a great school, I went to Cal State Northridge not necessarily as esteemed as like Mizzou or other schools, but, no discussion whatsoever when I was in school, about trauma and how it might impact you. And I just think that, you know, that's a problem. And I think, you know, especially... I know this is kind of getting off topic, but I have a good friend of mine in Australia who just got off Twitter, because she's gone through a lot of traumatic events, and she covered the Boston Bombings and a number of other things. And Twitter was just getting to be trauma, traumatizing, you know, just all the hounding, and so I just think that there's a lot of trauma out there for journalists, and probably more than actually when I first got in the business. So I think it's a really important topic.

Carpenter:

So let me ask you, did you think about this before 9/11? Were there specific stories that were affecting you or no?

Mike Walter:

No, in fact, I've talked a lot about this that, you know, to the point about the photographer you were talking about, I was really kind of ashamed of my reaction. You know, I remember there was a public information officer from the Air Force who came up and said, I heard you witnessed the jet going into the Pentagon, the FBI wants to talk to witnesses. And as you know, most of the people left the scene. Would you cooperate?

Can you? Like I handed over your information, would you be able to talk to the FBI agent about this? And so naturally, my answer was like, of course, I want to help in any way I can. But that's not what came out of my mouth. I mean, I think I may have gotten one or two words out, and then I just started sobbing uncontrollably. And then I was just kind of embarrassed because here's this buff guy in a uniform and I'm like a babbling little baby there sobbing. And so then I was like, oh, this is completely unnatural. You know, I was in Somalia, and I've covered some of the worst events ever and just kind of pulled out my resume here, all the terrible traumatic things and I'm not like a baby like this. And it was amazing. His reaction, I think, you know, it kind of, I think it kind of tells a story about the military versus journalism. He stopped me mid-track and just threw his arms around me and started hugging me and he said, look, this is perfectly natural, you're in a state of shock, you just witnessed something really horrific, don't be ashamed, you know. And I think, you know, in my documentary I talked about my brother, you know, coming back and having PTSD after Vietnam, there was none of that. And now I think, you know, soldiers, people in the military, are a lot more acclimated that trauma is a way of life. There's training there, I think for police and firefighters, paramedics, you know. It's a piece of the puzzle, too. But journalism, no, and I think we've kind of got to get on track. Because, you know, it's interesting, there's a guy I worked with, and I know, I'm kind of digressing. But I think it's interesting because you brought up a photographer, and there's a photographer I worked with, in Washington, DC, after my documentary came out, there was a therapist in Miami who wanted to come up and talk to me about, you know, the film and about trauma. And she was doing some research on this too. And I said, if you want, you can come out on a story, you know, I'm going out with the

photographer, and you can actually see how things are done in a newsroom, because obviously, this is foreign to you. And so on our way out, you know, I said, we're gonna stop and have lunch, because the first tenet of working with the photojournalist is you got to feed them, otherwise, they get grouchy.

Carpenter:

That's a way to make a photog, like you... get them coffee or food.

Mike Walter:

Yes, it's like key. So we're at lunch, and she starts talking about her research and everything. And he was actually from Bosnia, and his first usage of a camera, he had a choice, he could either get in the military, or he could go to the front lines, and shoot, you know, what was going on. And he became a photojournalist. And he just stopped mid-track. And he said, look, the first thing you need to know about the TV news business is, there's inside people and outside people. Inside people send the outside people, and the outside people see all the horrible stuff. And then the inside people tell them, you have to tell the story in a minute and a half, and they have no clue. He goes until you get through to the inside people, what you're doing is pointless. And I think there's you know, it's really profound what he said. And it's really true. I think a lot of times you get managers who are so busy, you know, how do we get our ratings up and this and that, they don't even think about the harm that's being done, or even to take the pulse of colleagues, you know, how are you dealing with this? And I think your story is emblematic of that.

Carpenter:

Yeah, when I talked to Neal's wife, she said, he had covered all these events, just happening around Boston, and then had some time off. And they were having lunch. And

it was right before Christmas, they had just had twins, they're about to have their first you know, family holiday together. And they called they said, something happened in Newtown and you got to go there. And we don't know how long you're going to be there. And so he went there and so she talked about kind of like what you said about how it was always, never a second to process anything. Just moving on to the next, the next, the next. So I don't know what you think TV stations and companies can do that would be beneficial for journalists who are covering unfortunately, traumatic news and events all the time?

Mike Walter:

I think, you know, as you continue on your research path, I might put you in touch with Heather Forbes, she's retired now, but she used to be with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. She was in HR there. And they have a really interesting robust program on this. They have a program with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation where they have cadets, like young people coming into the field and stuff, they you know, get their first jobs and they kind of move them along. But part of their training is, there's all the same stuff, you know, sexual harassment, and all this and that, but part of the piece of it is trauma related. And they have like a great film where they went in, they interviewed a lot of their veteran guys talking about, you know, trauma and how difficult it is and they bring up the subject, and they had a program, and I was associated with it for a time. I don't know if they still have it in place, she can tell you, but a lot of journalists are afraid to go and tell their boss you know, I'm really struggling, or even like to confide in colleagues and stuff. So what the ABC has created is a program where they have journalists outside of ABC who have gone through traumatic events, where you can call

them day or night, and I was on that call list where somebody, wherever they're at, they could call me up and talk to me, and it would never get back to the bosses and they would talk to somebody who's gone through something who can talk to him about you know, self care, what are you doing for yourself and you know, who are you talking to, you got to talk about this. And so I think it's a really, really unique program. And you might want to chat with her about what they've set up. You know, what's interesting about the documentary is I played it at a lot of places. I mean, we went all around the world showing it and people shared their stories. And it was amazing. Like, people have asked me, you know, what, what's your film about? Initially, I always said it was about PTSD. But then I was like no, it's about permission. Like it's permission to talk about something that is taboo that we don't talk about, because we would play it, open it up for questions / answers, and people would just share their stories over and over again. And I think that says a lot, you know, I'll tell you a quick story. And I know, I'm digressing again. But we screened this in Melbourne, Australia. And afterwards, they had a panel discussion, it was me and other journalists from Australia, and a therapist, because I can't really talk about what's going on with the head and they're a lot better about that. But a woman came up to me in the foye before the screening, and she said, are you the filmmaker? I'm like, yeah, she's like, I'm really excited to watch this. And I think it's a really interesting subject. And I'm like, well, I'm happy you came. So we're done with the screening, open up for questions, this woman just sort of raises her hand like this. And so, we call on her and she stands up and she goes, I remember, I worked at ABC, I was a field producer, and very young, very green. But I really tried my hardest. And finally, one of my bosses took notice and said, I'm going to give you your first overseas assignment. And she goes,

I still remember calling my mom, so excited and saying, you know, they've given me an overseas assignment. And she goes and they sent me to Beirut, and she goes, and I had no idea six weeks later, I'd be cradling my sound man, and he would die in my arms. And she goes, I've never spoken about this to anyone. And so you know, there were stories after story after story like that. So I think, you know, the business has got to change. But you know, what's interesting is when I started going around and showing this, this was kind of the, you know, it was 2009-2010, when it really kind of had some traction. And I was invited to Seattle, Washington, and it's right near one of the military bases. And a lot of, you know, military families were dealing with their loved ones dying in Iraq and Afghanistan. And these reporters, were having to knock on the door and listen to these stories. And, you know, the bosses had me out and they're like, they're really struggling, I want you to show the film and just open it up. And it was basically like therapy sessions, it would be groups of like four or five people, and they would just share their stories, and they would sob, but they had a lot of anger towards their bosses, even though the bosses were the ones who brought me in to kind of talk to them. But I think it says something, you know, like, I could come in and talk to them, whereas the bosses weren't comfortable broaching the subject.

Carpenter:

Yeah, it's interesting with this survey that I put out, most people stayed anonymous, but I appreciate you filling it out. But I noticed so many people were saying the same sort of thing. And they were struggling with the same thing. And it made me think if there was some sort of platform or safe space, where journalists could share stories, because also, like some companies, maybe they'll offer three counseling sessions a year for free, you

know, and then you have to pay for it. But they would say, oh, I don't know if I really trust that because it's through my work. Or they would say, the counselor that it put me in touch with had no clue what it was like to be a journalist. They didn't understand the business. So with you saying that it makes me think if there was some sort of mentorship program or safe space where journalists could go to share their stories that may be more beneficial than anything.

Mike Walter:

I agree. You know, John McCusker, who's in the film, we were in Atlanta for the Atlanta Press Club, and we screened it and then they had question and answer with the two of us, but John was saying I thought this was really kind of interesting. He said, you know, as a photojournalist, you're so excited, grab the camera, you start shooting stuff, he goes, but when you've been in it, as long as I have lifting that camera is like lifting a 57 Pontiac because you've seen so much stuff, and you have to look through that viewfinder and see more stuff. And he said the same thing. He said, you know, you can go to a therapy session, and the therapist is like, oh, I know what you're going through. And you're like, no, you have no clue what I'm going through. And he said he really struggled with therapy until he found a therapist who was a Vietnam vet who was like, oh, God yeah, I remember when I was in Khe Sanh and this happened, and kind of did a connection in the sense that oh, yeah, I saw just as much horror as you did. And then he felt more comfortable opening up to him and actually started to see some headway, but I think you're absolutely right. I think that's a problem too. Therapists in many cases don't really have any concept of what it's like, you know, I always say, and you know this, you can be out on a story for four or five hours and just see all kinds of horrific things. And then

your minute and a half story is antiseptic, you cut out all that stuff, but then you can't cut it out of your brain, it stays with you, you know, and your editor can't cut it out, either, because they're scrolling through and seeing those images. That's the other thing. You know, like Bruce Shapiro with the Dart center, right after 9/11, he was telling me a story about how he went to MSNBC. And they were thinking about all our people in the field. And he's like, Well, what about your editors? What are the people who are logging the tape? They're looking at people jumping out of buildings and stuff, those things are seared in their memory forever? Are you thinking about them? And I think that's probably you know, it gets back to the inside people. I don't know that they're really thinking through all of that.

Carpenter:

Going back to what you said on 9/11, what do you think it was about... You're saying, well, I've done all this stuff, and I've been fine. What do you think it was about that moment, that affected you so much?

Mike Walter:

I've told people this, how I kind of describe it. And I just gave a talk about this last week. So it's still fresh in my mind. But I always say that, you know, I kind of straddle two worlds. I live in the dream world, I'm living the American dream, I've got the great house in the suburbs, and the dogs and the kids and a wonderful wife. And then I work in the real world, you know, which is, as you know, there's poverty and pain and violence in the real world. But I always have been able to cross this imaginary boundary and go from one to the other and been able to compartmentalize and process. The problem with 9/11 for me is that those two worlds collided, you know, it was my morning commute to work.

And then suddenly, I'm driving into a war zone. And I think processing that, you know, I say, it's like, all of these stories, you know, Somalia and the fires and earthquakes and they're all like, bricks that go into a wall and 9/11 was the brick that went in the wrong way. And the wall came tumbling down. So for me, I think that was, that was the big difference. And, you know, it just you know, when you think about it, you get to a murder scene, and there's the yellow tape, and you're kind of there's a separation but witnessing the execution of hundreds of people, which is what I did helplessly, you know, I think it just does a number on your head. And, you know, and I think all the other stuff that's there, like I said, they're kind of like the building blocks. You know, because you're dealing with a lot of stuff in a career, I think still people can make it to the finish line, covering a lot of trauma and we're very resilient and, and not have issues. For me, it was really tough, and I think you know, talking about you, and John McCusker, I think there's, to me, there's a thread that goes through this, which is community, you know, in the film, I played the segment where, you know, I talked to my daughter and her friends had parents at the Pentagon, you know, she wanted words of reassurance, I couldn't give them. You know, when you talk about the Boston bombing, that's a community, it's people are going, you know, that's a race that everybody's excited about every year. It's like the celebration and suddenly it's tragedy. For McCusker, his community is in ruins, but his house was in ruins. You know, and I think it's that, I think it's that tension of like, you know, you can't separate now they've kind of come together.

Carpenter:

What have you seen in similarities, and you touched on this, but with journalists and first responders? How we could use sort of some of the same resources or training or help, because we're seeing the same stuff?

Mike Walter:

Yeah, it's funny, when we first screened the documentary, it was at a film festival in D.C. And you know, it's a short so they had like a little theatre. And it was great because the deputy director of the film festival came out and introduced it because you know, I've been on TV in Washington, D.C for a time, and they have these packages where if you're a donor or whatever, you can just go to any film you want to and you don't have to buy tickets and stuff. And so they sold out, but a lot of times they sell out of place, and people still don't show up, well all the people that bought tickets showed up but also these donors showed up, so it was just packed and so the staircase was filled with people. They brought in folding chairs, just packed, and I remember the guy who edited the film was like, you know this, I feel really good about this, but I wonder if anybody's gonna care. But the interesting thing about it was after the film was over, you know, Vietnam vets came up to me, Iraq war veterans, paramedics, you know, firefighters, all these people were there and had come to see the film, and I remember this Iraq War veteran said, you know, like, it's really interesting. We're all kind of in these different bubbles, you know, militaries in this bubble. Paramedics are in this bubble, firefighters and journalists. And there's nothing that connects us except for trauma. We all know what that's like. But I do think that they've gotten to the finish line a lot quicker in terms of trying to figure out some way to deal with that. And I don't know, I think it's a really interesting question.

And an interesting point, I think that maybe there's some lessons learned there. And, you know, it might be good to just chat with them and see, where are they going with their programs and stuff. Because I do think that other industries, businesses recognize that this is an issue and they're trying to address it, but I still think that our business even you know, that film came out 10 years ago, it was really interesting, you know, RTDNA all these people have been like come and speak, you know, the next year and the next year, but then it kind of went away. And now, you know, it's not an issue. When you look at these conferences, it's not an issue that's brought up, instead, it's how do you like, connect with more people online? You know, how do you build your brand, all that sort of thing? This is still an issue, you know, but I feel like they thought, well, we did this one year, and that's enough. And but you know, 10 years later, you've got a whole new crew of people entering the industry.

Carpenter:

I interviewed one of my friends, who was a news director and just got out of the business. But I asked him that. He was like, you know, I never thought about it. So you asked me and I went through and looked through all my notebooks from conferences that we've had. And it talks about being a leader and doing this and that, but never once did it mention like how to handle mental health or guide your newsroom or help them when they're covering these traumatic stories. And it was pretty surprising for me, I guess, because you're right. I watched your film. And I'm like, well, people have been talking about this. And of course, we have the Dart Center, which is amazing. But when you interview people, 90% of people in the survey said, not enough is being done to help with mental health.

Mike Walter:

Well, the other thing about the Dart Center is, you know, as I pointed out in the film, I didn't even know about the Dart Ochberg Fellowship, or the Dart Center, you know, and I've been in the business a long time. And so I think that's the other thing is kind of a hidden gem, how many people actually know about it?

Carpenter:

I wish I would have asked that in the survey. Because until I started doing this research, I didn't know about it. And so I kind of wish I would have included that question in there. Like, have you heard about this? Because that would have been really interesting to see. So after 9/11, I know you obviously did this documentary. But what do you think helped you get to where you are now?

Mike Walter:

It gets to your earlier question about your friend who was a news director who went back through his notebooks and you know, there's nothing there. My boss at the time, it was interesting, because, and I know this sounds insane. But I lived very close to my boss at the time, and we would commute into work every day, which to me is just like, in fact, when I first moved up here, I lived with him and his wife and his daughter for a while and at the time my family moved in, and we lived with them. And I was just like, oh my God, I'm gonna keep this job for like two months, and he's gonna fire me because my kids are gonna spill something. But that didn't happen. Actually our bond got even stronger. But I think because of that, he recognized that I wasn't doing well. And it wasn't in our commute to work or commute back. It was still within the work setting. He said, hey, man, do you have a minute, let's sit in my office for a second. And he said, he goes, you

know, I just want to take your temperature, I want to see how you're doing, you know, how you handle this, how are you doing? And I said, oh, no, I'm fine. And he said, Mike Walter, I gotta be honest with you. I know you. And that's not the right answer. It's not true. I think you're really struggling with this. And the company's making therapy sessions available. And I'd like for you to go. And I was like, oh, no, it's a huge story. I don't want to get off the story and go do something like that, you know, and I don't know if you watch Ted Lasso.

Carpenter:

My husband is obsessed with Ted Lasso.

Mike Walter:

Well, I love the fact that he goes into the sessions and is like, this is bullshit and this and that, because he doesn't want to really, you know, come clean with it and stuff. And I think there's that kind of bravado, especially in men. So I was just like, oh, well, the only way I'm going to go to counseling is if I do a story on counseling, you know, he's like, okay, well, I want you to do a story on counseling because I really want you to go through this. And so it was a group counseling session, and then they went to a smaller group session. And he was like, you're still going. You know, you're gonna go to this too. And, um, I think it kind of really kind of, I'm not sure, I'm sure it helped in some respects. My wife, I think was really, really helpful during this period of time, because I was like, in a very dark place. But then Dart, I know, it came years later. But I think, you know, it's interesting, 9/11 happened in 2001. Obviously, my Dart Ochberg Fellowship happened in 2005. And I think 2005, I think, actually is, I know, it's a long distance, I kind of processed some of it, but I think it really helped me to process the rest. And also

recognize that there is nothing wrong with you know, I mean when you're talking to all these guys who are covering wars, and all these other events, and what was great about the Dart Ochberg Fellowship is I think it's really smart how they do this, they, David Lloyd was with the BBC, he was there, Phil Williams, from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation was there, they had another foreign correspondent from Germany. But they also had a bunch of American journalists. And they also had some from real small newspapers, because they didn't want it to be like, oh, you got to be a war correspondent, and go off. And, you know, in these young reporters were kind of telling their stories and like crying. And so it was, it was kind of a group therapy session. And then afterwards, I mean, it's total journalism, then we go out drinking, and like, even more open up, you know, but doing a week of that really, really helped a lot. And really created my affection for all things Dart. I mean, I think it really helped me a lot. And it's unfortunate, you know, when you think about, think it's a group of like, 12 journalists who get the fellowships, and, you know, it can be 112 or 212. I mean, they can be doing this every week. Because there's so many out there, and unfortunately, you know like the photojournalist you're talking about, some of them aren't reached in time. And, you know, that's the sad truth of the matter is that, you know, when and the funny thing is, once the film came out, I talked to like these jaded veteran journalists and stuff, some good friends of mine, and they're like, oh, my God, I can't believe you guys are making such sissy movies about you know, cry baby shit like this and stuff. And then I would be like, okay, well, you know, you're in Vietnam, or you're in Beirut, like, how did you deal with it? Like, oh, yeah, we just took a lot of drugs and got drunk, and then, you know, you talk to

that, we've been married three or four times. So you know, it's like, okay, well, you're kind of damaged. So I'd rather go the route I'm going.

Carpenter:

So what should happen next do you think? Looking to the future, what do you think?

Mike Walter:

Well, I think, you know, I think it's interesting. I was talking about, I'm working at CGTN. Now, they just did this LinkedIn learning thing, where we've all got to take mandatory classes. And the first one is about diversity, you know, which is important. But, you know, you think about workplace, and diversity and sexual harassment, and all these things, I'm not saying oh, those are, you know, I think they are important, but this is important too in our field, and I think that there should be a component like that. And, and it should, people should be free to talk about their experiences and make create a safe space, and help them. You know, there are journalists who are afraid, I think, to come forward and say, you know, look, I really had a tough time in Afghanistan, you know, at this airbase, and they were, they were lobbing in bombs really close by and, you know, we're dodging stuff, and it was scary and, and now I'm jittery about going back, they should be allowed to say that, but then they're afraid of saying that because oh I will never be sent back again, you know, I'll be covering baking segments for the rest of my life.”

Carpenter:

Well, that's what some of the women said too in the survey. I'm don't want to say this, because then I'm not going to get the assignment anymore. You know, if I if I bring it up.

Mike Walter:

And I think women, you know, I mean, clearly you would know this a lot better than I am, because you're one, but I think women it's even harder because then you know, it's like, oh, because there's a lot of issues there. It's like, I've got five sisters. So the instinct is I want to protect you.

Carpenter:

You have five sisters?

Mike Walter:

Yeah, five sisters.

Carpenter:

Wow.

Mike Walter:

So, you know, the instinct. The instinct is oh, I want to protect, you know, like, be that protector. And then the other thing is like, oh, you know, a woman, how do I deal with this versus a guy? You know, it's like, it's a whole different dynamic, don't you think?

Carpenter:

Oh, for sure. I definitely think that and especially for me, I don't know, after having kids, like some stories just get me like I anchored the whole day of Sandy Hook and that was terrible, but they had me on the desk all day because I just moved to Boston. So I knew that area and Connecticut because I worked in Hartford. But I remember looking over at our meteorologists who had a kid in kindergarten who was just crying in the corner. But now looking back on that, as a parent, like I've interviewed some people who have covered Sandy Hook, so I've looked some coverage up from it, and now it gets me more

than it did you know, before I had children, as a mom and a woman, you know. Do you think there is any training that can prepare you at all for what you see in these stories? Or is it really mental health resources after the fact?

Mike Walter:

I think, this is my take on things... address it, you know, bring it up, talk about it. Then it's, you know, self care, because I think when you think about big stories, especially like you're in a war zone, or covering something really terrible. You're usually working, you're not working an eight hour day, you're working long days. So get up in the morning, you're just like, nailing down the coffee, eating crap food, you're doing that all day long, more caffeine, more crap food, you're not exercising, you're working a really long day, the days done, you're like all jacked up with adrenaline. So you go out and you drink. So all of these things that are bad in terms of self-care, like I think exacerbate everything. And I think, you know, the one thing that I learned with my fellowship is just talking to a lot of journalists that, you know, it wasn't just me, it's everybody. And so I think, you know, address it, say that, you know, this could happen to you, talk about it freely. Be you know, look, here's some things you should think about with self care. And see, like, if you do have issues, reach out to the Dart center, or talk to people you know, if you don't feel comfortable coming to me, find a network of journalists that you've worked with in the past who you think you can reach out to and talk to?

Carpenter:

Is there anything else you want to add? I so appreciate you doing this. And I would love your contact for what they're doing in Australia to get more info. on that.

Mike Walter:

Yeah, she's retired now. But I think she'd be a perfect person for you to talk to and she's really interesting and, and a lot of fun. And I think their program is really, really cool. You know, the funny thing is, I'll tell you one quick story, and then I'll let you go. But you know, that same night in Melbourne, Gary Tippett, who was a writer for the ages, and he's just, he's just a grizzled, old veteran guy. He was talking about, you know, like one of the people who talked, when it was getting to the Q&A. It was basically a lot of people sharing their experiences and kind of getting it off their chest. There's a young journalist, and she talked about how she just got a job at ABC as a cadet, and she had to go cover this horrible traffic accident, and it was in the community where she lived. And like, five teenagers died. And she knew every one of those teenagers and their families, and she was just like, it was the worst day of my career, I'll never have a day like that again. And Gary leaned over to me, and he said, you know she's wrong, she'll have more days like this. And that's the thing, you know, I think, you know, we do see a lot of bad stuff. And we continue to see bad stuff. I mean, you talked about Sandy Hook, you talk about the Boston bombing, you know, there's these events that keep happening in our career. And I think that, you know, this notion that, you know, oh, you know, it's only gonna happen to me once, not necessarily true. And so I think having built-in that kind of checklist for resiliency, and having people to talk to I think is key. And I think you know, I applaud you, the more people who are like looking at this and talking about this, the better it is for our industry, because I still think it's not talked about enough, you know, it just isn't.

Carpenter:

Yeah, so much more, so much more can be done. And even the resources that I have found through everyone I surveyed, like a handful of them, their station has done stuff on trauma, you know, so it's like, why aren't more stations utilizing these resources?

... Well, thank you so much for doing this I really really appreciate you taking the time.

Mike Walter:

Yeah, yeah, not a problem at all. And good luck with this.

Brian Wiedeke - FOX9 Photographer - Minneapolis, MN

Brian Wiedeke:

Good morning.

Sarah French Carpenter:

Thanks for doing this. What station are you working at now?

Brian Wiedeke:

I'm at the FOX station, KMSP, here in Minneapolis. I've been here 17 years now.

Carpenter:

Awesome. So you graduated from Mizzou?

Brian Wiedeke:

I did way back in 95.

Carpenter:

Did you get any sort of training? Or do you remember any classes that would have helped you in the events that you covered?

Brian Wiedeke:

Um, as far as like, like trauma-related stuff? I don't really remember any specific classes, per se. Um, I remember that year, we had the flood of 95. That spring that, um, I mean, it was one of those ongoing things. And I don't even know if that big old satellite trek was still there when you were there. But, I mean, we went to one town at six and one town at 10. And so you know, I mean, it was it was a little bit of insight into kind of some of the things you were going to be doing, but I don't remember any specific classes.

Carpenter:

So I know you listed a lot of things like Columbine. What would you say was the most like, traumatic event that you just were not prepared to cover?

Brian Wiedeke:

Oh, hands down the third precinct last year. And I think it caught a lot of people off guard. Um, we had a, we had a police-involved shooting, I think it was two or three years, maybe more than that. Maybe it may have been four or five years ago, a kid named Jamar Clark, on the northside of Minneapolis. And when that happened, a lot of people were outraged, upset. And they protested the fourth precinct, which is on the north side of town. And it stayed I'll say 98% peaceful. I mean, there were occasional fistfights and stuff like that. But they literally stood out there for probably three, three and a half weeks. And this was October going into November, when the weather was cold and everything. I mean, we all kind of thought, okay, cold weathers coming, they'll pack up and they didn't. And when people initially left 38th in Chicago, and went up to the third precinct, I think a lot of the city leaders, I think a lot of us, quite frankly, thought it was going to be a similar scenario where, okay, they're going to occupy Lake Street and for who knows

how long. And every, every night around sunset, you just saw the crowd change. And the first night I was down there, which would have been, I think, Wednesday MPD - And I really don't know why we were about a half a block back - but MPD just carpeted the intersection with tear gas at one point. And it drove people back. And I think that as much as anything really led to the looting of Target, if you remember that, because people just flew into that lot. And it was chaos at that point. And I think some people took advantage of that and just started you know that that push that domino as far as the looting, and then later on, you saw the AutoZone, which was which sat basically diagonal from the third precinct, it went up in flames. And after that it was just a free for all in that area. And I don't think I don't think anyone was prepared for that. I think that I think that honestly caught city leaders, it caught our management off guard, caught those of us in the field off guard. You know, we weren't expecting to turn that violent.

Carpenter:

So it was so different than other events for you, because you were like, in the middle of it all and concerned about your story?

Brian Wiedeke:

Yeah. I mean, that that's one of the first times where, and I think you've kind of seen it over the years, where there is a growing element of whether it's, you know, to me, it's, it's the far right, and the far left, in terms of their hatred of mainstream media. And, you know, they have somewhat different reasons for it. But they're both especially vocal about it. And you had a lot of those people there that didn't want us there. And police really don't have much of an interest. I don't think, you know, I mean, I don't know how much you've seen, but they, they've launched plenty of non-lethal rounds directly at

journalists, you know, um, people who I think you could argue, obviously, were journalists. Um, and, you know, I mean, the Department of Public Safety kind of tried to correct that, as we were going into the trial. They worked with a lot of the media outlets to create like a uniform press ID that they argued would help officers identify members of the press to avoid people getting tear gassed and shot with beanbags and what not. You know, I think it's still happened to a degree at Daunte Wright when we all had them. Um, you know, and I think rightfully a lot of people called them out and said, hey, you wanted us to have this, we have this, you're still aiming directly at us you know. Um, but you know, I think when you have both sides in this conflict, that neither one of them want you there to the level that they do now. The night that AutoZone went up, our managers had actually pulled us out of the area. And I had gone, I was downtown, which is maybe two miles away, you know, it's a 10 minute drive. And about 9:30 at night, my assistant news director called, and he said, hey, the AutoZone is on fire and the choppers down refueling any chance you can go back down there. And I said, yeah, I'll go back down. And, and it was one of those things that I was by myself. It was dark, you know, but I mean, you were very aware of everyone around you. And by the time I was tear gassed for I think it was a fourth or fifth time that day, I was like, okay, I'm done with that area. So and then there was stuff going on all over. It's spread by then. So I ended up in a couple different areas before the night was over.

Carpenter:

So what did your bosses do? Like as far as mental health services after? Did they do anything different?

Brian Wiedeke:

Um, I don't know that they necessarily did anything different. We've always had services available through the employee assistance program, you know, and I think, I think they were kind of cognizant and making people aware of that, um, you know, I mean, it was, it was kind of a weird period of time, too, because it wasn't normal times in the newsroom because of the pandemic. So, you know, you weren't going back into the newsroom the next day where people could see you and say, oh, you know, how you doing after last night, that type of thing. I mean, you weren't, we weren't going in at all. I mean, I still haven't been in the newsroom. And it's, what 18-19 months later. So, um, you know, I think I think the pandemic kind of altered that a little bit to a degree. But, um, you know, I mean, I will say FOX is very good in terms of the benefits that they offer. It was just a matter of you kind of had to know they were there. You know. And I think a lot of people did. I think we were kind of checking in on one another and saying, hey, you know, yeah, I've called this number, it's super easy. That type of thing.

Carpenter:

Being in the business for a while, what do you think? Any training, looking back now would help? Or do you think, oh, I wish this was done or offered? Maybe this would help future journalists?

Brian Wiedeke:

I think, um, I think training would help. You know, and I almost think that it needs to start with training managers in terms of just being able to recognize, hey, we're sending people to these jacked-up scenarios, you know, and I mean, especially in some of these, and it's not even in smaller markets anymore. I mean, yeah, there, we have crews in

Minneapolis that are MMJs that are going out by themselves and stuff. And, you know, I will say, our management has been very good. I mean, once, once we kind of realized, whoa, the, the game has really changed in the way that they're protesting. They didn't hesitate at all in terms of getting us private security. Which, you know, I mean, when I'm carrying a big camera and everything, just knowing that someone is basically within arm shot of me that is watching all around me, I can do my job fine. You know, then it's... I know that they're just gonna grab me and go, we gotta go if something's going on. That's I mean, because it creates such a big blind spot. So yeah, I mean, I know that they've been very proactive that way. But I think it's hard for, it's hard for crews, I think to know what you're getting into, because so many things are so different. You know, I mean, I think you can kind of go through different scenarios and have people kind of think about what they would do. But I think so much of it. Unfortunately, it's just something you, unfortunately, just have to experience. I think it's one of those things that I think stations can make it better publicized in terms of what, what resources are available, I don't think it would hurt. You know, I mean, I don't know that we're necessarily with George Floyd, just because of the pandemic, but to bring people on site to make it even easier, and just say, hey, you know, these people are here, you know, if they have a little extension, or whatever, set up temporarily, you know, hey, call this extension, you can set up 20-30 minutes with him before after your shift type thing, you know, that that may encourage more people to, to kind of debrief in those things.

Carpenter:

What's it been like for you? And your mental health, like through the years? Is it easier to look through a camera? Or do you get back and start editing and having to decipher like, what images are okay to show and not show?

Brian Wiedeke:

It's interesting, because I think so much of it has changed through the years. And, you know, I mean, like, I think of something like Columbine, where I was actually working in Kansas City at the time, and we were sent out there, but it was, I mean, it was a very weird experience for me, because I grew up out there. And like, I was in the same school district where we played Columbine all the time, and in high school, sports and stuff. And when that happened, I was, you know, only a couple years out of college. So it wasn't that, you know, it was less than 10 years removed from high school. So you know, I mean, it was, I mean, that was one of the things my news director was like, yeah, someone said, you know, where Columbine and everything is, I said, yeah, we played him all the time in sports and everything, and they said, you're on the next flight out to Denver, and I was like, okay. Um, so, you know, I mean, I think of that time where a lot of it was all on tape packages, fronting a live shot in this weird satellite city that popped up on the north side of the campus to George Floyd where so much of the stuff was just there was no editing because we were live wall to wall and you know, a lot of that is the the technology changes, you know. I mean, we've gone from meeting a million dollar satellite rockin two inch thick cable between your camera in it to this backpack that plugs into your camera and you can go for hours and hours with a live stream.

Carpenter:

Does that make it more draining now, this nonstop, continues livestreams that we do?

Brian Wiedeke:

Oh yeah, it definitely does. Um, you know, I mean, I think every company and their cousin says, Oh, well, it's a handy backpack. Well, I've only got one back to put you know, something on, so take your pick as to what, what it's going to be that day. Um, but I think, you know, it's, you don't, you don't have a good sense of if it's going out on Facebook or so you know, whatever stream, you know. So it's like, I think you always feel like you're when that thing is on, like, you're essentially on as if you were on air, you know, and I don't think you don't have you don't have time to kind of decompress and stand the reporter, you know, crew next to you and go that was pretty messed up, because who knows who's listening to you? You know, and I mean, it's just, you know, it's one of those things that social media will will rip you apart. Oh, my God, I can't believe someone from that TV station said this. And, you know, and, and it's not, you know, you're not saying something maliciously... I mean, it's one of those, I guess, historical ways that crews have kind of decompressed is, yeah, I think it's common with police officers to you know, they talk about the gallows humor and stuff. And, and I think that is shifting a little bit. And I think some of that force is just the fact that you're, you're always sending some sort of signal out. So you know, you can't, you're very mindful of, of, you know, the spotlight being on you the entire time type thing.

Carpenter:

Do you think when you were sent and covered Columbine, that because you were younger and didn't have kids maybe you were able to get through it easier or not?

Brian Wiedeke:

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, for sure. Um, my parents were still living in Colorado at the time, which it was funny. I remember calling them and I said, yeah, apparently, we're coming out there and, and my mom kind of joked. She goes, well, it's springtime in Colorado, pack everything. You know, it's 70 degrees today. And by Thursday, we're supposed to have two feet of snow. And I was like, okay. And so, I called the reporter that I was working with and told him and I mean, we kind of joke because we were one of the only crews that come Thursday, when there was a blizzard. There were these foreign crews from other countries that were like in little windbreakers just freezing to death. And I mean, for me, it was it was work. And it was it was very weird being there, just the circumstances around it. But I think because I was a lot younger, you know, it was like, hey, I can see my family. Yeah, I mean, there were those little things that kind of took away some of the rawness of what was going on, you know, and I think I think for most of that was just so surreal. You know, you couldn't believe that. There were literally 100 satellite trucks parked in a parking lot. And you saw crews from Australia and Japan and Germany. And, and, yeah, you're kind of just trying to process like, God, you know, we used to come down here all the time into this park and just hang out in high school. And now we're here, you know, for this crazy... I mean, you know, no one had ever seen anything like that before.

Carpenter:

I'm looking to the future, like, what do you think should change in the field of journalism? Especially, we're covering traumatic events, we're in the middle of them as they're happening, we're live streaming continuously. What should change or what would

help do you think when it comes to like, journalists and those that are in the middle of it all?

Brian Wiedeke:

It's interesting because I think I remember either that same question or something very similar in the survey, and unfortunately, I don't know that you can change a lot. I mean, part of our job is messy. You know, and I don't know if it's, if it's just conveying to people as they're considering this career, like the messes, the mess is filtered down to the local level. You know, I mean, it used to be a lot of it was just seeing if you were working at the network level or, you know, or some sort of national correspondent that you had to go overseas to, to a conflict zone or something. I worked with a guy here that he left us and went to Fox News Channel in New York. And as a photographer, and you know, I mean, I look at his Facebook page, and you know, it's yeah, it's the most recent thing he had to go down to Haiti for, for the disaster down there. And, I mean, yeah, he literally has been into Iraq and Afghanistan and Libya. And yeah, I mean, all these places. I'm like, man, you couldn't, you couldn't pay me enough to go into those places. And I mean, it just, he's kind of hardwired for that type of thing. And I think unfortunately, I mean, it's not a true war zone. Although, you know, I say, then, I mean, some of our private security after a couple of days after the riots kind of quieted down. We had a crew with us from Colorado, and I said, well, you know, we had some extra time, I said, you know, I can kind of show you the lay of the land, you know, we're not far from third precinct, and we were just in the car, every single one of them who had served somewhere in the middle east, they said, I haven't seen anything like this since, you know, either Iraq, or Afghanistan, or wherever they were deployed to. And I mean,

it, it truly looked like it looked like a bombed out war zone. It was just because the fire department couldn't get in, so it was just charred piles of garbage everywhere. And you know, I mean, I don't know that you can prepare for that type of thing. I think you can make it very clear to people that local news is not what it once was. Yeah, I mean, we are living in these just extraordinary polarizing times. Um, I think if anything, you have to, you cannot overemphasize, especially for TV crews, just because we kind of stand out that you just have to trust your gut, you know, I mean, you can be.. you look at the the guy from MSNBC down in Louisiana a week or so ago doing the hurricane coverage. And so, you know, the worst thing to happen to him is some crazy guy gets out of his truck and starts barading, you know, I think that's going to become a lot more commonplace. Until, until we figure out this polarization, you're going to have people who feel emboldened and can take out their hatred and frustration on a TV camera. And I think, first and foremost, you've just got to listen to your, to your gut instinct. And if you're like, something is off. Don't say, you know, don't stick around. I will say, our management is very good about they make it very clear that if there is something going on, whatever it is, whether it's weather, crowds, whatever, where you don't feel safe, you get out first and figure and figure it out, you know, they they do not, you know, they are not the type of managers that that will say well story is still going on, why did you leave? You know, I mean, if you do not feel safe, you get out. And I think it's, I think for the longest time we've had this idea that we have to be there start to finish no matter what. And I think if you listen to that little voice, it's more self preservation than anything. In terms of in terms of that. Being there in that moment, type thing.

Carpenter:

Was there anything else you want to add? I feel like you answered most of my questions.

If I think of anything else, I'll email you.

Brian Wiedeke:

Where are you at right now?

Carpenter:

I'm in Charlotte. So I was in Boston for almost seven years. I covered the Boston Marathon bombing. And then my photographer. He was just sent to everything, the bombing, Sandy Hook, and he ended up killing himself. And so you know, I've talked with his wife about how there just wasn't a lot of resources at our station. But he didn't want to ask for help anyway, you know. So that kind of got me interested in studying this and thinking like what, what resources are out there that are available and compiling this list of like big things that have happened and what stations have done that maybe other stations never thought to do. Because one person said they did bring in counselors or they have like a mandatory one hour session with each person. So it's been really interesting to see all the answers from everyone.

Brian Wiedeke:

And it's interesting, because, and for the life of me, I can't remember what event it was we had something where they had brought counselors, and it was pre-pandemic, and for the life of me, I can't remember what it was. And I think the biggest thing was, and I really think they would have done that with everything going on with Floyd. But nobody was in the newsroom. Yeah, I think that was still the period where we had a lot of our anchors, doing stuff from home. You know, and I think they kind of had to get the

blessing from Los Angeles or New York or who, whichever coast it is that deals with us to get anchors in the studio just to cut down on some of the lag because we're going live so much wall to wall. So yeah, I mean, it was just such a weird time. I mean, that was the other big stress with that is, you know, you're in these huge crowds, and you're like, Oh my God, like, you know, am I gonna walk away with this from with COVID? On top of it all, you know? I think that was very early on in the pandemic, where it was just you didn't know anything. Interestingly, the crowds there, and I'm sure some of it played into their hands that the crowds there were very conscientious about being masked, you know, I mean, I'm sure it helped the agitators, you know, they don't stand out when they're masking themselves, you know, wearing goggles and masking themselves, you know, to hide their identity, you know, they just look like essentially everyone else in the crowd.

Carpenter:

Yeah, interesting. I appreciate you taking the time to chat. I'll reach back out if I think of anything else.

Brian Wiedeke:

Yeah, I'm always around.

Carpenter:

Awesome, Brian. Well, thank you so much. I appreciate it.

Jeremy Young - Al Jazeera Producer

Sarah French Carpenter:

Thank you for doing this. I really appreciate it.

Jeremy Young:

No worries. Nice to meet you.

Carpenter:

Nice to meet you, too. So tell me about your backstory, how you met Mike, and he said you're a Dart Fellow as well?

Jeremy Young:

Correct? Yeah, that's sort of how we became friends. But, you know, we just like Mike understands the medium I work in so much better than so many other people that I know. So we just sort of became close friends. Both working in Washington, DC and just being connected. But my backstory is that, you know, I started working in journalism soon after undergrad, and I moved to New York. And I worked at MSNBC. And after 9/11, I traveled over to Pakistan and Afghanistan to produce for three months. And then I came back to the US and worked in a series of different jobs. And eventually I was hired by Al Jazeera in 2006 before they started launching Al Jazeera English, and that's where I've been for the last 15 years. So I did help launch the show I work at now, which is called Fault Lines. I don't know if you've ever heard of it, but we do 25 minute current affairs documentaries. So I helped launch that in 2009. And then I left and joined the investigative unit in 2013. And then I just returned to Fault Lines in 2020. So I'm a senior producer now at Fault Lines.

Carpenter:

Nice. So talk to me about your history covering trauma, and like when you started to realize that it was affecting you and did you notice resources for journalists out there?

Jeremy Young:

Yeah, so when I first traveled and started, like covering wars, I, you know, I was very young, I was 23, when I went to Afghanistan, I was totally unqualified, both professionally and psychologically for an assignment like that. But you know, I was the only person in my office who was really willing to go for an indeterminate amount of time. And then I guess what, you know, I started covering criminal justice more often, and doing documentaries about different issues inside of jails and prisons. And that's kind of what drove me to apply for the fellowship at the Dart Center was just the nature of the stories that we're doing about jails and prisons, and kind of just, I guess, the impact that it had on me personally. And you know, I'm pretty expressive as far as like, reaching out to people for help and you know, being a friend or an ally for people who need support. So I think I felt pretty open about reaching out to people within my circle, but never really like resources. Beyond that, you know what I mean? Like nothing that was like a formal institution that would help you out with any sort of training or anything along those lines.

Carpenter:

Let me ask you this... Do you think there is any training that you can envision that would help journalists that would have helped prepare you to cover these traumatic stories?

Jeremy Young:

Well, I think having a dialogue about, you know, how it impacts the individual reporter to go through the professional experiences that we go to, go through would be hugely

helpful. You know, I mean, one of the things that became hard for me, I've got a, I can send you this video of, I was, I was leading a team in Libya. And we almost got hit by a mortar, when we were in the field, and we have a video of that experience, because he was on camera when it happened. And I remember my boss, like scolding me saying, you know, why did you put the team in that position? In that predicament, you know, you're responsible for the rest of the team. And then he was like, in the same breath, he's like, and let me see the video, let me see what the video looks like, oh, that looks great. You know, we can use that to lead off the program in our free titles. And it was like, it sort of felt like they wanted their cake and eat it too. And so that was a little bit difficult. But the other thing that's hard, too, is like, once you gain experience working in these difficult places, you tend to get called for those assignments again, because of that work experience, and it's almost like your ability to withstand the trauma is part of the reason why someone wants to hire you, or someone wants to send you to an environment, right? Like, I feel like our industry has a real inability to look inward and to acknowledge vulnerabilities that we have as a result of the nature of work. And as a result, it ends up being a lot of kind of closed off spaces, as opposed to having, you know, much more open and honest conversations with managers and co-workers and colleagues than you otherwise would have.

Carpenter:

Why do you think that is? And how do you think we change that?

Jeremy Young:

Well, I think one, one thing that certainly is helpful is training programs, not so much for someone who has my job. But for someone who has my boss's job, that people who are

making the decisions about deployments, assignments, you know, people who are executives, understanding what their employees are going through, when they're sent to cover an earthquake, you know, or these kinds of considerations, because I think people who work in the field, you know, we're on this sort of tip of the spear, know what it's like to go through, but I feel like, sometimes it's really the folks who are making editorial decisions that should be across this kind of stuff so that they can ask their their colleagues, how are you doing? You know, are you able to stay? Do you need a day off? You know, whatever it is. Then back to your previous question about why it is this way, I have to say, unfortunately, I love our industry, like I love what I've done for the past 20 years of my life. But there are a lot of problems with it. And I think one of those is this concept. I tried to explain to you before that, you know, it's an asset, if you're not complaining about your mental health issues, you know, like, we're supposed to be tough enough to witness horrible devastation and be able to report on it. It's just kind of the nature of the job. And, you know, it's more complex than that.

Carpenter:

Have there been any resources provided to you in your career that you thought were beneficial? Or if not, what do you think would help journalists going forward?

Jeremy Young:

It's a good question. I mean, obviously, through the experiences that I had with the Dart Center, you know, it opened up a whole world of like people who are like-minded journalists who work in my industry that I'd never really would have had access to before. So that's been great, but that's not really that came through sort of my own curiosity, right? Like, it's not exactly a resource that exists for everybody. So I don't

know that I've had a lot of like, organic experiences through my employment that I would say have helped me deal with these issues. You know, it's probably more of the opposite. You know, I've worked at large news organizations, you know, in different places and I don't know that I've gotten a lot of help in house on any issues related to, you know, stress and trauma and all of those things.

Carpenter:

I talked to Heather Forbes from the ABC in Australia, and she was talking about this program that she implemented, that was basically peer supported, and they were trained journalists, and they would talk to other journalists. Do you think that something like that would be beneficial here as opposed to like therapists? Totally?

Jeremy Young:

Totally. Yeah, no, absolutely. I think it's a great idea. I can give you an example. I have a colleague who works for Al Jazeera English, who is based in Beirut. And she was there for the Beirut bomb blast, she was actually like, holding her like, three-year-old child at the time. And they ended-up doing this amazing reporting. And they won, you know, really mainstream, big awards for it. And I called her relatively recently. And I said, you know, I just wanted to say congratulations to you for all of the great work. And of course, she's got the kind of attitude where she's like, oh, it's not a big deal. Not at all. But I checked in on her, you know, and I asked her in that phone call, how's your mental health? And at the end of the call, she said, this call meant so much, you know, thank you so much for calling. And like it felt like no one had done what I did you know. And so I think some sort of empowerment network slash training module that encourages journalists to, you know, check in on friends and colleagues and people from other news

organizations, you know. I think it could be as simple as I saw your story in The Guardian, and I wanted to reach out, I'm a journalist as well. And I just thought, you know, this reporting was extraordinary. And I wanted to say, you know, congratulations. And, you know, maybe it's a quick question about their mental health, or maybe you have to get to know someone more before you can do that sort of cold call. But, you know, for most people, they can look within their own network of people that they probably know intimately, intimately well, and, you know, reach out to folks directly, who they have a relationship with, that they can check in on. And you know, to be honest with you, like, I've got colleagues who have gone through divorces or, you know, have gone through, like, personal shit. That's not totally a result of their reporting. But let's be honest, like our industry, again, is not one that caters to healthy work life balance, healthy family lives. So, you know, if that was something I was cognizant of, when I was looking at foreign reporters and foreign correspondents is the amount of tax it puts on your personal relationships. And so even catching up with people on personal stuff has value in this context. If it's someone that you know, if that makes sense.

Carpenter:

How do you think managers can do this and have a, like a thriving business because a lot of people, you know, in this survey that I put out, have talked about how just a day off or, like they're doing these, especially during breaking news and nonstop coverage, they're sent, you know, covering Sandy Hook for a week or two. But also there's the perspective it might be hard for a manager to just give everybody days off. How do you think companies can do this?

Jeremy Young:

I think it's a myth to say that news organizations, you know, don't have the flexibility to ameliorate the situation. I'm not saying you're never going to prevent any of the people who we work with, from, you know, witnessing or going through these types of experiences. So I, you know, I think that's a bit of a crutch, because, you know, sometimes it can be small things, right? It doesn't always have to be, you know, a bonus and a week off at a mental health therapy facility, although, you know, for some people, if that's what they've done for you on assignment professionally, in some cases, a price should be considered. But I kind of think this idea that there's some sort of impact on the bottom line, when we're talking about improving the conditions for workers. I mean, I truly believe like happy healthy workers are the people who you want populating your newsroom, right? So if you're concerned with the mental health, and the well being of your team, and you're showing a way to approach it or deal with it, I just don't believe that there's some sort of conflict with your financial model or any type of a small offer or sacrifice that you might make associated with helping out someone who works for you. Does that make sense?

Carpenter:

Yeah. You said you had a Boston Marathon story.

Jeremy Young:

Oh my gosh, I have a really good one in this context. You ready?

Carpenter:

Yes.

Jeremy Young:

I was on an assignment for a project that I did not want to do. It was about private space travel, okay. And this project was called Space Incorporated. And it was about private citizens traveling to space to mine asteroids. And I couldn't have been less interested in the assignment. But I was producing it. And we had a flight from Southern California to Boston, to interview a scientist about this private space travel thing, right. And our flight was like due to land in Boston, the day of the Boston Marathon bombing at, it must have been like 9:30 in the morning, something like that. And we were about, I know, well, this will inform the timing. So we were about 45 minutes outside of Logan. And all of a sudden, every stewardess, it was a JetBlue flight I remember at the time, it was like a big deal that you could get live news, or live TV on these JetBlue flights. And all of a sudden, everybody's TV started to tune into the local CBS affiliate in Boston. And it sort of like carried through the plane that there had been this. And they made an announcement. Remember, at the time, they were like grounding planes and really shutting things down. And they said, our plane was so close to Logan that they have no alternative but to continue to the airport and land at the airport. So when we landed, I called our news desk. And I said, we just landed in Boston. And they said, our closest news team is in New York. And I said, well, we're here. And we ended-up renting our vehicle, just as we had planned, and driving down to a live location where a satellite truck was set up. And me and the correspondent and the cameraman took over this live position. My role was to go find people to interview. And of course, as I'm walking around, I don't know the neighborhoods as well. But I'm walking around this neighborhood, and I'm seeing people with running bits on with blood on them, as a sign

of this is someone who might, we might want to interview. And, you know, I was like, ducking into bars and seeing if anyone was there. And then, you know, bringing people to the live location to do a live interview with our correspondent. And none of us had planned or prepared for this. And it was just an unbelievable series of coincidences that ended up with us, you know, anchoring the coverage from the location before anyone else from the network who worked. We work on the documentary side, right? I don't even really work on the news side. And it just ended up being a really, you know, like, I saved the clips that we interviewed from that day. But it was one of those instances in this context, where you go from, you know, not at all covering trauma to like, you better turn it on real quick. And you better be ready to endure the fact that these people just went through a serious terrorist attack. And that they're, they're traumatized. And it's just that kind of a light switch mechanism that probably doesn't exist in too many industries where you have to pivot like that.

Carpenter:

I mean, a lot of people talk about having to just flip it on and flip it off. Do you think that's possible, or people really do need to take time after they cover or even witness some of these stories to process what they've seen?

Jeremy Young:

I think that there's different ways to heal for different people, right? I don't think for everybody, it's going to be the same tool or same technique that's going to help them heal from what they've experienced and what they witnessed. But there's certain, there's certainly healthier ways than others, you know, to deal with this stuff, right? Like, you know, drug and alcohol and other addictions that we have not great techniques for, for

dealing with it, you know, if I was, you know, if I was doing yoga instead of drinking a beer, you know, every time I finished one of these tough assignments, I probably would be in a better spirituality. But the truth is, you know, it's going to be a combination of different things for different people. And I think as long as you're having a conversation about it, and a dialogue about it, recognizing it, as opposed to pretending. I think the worst case scenario is you pretend like nothing's happening, and that you're totally all right, and that it doesn't bother you at all. And, you know, interviewing, witnessing an execution or watching video of fucking 9/11, or we're interviewing someone whose child was shot and killed in a drive-by, like any of these experiences are not normal. And just, if you think that they don't have an impact on your brain, then you're in a really wrong place. So I think if you're able to acknowledge the truth, even if you don't necessarily deal with it in the most healthy of ways, at least, you're allowing it to, to seep out that it has an impact on you. And I think, you know, like I said, it's different for different people it's different stuff. Like, honestly, for some people, if you were -- well in non-COVID times, you know -- if you went and took someone for a beer or a couple beers, you know, who just got back from a tough assignment or whatever, that kind of stuff helps, you know. I don't know, I think it's, I don't know if that makes sense.

Carpenter:

No, it did. It made perfect sense. Well, I may since I have your email now, if I think of anything else, as I continue on with this, I may shoot you an email, if I think of any other questions as I gather all this stuff from my report, but I really, really appreciate you taking some time.

Jeremy Young:

Yeah, feel free to call me. You know, just call me and that's a great way to reach me. Okay, I'll send you, I'm gonna send you a link to this video from our Libya trip. That includes the incident that I mentioned to you. It's only a couple minutes, but I ended up interviewing our cameraman, about the experience. And it was, I was like, for me, no one ever asks the cameraman, kind of what they think. Right? Always, in many instances an after thought. And he had such a, like, just kind of straightforward manner of describing what had happened. You know, he didn't overthink it. He was just very honest about what he just went through. And I loved getting his perspective. So I'll send you a link to the video and check it out if you get a chance.

Carpenter:

Awesome. Thank you. Thank you for doing this with me. I appreciate it. Thanks for taking some time today.

Jeremy Young:

Yeah, last thing that I'll toss out is we are all often looking for, you know, partners and collaborations for our documentary work. So I don't know if you know people who work for nonprofit newsrooms or other outlets that would be interested in doing partnerships or collaborations, but that's kind of one of the things I'm spearheading for next year. I initiated a phone call with Carolina Public Press. So anyway, if you come across folks that are interested in collaborating, please feel free to keep in mind.

Carpenter:

I will.

Jeremy Young:

Awesome. Well, thanks for the conversation. I enjoyed talking to you.

Carpenter:

Awesome Jeremy. Thank you so much. Have a great day.