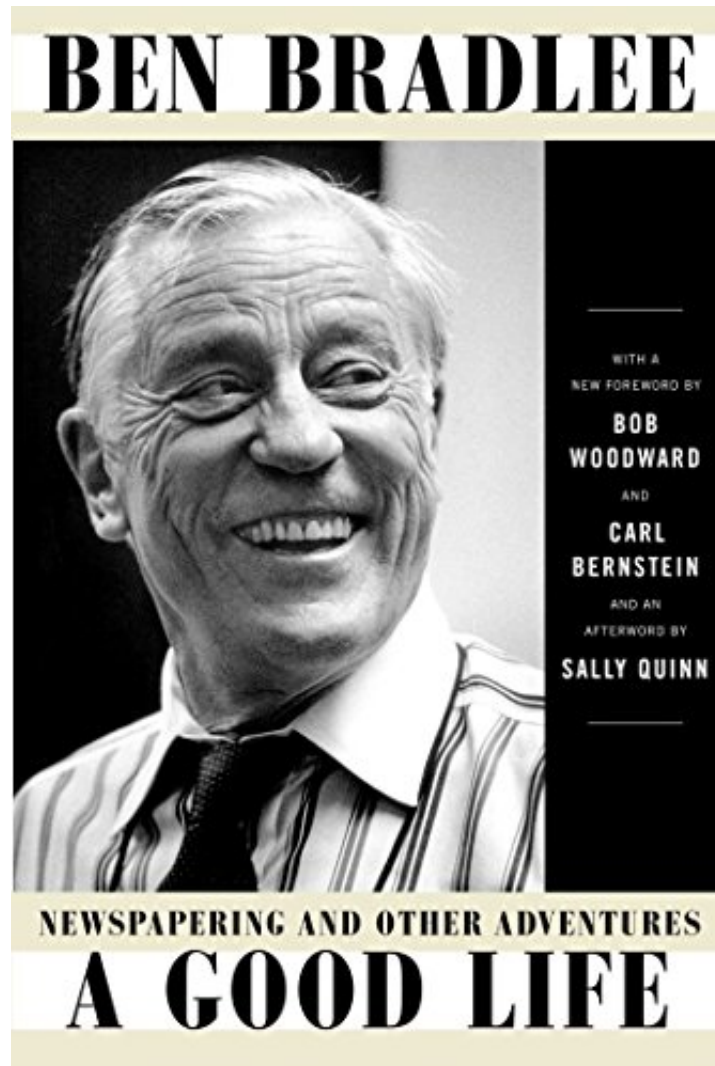


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A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures

by
Reza Kahlili



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Synopsis

This is the witty, candid story of a daring young man who made his own way to the heights of American journalism and public life, of the great adventure that took him at only twenty years old straight from Harvard to almost four years in the shooting war in the South Pacific, and back, from a maverick New Hampshire weekly to an apprenticeship for Newsweek in postwar Paris, then to the Washington Bureau chief's desk, and finally to the apex of his career at The Washington Post. Bradlee took the helm of The Washington Post in 1965. He and his reporters transformed it into one of the most influential and respected news publications in the world, reinvented modern investigative journalism, and redefined the way news is reported, published, and read. Under his direction, the paper won eighteen Pulitzer Prizes. His leadership and investigative drive following the break-in at the Democratic National Committee led to the downfall of a president, and kept every president afterward on his toes. Bradlee, backed every step of the way by the Graham family, challenged the federal government over the right to publish the Pentagon Papers—and won. His ingenuity, and the spirited reporting of Sally Quinn, now his wife, led to the creation of the Style Section, a revolutionary newspaper feature in its time, now copied by just about every paper in the country.

Look inside the book

Books by Ben Bradlee
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Conversations with Kennedy
A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures
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For Sally and Quinn
who light up my life
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FOREWORD
When I was a child, we had to read books in French at home, and I remember one called *Les Mémoires d'un Âne... The Memoirs of an Ass (or Donkey)*. Except for that, I have always thought of memoirs as the province of presidents and prime ministers, explorers and four-star generals, plus maybe a Secretary of State or two, or a literary lion. It seemed a bit cheeky for a newspaperman to run with such a crowd, especially a newspaperman trained to stay off the stage and keep himself and his feelings out of the story, and especially a native Bostonian newspaperman, trained from birth not to talk about family, money, or sex. But this is a memoir, pure and simple, memories of the events that have left their mark on me. It is nowhere near a collection of my thoughts on the state of journalism, or on the proper relationship between the press and public policy. I'm still collecting them—still changing my mind. I dared try my hand at a memoir only when I began to realize that I really had been dealt an awfully good hand by the powers that be. A hand that gave me a ringside seat at some of the century's most vital moments. A hand that allowed me to make an adventure out of the Depression, illness, and war, and a romance out of newspapering. It is called *A Good Life* because that is what I've had—and because when I was desperate for a title, David Halberstam said casually, "You've had a good life, Bradlee. Hey, why not call it that: *A Good Life*?" I have thought hard about the role of luck in my life and come to the simple conclusion that I have been wonderfully lucky. To survive polio. To survive more than three years on a destroyer in the Pacific War from Guadalcanal to Japan. To land a job on *The Washington Post*, after skipping an interview with the *Baltimore Sun* only because it was raining so hard when my train stopped in Baltimore first. To buy a house in Georgetown a few months before Senator

and Mrs. John F. Kennedy bought a house only a few doors away. To try to persuade Phil Graham to buy Newsweek at just the right moment. To find the emerging Katharine Graham looking for an editor at the precise moment when the Post was ready to fly. And most important, to find the most extraordinary collection of newspaper types eager to sign up for the flight. These newspaper types, now graying, some even gone, are the people I would like to thank first and most for their contribution to this book and to my delight in my working life. Larry Stern, Dick Harwood, Bart Rowen, David Broder, Haynes Johnson, Shelby Coffey, Phil Geyelin, Meg Greenfield, Bill Greider, David Laventhol, Gene Patterson, Bob Baker, Phil Foisie, Barry Sussman, Harry Rosenfeld, Jack Lemmon, Nick von Hoffman, Mary Hadar, Dick Cohen, Len Downie, Bob Kaiser, George Solomon, David Ignatius, Mary McGrory, Mike Getler, Walter Pincus, Chal Roberts, Don Oberdorfer, Murrey Marder, Eleanor Randolph, Myra MacPherson . . . to name any of them is to risk leaving out someone vitally important to me. And, of course, the one and only Sally Quinn. It would be hard to overestimate the contributions to my newspaper and to my time as editor of that extraordinary reporter, Bob Woodward—surely the best of his generation at investigative reporting, the best I've ever seen. With his sidekick, Carl Bernstein, and the job they did on decoding the Watergate scandal, they put the Post (and me) on the map in ways that no one could have predicted. And Woodward has maintained the same position on top of journalism's ladder ever since Watergate. A newspaper is not referred to as the "Daily Miracle" for nothing. It takes the talents of a great many people working a great many hours at the top of their game before an editor can put his feet on the desk and accept congratulations. With this kind of talent, congratulations are inevitable. It would be ungrateful of me not to pause here to acknowledge the role of Richard Milhous Nixon in furthering my career. It is wonderfully ironical that a man who so disliked—and never understood—the press did so much to further the reputation of the press, and particularly The Washington Post. In his darkest hour, he gave the press its finest hour. Writing is an acquired skill, at least for me. I wrote for almost fifteen years before I felt reasonably sure of turning in a coherent, well-written story. But in the Washington Bureau of Newsweek, even one's most beautiful prose was rewritten by some faceless bastard in New York, and back at the Post I wrote so many leads and headlines that managing editor Howard Simons regularly belittled my writing skills by referring to me as a sprinter. "Benny gets lost after the first two hundred words," he said. In writing this book I had special, quality help from two women who gathered and organized the paper trail—detritus—of a disorganized life and forced me to think as well as write. First came Barbara Feinman, until she moved on to concentrate on her own career as a writer. She got me focused with skill and humor. Next came Katherine Wanning, whose diligence and patience were awesome. Their help was essential. Tom Wilkinson, my longtime friend and colleague, devoted hours to re-creating with me the sense of excitement in the 1960s and 1970s, and I am especially grateful to him. The same goes for Carol Leggett, secretary and friend, who has been irreplaceable from day one. I have been reading forewords all my life, never quite believing the authors when they come to the point where they thank editors. Deep down I used to think that writers have a natural contempt for editors, as unnatural obstacles between them and the readers. Well, I am now at that point, and I was wrong. Alice Mayhew, whose title is Vice President, Editorial Director of Simon & Schuster, seems to have edited almost every book any friend of mine ever wrote. And I was especially worried about her. Again, I was wrong. Never mind her title—she is an editor's editor, enthusiastic but strong, fun but tough, and wonderful company. She proved what I secretly suspected all the time, that no one needs an editor like an editor. Her sidekick, Liz Stein, was gracious, persistent, and full of sense. And a special word of thanks to Dick Snyder, the former Chairman and Chief Executive

Officer of S&S. He decided that I would write this book, Mayhew would edit it, and he would publish it. But for the last thirty years it is Katharine Graham who has so generously and unselfishly given me the chances to do what I feel I was put on this earth to do. And I thank her every day for those chances. Make no mistake about it: there is only one thing an editor must have to be a good editor, and that is a good owner. Kay says the only editor of The Washington Post she was ever in love with was Russ Wiggins. And I accept that. I love him, too. But I love her for her courage, for her loyalty, for her determination to commit the Post to excellence and to hold it unswervingly to that commitment. I love the joy she gets out of her work, and the joy she gives others. I treasure her friendship and confidence. It is no accident that the best newspapers in America are those controlled by families to whom newspapering is a sacred trust. With Don Graham now in the driver's seat, the Post is deep into the third generation. He is probably the best-trained newspaper person in America . . . reporter, editor, ad salesman, circulator, production assistant, general manager, publisher, now CEO, and still barely fifty years old. When I walked out of the city room in 1991, I bequeathed Don Graham's loyalty to my successor, Len Downie. There was nothing more valuable I could have left him.

ONE EARLY YEAR

It was a balmy fall day—October 2, 1940. The scene was a large, messy living room, converted to an office in one of those big, Victorian houses that circle Harvard Square in Cambridge. The sign on the door read “The Grant Study of Adult Development.” Financed by W. T. Grant, the department store magnate, and run by Harvard's Health Services Department, the study proposed to investigate “normal” young men, whatever that might mean, at a time when most research was devoted to the abnormal. Dr. Arlie Bock, the first Grant Study director, was convinced that “some people coped more successfully than others,” and the study intended to search for the factors which “led to intelligent living.” The guinea pigs were drawn from consecutive freshman classes at Harvard, a total of 268 men. *I was one of those guinea pigs, and we were presumed by our presence at Harvard to have shown “some capacity to deal more or less ably with [our] careers to date.” The researchers included internists, psychiatrists, anthropologists, psychometricians, social workers, plus an occasional physiologist, biologist, or chemist. On that particular afternoon, I was a sophomore, just turned nineteen, a sophomore who had only recently been laid for the first time, sort of. The Depression and a six-month siege of polio had been the sole departures from an otherwise contented, if not stimulating, life. The news was dominated by the war in Europe. Churchill had just replaced Chamberlain. Some 350,000 British troops had been evacuated from Dunkirk in small boats. FDR had masterminded the gift to Britain of fifty American four-stack destroyers,* and was nearing reelection to his unprecedented third term. Joe DiMaggio was about to hit .350 and win the American League batting title. Gas cost 15 cents a gallon. A luxury car cost \$1,400. And Ronald Reagan had just been picked to star in *She Couldn't Say No* with someone called Rosemary Lane. The Grant Study's social worker later described a classic young WASP, whose family income was \$10,000 a year (\$5,000 from my father's salary, \$5,000 from my mother's dress shop), and whose college expenses were paid for by a New York lawyer grandfather. She described my father as “industrious, hard-working . . . interested in nature, trees, birds, antiques, sports and civic things.” My mother was listed as “ambitious and industrious . . . musical and artistic” (which she would have liked), and as “rather of the flighty and artistic type. Very charming and young in her ideas [at forty-four]; almost immature.” That last would have enraged her. After the physical exam, the doctors noted their guinea pig was 5 feet 11½ inches tall and weighed 173 pounds, with warm hands, cold feet, “marked postural dizziness,” “moderate hand tremor,” “slight bashful bladder,” three tattoos—one on left arm and two on right buttock—“rather short toes” with “slight webbing” between #2 and #3, a double

crown in his scalp, and without eyeglasses, freckles, or acne. Blood pressure was 112 over 84. Pulse was 81; respiration, 22. Hair: dark brown. Eyes: brown/green. The psychometrist made 107 different measurements, including head length (210 mm), head breadth (151 mm), nose height (51 mm), wrist breadth (59 mm), sitting height (95.6 cm), trunk height (60.9 cm), and something called "cephalo-facial" (21.19: 88.9); and made 134 separate psychometric observations: mouth breather (yes), chest hair (absent), thighs (muscular: + + +), buttocks shape (+ +), Fat Dep. Butt. (+), Fat Dep. Abd. (sm), chin (pointed), nasal tip (snub), teeth lost (none), earlobe (free), hands shape (long, square), handedness (right), footedness (right); and concluding medical physical appraisal (normal). One of the psychologists described her guinea pig as a "very good-looking . . . boy, well-mannered and cultured. He walked into the office with the confident manner of one who knows how to deal with people." She was especially impressed with how this "quite normal, well-adjusted, and socially adaptable" boy had adapted to four months of leg splints and crutches during his bout with what was then called infantile paralysis. "In spite of being unable to move his legs [for a couple of months] and in spite of one of his friends dying in the same epidemic . . . he never did consider he would be paralyzed. This is a very interesting fact in illness. Do those people who develop a permanent paralysis have as much confidence while they are ill as this boy had?" But they weren't all that impressed by much else. "My general impression of this boy is quite good," the anonymous psychologist noted. "He probably will not have any trouble socially here at Harvard. His trouble will probably lie in a conflict between his conservative Bostonian raising and his ideas and ideals which are gradually becoming more radical." "This boy's emotional response to things" attracted psychiatrists' attention. ". . . he often cries rather openly in a movie . . . he often puts himself right into the shoes of the actors and actresses, and . . . he enjoys this. He states, too, that he has a strong desire and emotional feeling toward [the film] 'A Foreign Correspondent.' As a matter of fact, he has seen this picture four times and is looking forward to seeing it again. He feels that a foreign correspondent is one of the most 'romantic' and 'glamorous' persons that live today. He is looking forward to doing this sort of work. My general impression is that this boy has a rather immature, emotional, and romantic outlook on what he wants to do." Six months later I returned for one of many required follow-up sessions, and a new psychologist described someone quite different. "When he came in," his notes read, I could easily see that he is mixed up. His principal problem seems to center around the fact that before he came to Harvard he was living in a more or less materialistic world. He had been more a typical American boy—quite athletic, quite popular in school, and doing his work fairly well. But it was not until his freshman year at Harvard that he began to think, particularly in the abstract. Thus, he has more or less changed to a theoretical, philosophical, impractical person, whereas before he was quite materialistic and practical. This new toy, the philosophical and abstract, has rather confused him. In his confusion, the boy has become rather restless and dissatisfied with Harvard. As a result, he did very poor work in his midyear examinations. Shortly after doing this poor work, he started making plans for stopping school. At three o'clock one morning, this boy suddenly decided to go to Montreal and join the R.C.A.F. He went to talk with those people, and they said they would accept him, but at that time he backed out and came back to Harvard. However, his restlessness and dissatisfaction continued. He began to wonder why he was here at Harvard; he wondered what kind of a life he was going to lead; and he was generally mixed up with his new plaything—the dealing with the philosophical, abstract and theoretical. Recently, he has gone down to the Navy Yard and found that he can join the Naval Air Force when he reaches 20, which will be August 26 of this year. The general picture is one of confusion and dissatisfaction with himself and with the results he has been attaining here at

Harvard. Entering into this dissatisfaction is his restlessness. He has done several things to overcome his restlessness. There have been times when he has drunk too much alcohol, but this does not satisfy him. Sixteen months later, on August 8, 1942, "this boy" graduated from Harvard by the skin of his teeth at 10:00 A.M. At noon, I was commissioned an ensign in the United States Naval Reserve, with orders to join the Philip, a new destroyer being built in Kearny, New Jersey. And at 4:00 P.M., I married Jean Saltonstall, the first and only girl I had slept with. I was not yet twenty-one. I had never been west of the Berkshires or south of Washington, D.C., and I was on my way to some place called the South Pacific, which was not yet a musical. The education of Benjamin C. Bradlee was finally under way. As a family, the Bradlees had been around for close to three hundred years, but well down the totem pole from the Lowells and the Cabots. Proper enough as proper Bostonians went, but not that rich, and not that smart. Grandparents who were well off, if not rich. Nice Boston house, not on Beacon Hill, not even on the sunny side of Beacon Street overlooking the Charles River, but on Beacon Street still. One car, no boats, but a cook and a maid, and a stream of governesses before the Depression, plus old Tom Costello to lug firewood up three flights of stairs to the living-room fireplace and to shovel coal into the basement furnace. Josiah Bradlee (married to Lucy Hall), described as "the poor son of a humble Boston tinsmith" (Frederick Hall Bradlee), was listed among the fifteen hundred wealthiest people in Massachusetts and a millionaire in 1851. One authority wrote: "In spite of his great wealth and standing as a merchant prince . . . never attaining a place among the Proper Bostonians." It was said of him, heavily: "If he sent a shingle afloat on the ebb tide bearing a pebble, it would return on the flood freighted with a silver dollar." One of his proudest boasts: "In all the 82 years of his busy life he never spent but one night away from Boston. That time he journeyed to Nahant." My father was a Walter Camp All-American football player from Harvard, turned investment banker in the 1920s, busted by the Depression in the thirties. Frederick Josiah Bradlee, Jr., son of Frederick Josiah Bradlee, grandson of Frederick Hall Bradlee, all the way back eight generations to Nathaniel Bradley, born in 1631, who got the cider concession in Dorchester, Massachusetts, in 1673, and made sexton in 1680. His job was to "ring the bell, cleanse the meeting house, and to carry water for baptism." My father was born at 211 Beacon Street in the Back Bay. After they married, my parents first lived in an apartment at 295 Beacon Street. They bought their first house, a brownstone, at 267 Beacon Street, lived there for twenty-three years, and then moved across the street, back into an apartment at 280 Beacon Street. These were not adventuresome people. After football, "B" Bradlee rose quickly like all Brahmin athletes of that era from bank runner, to broker, then vice president of the Boston branch of an investment house called Bank America Blair Company. And then the fall. One day a Golden Boy. Next day, the Depression, and my old man was on the road trying to sell a commercial deodorant and molybdenum mining stock for companies founded and financed by some of his rich pals. There was always the promise of some dough at the end of a family rainbow, as soon as the requisite number of relatives passed on to their rewards. Especially Uncle Tom, whose fortune was so long anticipated, and his wife, the long-lived Aunt Polly. Tom was some kind of cousin to my grandfather, and lived in some institution in western Massachusetts, dressed immaculately in yachting cap, blue blazer, and white flannels, looking through a long glass across green fields for God knows what. Aunt Polly lived at 111 Beacon Street. My father and his two brothers called on her regularly to check her pulse, until she died of old age in her late eighties. Before the right people died, my father kept the books of a Canadian molybdenum mine for a few bucks; he kept the books of various city and country clubs for family memberships; he supervised the janitorial force at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts—for \$3,000 a year. And all

through the Depression we lived rent-free, weekends and summers, in a big Victorian house owned by the estate of some distant relatives named Putnam in the woods of Beverly, Massachusetts. Rent-free, provided we kept up the grounds and barns, which "B" did with a passion, and with me when I was around. This was Beverly, a glorious by-product of the Depression, when my family had the use of two houses, plus two big barns in twenty acres of beautiful woods, on a hill overlooking the bays of Salem and Beverly, less than a mile away. The owners were the trustees of an estate, who wanted to sell when no one wanted to buy. We had lived there, summers in the big house, winter weekends in the cottage, from 1932 until one afternoon in the summer of 1945. "B" and Jo were having cocktails on the big porch which girded the house, when an unknown car drove around the circle by the front door. "Who's that, for God's sake?" Jo asked, according to family legend. "Beats me," "B" is said to have replied. "Probably someone looking to buy the place. Been for sale for fifteen years." Now for the first time in years, Jo was feeling almost flush. An elderly relative, who had been long forgotten in some convent, had recently been gathered, leaving Josephine \$5,000. She announced that she was going to call Harvey Bundy, one of the trustees, and a family friend (also the father of future national security adviser McGeorge Bundy), and offer him the \$5,000 for the whole place. And over my father's dead body she rose from her chair and she did it. Harvey wouldn't take \$5,000, but by God he would take \$10,000, and all of a sudden this gorgeous place was ours. I have nothing but wonderful memories of Beverly, learning a love of the outdoors that has never left me, cutting down each giant beech tree that died in the blight of that time, on the opposite end of a two-man saw with my father and his friends. Burning brush for hours on end, still a uniquely calming and rewarding experience for me half a century later. Climbing trees, collecting butterflies, growing vegetables, playing doctor with my sister's friends. "B" and I built a backboard in the garage, even though the ceilings were only seven feet six inches high. It taught me to keep backhands and forehands low, and kept me busy on rainy days. My family's house in Beverly burned down years later. There was one great loss: three huge red leather scrapbooks kept by my grandfather about my father's football career. Pictures (the original glossies) plus stories in all the papers, about a tough, fast halfback called "B" by his friends and Beebo in the sports sections, who played on a team that never lost a game. I remembered one clip from the Boston Globe. Dated Monday, November 23, 1914, Coach Percy Haughton wrote about his Harvard team after they beat Yale: "From a photograph I have before me, it appears that Coolidge had not more than a three-yard start over two Yale men . . . Bradlee is depicted a half yard behind [them], and yet in spite of this handicap, he succeeded in throwing first one Yale man, and then the other sufficiently off their stride to give Coolidge a clear field for the touchdown." (Harvard coaches spoke and wrote the King's English back then.) Coolidge was my father's best friend, T. Jefferson Coolidge, who had recovered a Yale fumble on Harvard's three-yard line, and ran it 97 yards for the score. My father weighed less than 200 pounds, but he was tough, barrel-chested, strong, fast, and soft-spoken. Lying in his arms as a child and listening to that deep voice rolling around in his voice box was all the comfort and reassurance that a child could stand. My mother was a little fancier. Josephine deGersdorff, from New York City, daughter of a prototypical Helen Hokinson garden club lady named Helen Suzette Crowninshield and a second-generation German lawyer named Carl August (pronounced OW-GUSTE) deGersdorff, who was a name partner in one of the swell law firms . . . Cravath, deGersdorff, Swaine & Wood. My mother was the co-holder of the high-jump record at Miss Chapin's School for years, fluent in French and German, lovely to look at, well read, ambitious and flirtatious. She took singing lessons from a faded opera star. She was called Jo, and when she sang "When I'm Calling You" during Assembly one morning at Dexter School in Brookline

just outside of Boston—she forgot the words. I thought I'd die. Miss Fiske, the principal, whose motto was "Our best today; better tomorrow," thanked her much too profusely, but I never really forgave her, even if I was only ten. Jo was ambitious, but mostly for us children . . . not so much socially (we were about as far up that ladder as anyone was going to go), but intellectually. We had governesses as long as we had the money to pay them, mostly desiccated women who used a switch to keep us speaking French. Every Saturday, no one in the family was allowed to speak anything but French. We took piano lessons (I can still play "Ole Man River" with the knuckles of my right hand). We took riding lessons at Vignole's Riding Academy in Brookline. We were forced to go to the Boston Symphony's Children's Concerts (Ernest Schelling, conductor) on Saturday mornings. We were taken to the opera every spring, when the Met came to Boston. One day when I was twelve, I was taken to an afternoon performance of *Madame Butterfly*, followed after supper by four hours of *Parsifal* (starring Lauritz Melchior and Kirsten Flagstad). We hardly ever pretended to be sick and miss school, because that meant listening to Josephine practice her scales for two hours. They made an odd couple, come to think of it. My father would get pretty well tanked when forced to host or even attend her musical evenings. My mother quickly learned to loathe afternoons burning brush in the Beverly woods. My father loved words, but talked only when he had a point to make or a story to tell. He had a great sense of humor and wit, but smiled more than he laughed. My mother talked a lot, especially when she was nervous. She really had no sense of humor, but she laughed a lot. Great teeth. But figuratively or literally he had his hand on her behind for most of half a century. Our sense of family was very strong, especially after the Depression, when the maids departed and we replaced them. Their life together was generally joyous and supportive. So was ours. "Ours" was my older brother and younger sister, Frederick Josiah Bradlee III and Constance. Freddy dropped the "k," the "Josiah," and the "III" as soon as he could—when he opened on Broadway as Montgomery Clift's understudy in *Dame Nature*. Connie was born the belle of the ball, and without any real education learned the art of coping at an early age, settling into the system with grace and comfort. We children ate early by ourselves in the dining room, except Sunday nights. We all remember only hamburgers for supper and prunes for dessert. For months I stacked the prunes on a ledge under the table rather than eat them. That worked fine, until the time came to put extra leaves in the table one night for company, when all the prunes fell to the floor, caked with dust. I remember the debate between my parents about whether I should be made to eat them, right then and there. The prunes were on the menu because my mother was preoccupied by our bowel movements. On Christmas mornings, for instance, we were forced to wait for the last child's bowel movement before we could go upstairs and open presents. That was always Connie, who couldn't bring herself to fake it, flush the toilet a couple of times, and announce her mission accomplished. The same bowel preoccupation required regular morning spoonfuls of Gorton's Cod Liver Oil, which tasted just the way it sounds. I finally got so that I literally gagged and barfed it up on the dining-room wallpaper. Years later, after God knows how many coats of paint, an oily stain the size of a man's face would always emerge, mute evidence of this early form of child abuse. Freddy and I fought pretty much of a pitched battle for the first thirteen years of my life. And I mean fought. Down two flights of stairs, one night, landing on the second floor of our Boston house in the middle of a cocktail party my parents were throwing . . . Freddy on top. He pounded my head into the floor again and again, making me say "give up" before my brains spilled onto the carpet. "B" was so sick of the fighting that he didn't pull us apart. Two and a half years older than me, Freddy won all the fights—until I took up golf. Then one summer day I took out after him with a five iron in my hand and blood in my eye. Fortunately, before I got close enough to

swing, "B" came up the driveway to prevent bloodshed. And so when I was thirteen, the fights were over, replaced by silence. We simply didn't talk for years. We lived in separate worlds. Mine dominated by the outdoors—tennis, butterflies, chopping wood, girls. His dominated by imagination, actors and actresses, theater. I scorned his world, because I didn't understand it. He ignored mine, because it bored him. The governesses varied greatly in form and substance. Mademoiselle Cahors was stout, to put it gently, and mean. She waddled when she chased down the Esplanade after Freddy and me with a freshly cut switch in her fat hand. Mademoiselle Bouvier, known as 'Zelle, was a prissy snob, inordinately proud of her perfect French from her native St. Pierre et Miquelon Islands. It would have been useful to know then that St. Pierre et Miquelon had been settled by French criminals. She concentrated on Connie, and left Freddy and me pretty much alone, except to endlessly correct our French and our manners. Whenever we spoke to my father on Saturdays in French, he would mutter "Jeezus," and go off to another room. The governess situation took an extraordinary turn for the better with the arrival from Switzerland of the fabulous Sara Metin, known quickly as Sally, only eighteen years old, with bright red Alpine cheeks—and an absolutely spectacular body. Sally quickly spotted us children as tight-asses, and resolved to do something about it. Like roughhousing, at least once a day. Like getting us used to nudity. Ours and hers. I shall always be grateful to the highest authority that hers were the first breasts I ever saw—and forever remembered, even if I was only ten years old. Sally had fallen in love with a man named Eddie Goodale, whose family owned apple orchards in Ipswich, Massachusetts, and who had gone to Antarctica with the first Byrd Expedition. On days when letters from Eddie arrived at 267 Beacon Street from New Zealand, Sally would dissolve in tears of love and anguish, and share with us stories about Antarctica from Eddie's letters. The return of the first Byrd Expedition from the South Pole coincided roughly with the arrival on Beacon Street of the Great Depression. Sally left us to marry Eddie, and help run the orchard where all the Eskimo Huskies from the Byrd Expedition were kenneled. We stayed close to her for a long time. I used to spend weekends with the Goodales in Ipswich, helping with the dogs and picking apples. I was given a Husky puppy, Skookum, who outgrew me quickly, and knocked me down regularly whenever he greeted me. He was part of the family, until he broke into my father's pride and joy, a chicken coop where he was trying to raise ring-necked pheasants, and ate them all. Skookum went back to the Goodales, and from there back to Antarctica on the second Byrd Expedition, where we were told he died a hero. Got sick one night, and wandered away from his team and froze to death. I was very proud. Sally's departure was soon followed by the rest of the Bradlee staff, and overnight we were alone, making our own beds, cleaning our own rooms, cooking our own meals, fetching our own firewood like real people. The Depression was upon us, the first truly marking experience of my life. The biggest change came when my father lost his \$50,000-a-year job, and with it some of the male dignity that went with the role of provider. To keep us children in private schools, my father and mother depended on the charity of still rich old relatives, whom they didn't really like, but to whom they now had to suck up. Relatives like Grandpa deGersdorff, and like Cousin Frank Crowninshield, my godfather, who never worked a day in his life. He was the oldest living Crowninshield, known chiefly for his dislike of Franklin Roosevelt and anything British. He suffered from hemorrhoids, and when he had to have his rear end X-rayed, he turned to the nurse and said, "Make sure this is a good likeness, so I can send it to that son of a bitch in the White House." Visits to these benefactors were dreaded, like visits to make payments to loan sharks. There were few matters of moment on the agenda of this family, beyond the Depression. A little, light FDR bashing, some modest outrage whenever one of Boston Mayor James Michael Curley's bridges collapsed, a lot of family vacations, a few

too many drinks. At first, my father couldn't find a regular job; he started coming home before five in the afternoon. But he struggled at various odd jobs, with great energy and without false pride. He kept his membership in various clubs, in return for keeping the club books. Some of his friends had invested in a commercial deodorant called SANOVAN, and he tried to sell it to big Boston companies whose officers he knew. Once he mopped an entire Boston & Maine Railroad car, to demonstrate SANOVAN'S powers to B&M officials. For what seemed like an eternity the family car was a four-door Chevy, painted the God-awfully garish blue that the Chevy dealer felt would attract maximum attention to his demo car. "B" was proud of the good deal he got, while we children, especially Freddy, were embarrassed by the unwanted attention. When "B" put the SANOVAN tire cover on the spare tire that sat on the rear bumper, we all suffered. Family conversation centered on ourselves and our friends. And none of us was what might be called interesting yet. There was almost no anti-Semitism . . . maybe a couple of Izzy jokes in twenty years, because there were no Jews in my family landscape—except for Walter Lippmann, who had married the co-holder of the high-jump record at Miss Chapin's School. Lippmann never addressed the question of his religion, then or later, and my family was only too happy to play it his way. And by the same token, there were no blacks in our lives, literally, except for Amos and Andy, who were absolutely sacred in our house. My father would sooner give up his sacred Martinis—known as "yellow boys" because they were made with three parts Booth's Old Tom Gin to one part sweet vermouth—than miss a minute whenever Amos 'n' Andy, or Fred Allen, Jack Benny, or Ed Wynn, were on the Atwater Kent radio. I had never spoken to a black man until I introduced myself to my classmate Ray Guild in Harvard Yard our freshman year. We used to spend either Christmas or Easter vacations with the New York grandparents, trips I never really looked forward to, except when we took the train to Fall River, and the Eastern Steamship Line's overnight boat to New York. I always felt like an outlander in New York, underdressed, unsophisticated, and unappreciated—partly because of the dimension of the monied lifestyle, with Eckman, the butler, and Jimmy, the chauffeur. Carl A. deGersdorff was a little man with a gray moustache, and he relished the fact that life at 3 East 73rd Street in New York City, and summers in Stockbridge, Mass., revolved around him. He got the first—and sometimes the only—drink at lunch, served on a silver tray. Everyone had to wait for him to talk, or finish talking. In the mid-thirties, President Roosevelt asked the Cravath firm to negotiate a settlement to the Black Tom case with Nazi Germany.* Grandpa deGersdorff, with his German surname and his Almanach de Gotha tucked firmly under his arm, got the case, taking his prize assistant with him, a man named John J. McCloy, who would return years later to run Germany as U.S. High Commissioner. I remember hearing of their audience with Hitler, who told Grandpa he had checked the family name in the Almanach, and I remember Grandpa describing Hitler in terms that would in due course seem uncritical. My grandmother was warm and selfless, untouched by most of the mundane realities of life. She could have been the prototype for the garden club women. But even if she didn't care much about the Boston Red Sox, she put other people first, and I remember her with love. Granny's two brothers—my great uncles—were always the highlights of our trips to New York. First, Uncle Edward Crowninshield, who also never worked a day in his life, except for the two times he went into the antique business just to dispose of the heirloom furniture he inherited from various relatives and parents. He didn't stay in the antique business very long, because my grandmother always bought all the family heirlooms back, leaving him flush and out of business. He was conspicuously tattooed, with a square-rigged, four-masted schooner under full sail on his back (put there during a ninety-day voyage to China), and coiled around the full length of his right arm a snake whose tail was plainly visible whenever he shook hands or shot his cuffs. He was

an accomplished tap dancer, once getting pitched off the bow of Harold Vanderbilt's yacht in Newport Harbor, in the middle of the night, in the middle of his dance. He smoked opium, although I didn't learn that until he died. He escorted various celebrity women—like Edna Wallace Hopper, the first cosmetic tycoon, and Helen Wills Moody, the greatest tennis player of her day. He escorted them, and no one knew what else he did with them, although the word “mistress” was whispered whenever Miss Hopper's name was mentioned. And he was an accomplished amateur magician. We children used to love it when he asked Eckman, the butler, for a new pack of cards, tore and folded five or six of them into a box, which he then filled with smoke from his foul-smelling Turkish Melachrino cigarettes, and flicked with his finger to produce endless smoke rings. And then there was Uncle Frank Crowninshield, my grandmother's brother (and some kind of cousin to the other Frank Crowninshield), the urbane, witty founding editor of *Vanity Fair* magazine, raconteur, art collector, toastmaster, member of the legendary Algonquin (Hotel) Round Table (with Dorothy Parker, Robert Benchley, Alexander Woollcott), historian of New York's High Society, friend of people as disparate as sportswriter Grantland Rice and Mrs. Vincent Astor. As a child I was uncomfortable in front of some of his African statues, especially the angular, highly polished nude sculptures with breasts pointing at me like oversized arrows, and in front of some of his collection of Impressionist art. But I was impressed that he had sportswriter friends as well as just fancy friends, and he treated me as an adult. Once when I was about twelve, I was allowed to take my sister Constance alone from 73rd Street to Uncle Frank's apartment on 66th Street for tea. When he answered our ring of the doorbell, he was saying goodbye to a spectacularly lovely young woman, to whom he quickly introduced us. “Benny, I want you to meet my mistress, Clare Boothe.” The future Mrs. Henry Luce, then the managing editor of *Vanity Fair*, didn't seem at all bothered, but I turned bright red. I wasn't at all sure what “mistress” entailed beyond having something to do with sex, but we sure didn't use that word much in Boston. *When I was fourteen years old and in the ninth grade at boarding school—or the Third Form, as it was called at St. Mark's School, in Southboro, Massachusetts—I got polio. St. Mark's was one of a dozen citadels of WASP culture that dotted the New England countryside, each giving absolutely first-class educations to young boys preparing to join a world that was slowly ceasing to exist. One hundred eighty boys from the finest (read richest) families, so WASP that the only Jew in the school was a practicing Catholic named Moore, whose mother was a Pulitzer from St. Louis. Polio hit the school as an epidemic in the spring of 1936, striking more than twenty boys, killing one, permanently crippling three more, and paralyzing another half dozen, including me, for some months. The researchers at Harvard Medical School couldn't wait to get our blue blood into their white mice, convinced that the isolated epidemic gave them a perfect shot at isolating the virus. If you were not alive during the time when polio swept the country every year, it is hard to imagine the fear that came with it. Children—at least in my crowd—were not allowed to go to the movies, to eat raw fruit or vegetables, to swim in public pools. Mothers (at least my mother) were terrified. After the first child was officially diagnosed to have polio, all St. Mark's parents were informed, and asked to keep their children at the school—rather than risk spreading the epidemic by bringing infected children home to start new epidemics there, an argument my parents bought. At school we were told to sit upright on the edge of our beds twice a day, and bring our chins to our chest. If it didn't hurt, we were free of the disease. If we felt a sharp pain in the small of the back, we probably had it. One Sunday a week or two into the epidemic, Fred Hubbell and I had spent all afternoon fooling around the track. We sprinted, we ran, we jumped, we threw the hammer and the discus. We showered, dressed, ate, and sat down on the edge of our beds. The pain for both of us was intense. Late

that night in the infirmary, we both had high flulike fevers and aches. By noon Monday, we were side by side in an ambulance, headed for Boston thirty miles away, siren screaming. My father and George P. Denny, the family doctor, were waiting for the ambulance outside our Beacon Street house, to save the expense of a hospital, and I went up two flights of stairs in my father's arms to bed in my sister's room. The ambulance with Fred continued on to Massachusetts General Hospital, where he died two days later, his lungs paralyzed beyond help. He was more promising than most of us, a strong and open, trusting boy from Des Moines, Iowa, full of joy and friendship. For the first two weeks, polio behaves like the flu—aches, pains, fever, and headache. And one morning the aches and pains are gone. The temperature was normal. And the polio doctor, Frank Ober, was summoned for his macabre task. He didn't know how to prevent polio, or even how to treat polio. (Nobody did, Sister Kenny to the contrary notwithstanding.) But he knew his muscles, and he started checking mine, as I lay flat on my back, my father and mother watching me with anguish in their eyes. First, wiggle the scalp, then frown, raise each eyebrow, shut each eye, wink, left eye, right eye, sniff, move your lips and tongue, swallow, clear your throat, breathe deep, cough, sneeze, wiggle your ears, and so on and on. Right arm, from fingers to shoulders. Left arm, from fingers to shoulders. I was going like gangbusters until we got to roll-ups: I couldn't get my shoulders more than a few inches off the sheets. It didn't take a rocket scientist to understand that my gut muscles were not working right. The rest of the examination didn't take long. I could move my hips some, and I could pee. My father had to lift me up for damn near thirty minutes, and call upon the laws of gravity, but by God I could pee. The bowels worked, though not always at my command, and that was pretty much it. No action in the leg department. The tear ducts worked fine. Everybody's. But before very long, we were all talking about what we were going to do. Braces would be needed, because without any feeling in the legs, they could end up in shapes that could never be straightened. The braces would need footboards on them to hold my feet up, so the weight of the top sheet wouldn't flatten the soles to the bottom sheet. Someone (All-American Dad) would have to lift me into and out of a hot bath twice a day. And there was even prayer. Looking back so many years later on the sudden truths that come with paralysis, I find it almost impossible to believe I wasn't preoccupied with the prospect of a life permanently impaired. I have never been known for the quality or quantity of my introspective thoughts, but I can honestly say that I spent no time worrying about my future. None. I never saw myself in a wheelchair, or on crutches with braces. I rarely saw myself anywhere in the future. I had only recently discovered the joys of masturbation, and was encouraged more than somewhat when I learned everything in that department had returned to "normal." The Grant Study shrinks—and their successors—were always impressed with what they called my ability to adapt to new realities. I wonder now whether I was adapting to them or ignoring them. In any case, four weeks after Fred Hubbell died, I was back in an ambulance (paid for by friends of my parents) with siren blaring again en route to the big house in Beverly. From my bed I could see the big spruce tree, where I had built my treehouse a few years before. I could hear the foghorn on Baker's Island, and I could eavesdrop on the comings and goings of summer life out the windows. My brother and sister would shake their heads as fresh raspberries and thick cream, along with a stream of delicacies from S. S. Pierce, would be brought to me on a tray—gifts from my mother's friends—while they reported eating hamburgers and applesauce for seventy-three days running. They grumbled constantly about my being spoiled rotten, and that was plainly an understatement. May and June turned into real summer, and I was neither scared nor bored. I could move laterally, from one side to another, thanks to a pair of trapeze rings installed for that purpose in the ceiling above my bed. My mother taught me how to play bridge

with one of those special teaching boards. My father advanced me a fictional \$200 to bet on the horses at Suffolk Downs. I studied the entries and past performances for hours, carefully recorded my bets—mostly two bucks to show—and listened to the race results on the radio. I remember making a \$25 profit by Labor Day, which my father paid me. I read the sports pages cover to cover (and not much else) and listened to the Red Sox games as described by Fred Hoey over radio station WNAC. Visitors were scarce. A few adults trying to score points with my parents. My St. Mark's School roommate Bob Potter, the only one of my own friends old enough to have a driver's license, dropped by almost daily to my surprise and delight. The mothers of other friends were so terrified of polio they ignored their doctors' advice that polio was not contagious after two weeks, and kept their kids away. And then there was Leo Cronan, a fireplug Notre Dame athlete who was scratching out a living running a playground summers on the North Shore of Boston, teaching groups of us boys how to throw, catch, run, slide, box, bat for five or six hours a day. Leo was maybe twenty-three or twenty-four years old, and spoke reverentially of the legendary Notre Dame football coach, "Mr. Rockne." Leo was too short to be a great athlete, but what there was of him was all muscle and heart, and he came almost every night, to watch over one of his fallen "players," and to eat. He would put away almost a quart of milk each time, and as many of those Huntley & Palmer Biscuits (they were actually cookies) as were left over from the night before. This was the Depression, and the cookies were his dinner. It was Leo who got me thinking about walking again, wondering aloud when I was going to want to try to stand, when I was going to dare to try to stand. Nothing hurt, but I still couldn't wiggle my toes, and the braces kept my legs so rigid I felt no change in my legs. Each brace consisted of two steel rods, attached to either side of a vertical foot pad, running up either side of my leg. Leather straps every few inches kept the leg itself up off the bed. The bars were joined by a curved metal strip at the crotch. It was painful even to think of standing up with them on, but Leo announced to me—never my parents—that "we" were going to do exactly that before the end of summer. No ifs, ands, or buts. By the end of June he had me interested, and he started holding me under my shoulders at arm's length. At first, no weight on the footboards. Then just the least bit of weight. That made the braces dig into my crotch a little, then a lot. But by now I thought I could do it, and Leo said he was going to let me go, and catch me when I fell. And by God, he did. The next night, he asked me if I was ready to stand by myself with my father and mother watching, and he called them upstairs from the living room, and there I was, grimacing from the pain of the braces, but standing. We all cried our different tears of relief. Leo downed another quart of milk and another box of biscuits, and we started planning to do it next without braces. Eight weeks later, wearing a corset to keep my belly from sagging (still no real stomach muscles), and on crutches, I stood on the first tee at Essex County Club with Bob Potter, ready to try a few holes of golf. I drove the ball into the creek that crosses the fairway about 50 yards away, and hobbled off the tee to fish it out. Only one trouble: when I leaned over to retrieve the ball from about two inches of water in the creek, I didn't have the strength to straighten up, nor the strength to stay bent over, and so into the creek I plunged, cracking my head on a rock as I went down. Potter was there to fish me out, bloodied but pleased with myself. When it was time to go back to school, I was "recovered." I couldn't run, but I could walk without limping. No muscle refused to work, and naively or not, I was thinking of returning to sports the next year. * * * St. Mark's School specialized in fitting round pegs into round holes, fine-tuning good students and good athletes into better students and better athletes, turning them on to new opportunities like social work, debating, and extracurricular activities in general. Square pegs—like my brother Freddy—just wouldn't fit into those round holes, and they were miserable. They were known as the "Dry-Hair-in-Chapel" crowd. Since they avoided

sports at all costs, they didn't have to take showers after exercising in the afternoon, and so they showed up for the mandatory evening chapel services—one lesson, two prayers, one hymn—with hair uncombed and dry as a bone. Dry hairs like Blair Clark, who went on to be president of the Harvard Crimson and vice president of CBS News, or like Robert “Cal” Lowell, the distinguished Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, were tolerated, but clearly classified as outsiders. And this was my first lesson in the whole complicated matter of insiders versus outsiders. I liked being an insider, and it was a long time before I found the courage to tolerate, then explore, then enjoy outsiders. Returning to St. Mark's in a corset to contain my sagging belly curtailed my athletic career more than somewhat. Football was out, period. I gave hockey a try that winter, but you can't skate on your ankles. Baseball was a little better, but I could barely beat my mother down to first base. And so I turned to dry-hair activities, like debating, editing—even acting. Following a minor triumph the year before as the “femme muette” in Molière's *L'Homme qui épousa une femme muette*, I played a cop in a school play. I sold charter subscriptions—forty-eight of them—to an exciting new picture magazine called *Life*, and I can still remember how thrilling that first issue seemed, with Margaret Bourke-White's extraordinary cover picture of Fort Peck in Montana. I tried out for the highly desirable job of exchange editor of the *Vindex*, the school's monthly magazine, and I got it. The only thing an exchange editor had to do was to write the editors at all the girls' schools on the East Coast, offering a free subscription to our magazine in exchange for a free subscription to their yearbook, the one with pictures of the juniors and seniors. Intellectually, the school's most exciting presence (for one term) was the great British poet Wystan Hugh Auden, who was a friend of our English teacher, Richard “Dreamy Dick” Eberhart. My memories of Auden are two: he had a really large mole on his lower left cheek, and he didn't bathe often enough. No recollection of his poetry, nor any recollection of being embarrassed by having no recollection of his poetry. We all liked Dick Eberhart, who went on to become a renowned poet himself. He was the Congressional Poet from 1959 to 1961, known then as the Consultant in Poetry in English to the Library of Congress. He had written an ode to masturbation, a first for St. Mark's English teachers, and he returned one fall with a copy of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* which he had smuggled through Customs for us. In the more traditional studies, such as history, government, and the classics, I was generally ranked second in my class—to Henry Munroe, who used to score a perfect 106 on the *Time* magazine current affairs quiz, and later became a big shot in the *Vick Chemical Company*. The only time I ever ranked first in my class was the week Munroe had mumps. The summer after polio I spent two weeks as a student counselor at Brantwood Camp, which St. Mark's School ran for white Big Brother kids from New York—my first exposure to the underprivileged. I saw my first pistol, when fourteen-year-old “Nick” from New York tried to establish his territorial imperatives over my cabin with a Colt .45. (Not loaded, it turned out.) I fished nine-year-old “Joey” from Fall River from the bottom of a pond, after luckily spotting him as he jumped cautiously in. He couldn't swim a lick. I listened to small boys telling me how they stole lead pipe from abandoned warehouses. I smoked my first cigarette. Back in Beverly, on the eve of becoming sixteen, I got a job (my father got me a job) as a copy boy on the *Beverly Evening Times*, circulation 5,000. I thought it might be fun and he knew the owner. He had to drive me to work on his way to work, until I got my license and the use of a car in midsummer. This was a \$300 Chevy coupe, vintage 1930 or 1932, which had belonged to my father's bootlegger. No springs in back, no seat in the rumble seat, which had been removed (and lost) to make room for the booze. For most of the summer I fetched coffee for Clayton Creesy, the city editor, and Mr. Stanton, a nice old man with stooped shoulders, a kind heart, and a green eyeshade, who was chained to the obit desk. Before too long Buddy

Conley and I graduated to “City Locals,” a daily column of one- or two-sentence paragraphs about local citizens.* Beverly was both the last industrial town and the first summer resort on the seashore north of Boston. Economically it was dominated by a big United Shoe Machinery plant. To collect City Locals, I went the length of Cabot Street, stopping in one store after another and asking the employees what was new in their lives. Any birthdays, new arrivals, deaths? Illnesses? Any visitors at home? Any vacations planned? Home alterations? Parties, retirements, confirmations? College acceptances? Dean’s lists? I got paid \$2 a column—on top of my \$5 weekly wage—and I learned a vital lesson: People will talk if they feel comfortable. My last week, I saw my first body. A man had killed himself by sticking his head in front of a Boston & Maine train near Ipswich. I threw up when the coroner asked me if I had ever seen a brain before, as he leaned over and slipped this man’s brain into a plastic envelope. And I wrote a feature story about model ships on exhibition at the Peabody Museum. Here’s the lead to my first byline, “Model Boat Exhibit Draws Crowd to Essex Galleries,” August 1937, just before my sixteenth birthday. “In the quaint attic galleries of Stephen’s antique shop on Main Street, South Essex, the Essex Chapter of the American Red Cross is presenting an exhibition of ship models, most of which have been donated by the families of Essex, whose ancestors themselves were shipbuilders of renown.” Where, who, when, what . . . in forty-seven words. Proper Bostonians—at least halfway proper Bostonians—were sexually repressed if not inhibited in those days. Sexual experiences were pretty much vicarious, such as they were. Gypsy Rose Lee and the Howard Burlesque Theater in Boston were a couple of years away. A grainy foreign film called Ecstasy showed Hedy Lamarr in orgasm, but that was as scary as it was stimulating. There was no Playboy magazine, only Cal York’s Gossip of Hollywood in Photoplay, to be read in the barber shop, and vague rumors of wild orgies involving comedian Fatty Arbuckle and unidentified starlets. There were girls, however, and my sister Connie’s friends constituted the perfect circle to fantasize about. I remember taking Jenny McKean, my first love—and a love all my life—to the movies one afternoon, determined, by God, to kiss her at least and at last. But I ran into a problem that has plagued me throughout my life. The movie was Dark Victory, starring Bette Davis. We had held hands, sweatily, for most of the time, but by the end of the movie, as I remember it now, Bette Davis goes blind, and slowly ascends a grand and endless staircase, as the music of angels singing grows to a crescendo. Suddenly the movie is over, the lights are on, and I am crying uncontrollably. No handkerchief of course (at sixteen?). No Kleenex. And I was left with only the bottom of my polo shirt to stem the flow. When I dropped Jenny at her house, I clumsily screwed up my courage to try to kiss her. She demurred. And when I got home, my sister was on the phone listening to Jenny laugh. Back in boarding school for my junior year—tuition paid by Cousin Frank Crowninshield, the godfather whose only achievement in life had been to marry a du Pont—I had apparently decided on a life of achievement. My health, if not my speed, had pretty much returned. I played varsity football and hockey, without getting my letter, but in baseball I was the starting first baseman for the team that beat Groton. My mother and grandmother had cried noisily a few weeks earlier when I hit a home run against Milton and thundered around the bases like a freight train. George Palmer and I were the school doubles champions in tennis. My marks stayed up, and I ended up as a class monitor and editor-designate of the school yearbook. Half a century later boarding schools like St. Mark’s seem hard to explain, especially the single-sex boarding schools. Parents feel guilty about sending little Johnny away for the better part of such important years. And little Johnny is in no hurry to swap the permissive attitudes of today’s culture for the isolated discipline of a boarding school. The education provided was top of the line, but the education not provided—about race, poverty, anti-Semitism, crime, anything

remotely counter-cultural—was extensive. But still, I had a very positive experience away from home for five years, aged thirteen to seventeen, nine months a year. Was this the beginning of the “adaptation to life” which so interested the Grant Study researchers later? I knew my parents loved me. I really did. I was the original round peg waiting for the round hole—programmed to do well at schools like St. Mark’s. Not yet comfortable with rebellion, cynicism, or complaint. I resent the inability of institutions to cope with different, distinctive children far more today than I did then. During the summer of 1936, I spent six weeks at Brantwood Camp, and I spent my first night in jail, on the Fourth of July. The evening in question started at the staid and proper Dublin Inn, in Peterborough, New Hampshire, where I was importuned by my peers to find out what rye whisky tasted like. Old Overholt, or “Old Overcoat,” as they called it, tasted perfectly dreadful, and it effected an awesome change in me. After dinner we all adjourned to the Keene (N.H.) State Fair . . . full of ourselves, full of booze, and full of thoughts about the upcoming football season. Bill Parsons, a fellow polio veteran and a future clergyman, and I got down in our three-point stance and charged off in various directions, whenever our buddies shouted, “Set!” Eventually we started tackling people, and inevitably one person we tackled was a state trooper who was totally unamused. He marched four of us off to the clink: me, Parsons, Henry Allen, who later became Dr. Henry F. Allen, the chief of ophthalmology of the Massachusetts Eye & Ear Infirmary, and my childhood friend Herbert Sears Tuckerman. We were released in the custody of the camp chief the next morning, and had to greet one hundred kids in the scorching heat a few hours later. I have always wondered whether that night is part of my formal record, waiting to be found by the Feds when I run for high office. Booze and my family have often been incompatible. My brother is a recovering alcoholic, who struggled with impressive courage—and ultimate success—to overcome his addiction. I doubt that I have ever had to fight so hard. My father just plain drank too much, and none of us could ever convince him how much his personality changed when he did. The first real job my father found after the Depression was at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, where he was the supervisor of the museum maintenance force that hung the art works and kept the galleries and the statues—and the toilets—clean. His salary was \$3,000 a year. And then the job that took him through the tough times, until the family fortunes improved with some critically important deaths, was as a member of the Massachusetts Parole Commission. His pal, Leverett Saltonstall, had become governor of Massachusetts and appointed him, and he took the job with great seriousness. “B” loved the parole decisions less than he loved the rogues, who dominated Boston and Massachusetts politics, as rogues always have. He was particularly taken with one Patrick J. “Sonny” McDonough, an elected member of the Governors’ Council, and a person who represented more than his share of the men who appeared before the Parole Commission in search of freedom. I’ll never forget “B” ’s report of a commission meeting at the Bridgewater (Mass.) state prison, where he had arrived a few minutes late. Sonny McDonough was sitting next to a client when “B” took his seat, and heard Sonny tell his client: “That’s Bradlee. Look out for him. He pisses ice water.” My mother also went to work during the Depression, in a dress shop on Newbury Street in Boston, called ADEM, after her friends, the proprietors: Adelaide Sohier and Emma Lawrence. This impressed all of us, and all of her friends, because Jo was not exactly everyone’s idea of your typical working woman. Bright enough, surely. Certainly pretty enough, and gregarious enough, but she had no calluses anywhere. She didn’t seem tough enough. But she was. In a couple of years, she bought out her partners, with a loan from her father, and ran the shop herself. Running it included two buying trips a year to cloak and suit headquarters on Seventh Avenue in New York. Christmases during this time in our lives were on the lean side. Our stockings were filled

with more necessities—like socks, underwear, and combs—on top of the traditional orange in the toe than luxuries. As the family fortunes improved, I remember five-dollar gold pieces showing up, and I remember Connie getting a family ring. I got a Flexible Flyer sled one Christmas as my “big” present. My father walked me down to the Boston Common to go coasting on Christmas afternoon, but crossing one street, a taxi cab ran over the rear runner, twisting it into a shape that made coasting impossible. I could draw the shape of that twisted runner today. The worst present experience of my life came a few years later, on my birthday. I had asked for golf clubs, since polio had forced me to take up golf over tennis, and mine had become too short. I got the golf clubs, but they were hand-me-downs from my brother, the non-jock, and he got new golf clubs. On my birthday. I didn’t understand that then. And I don’t understand it any better now. In the summer of 1937, the New York grandparents gave us a six-week trip to France. We sailed over—it took almost ten days—on the S.S. Champlain, one of the first ships that would sink in World War II, and sailed back on one of the early voyages of the S.S. Normandie in less than five days. Tourist class. With my mother, my aunt Alma Morgan, and her husband, Tick, their daughter Tudie, and the three of us. I remember falling in love, and exchanging diaries with the beautiful Katherine Adams from Albany, New York, but unable to get up my nerve to kiss her. I remember riding the Ferris Wheel at the Paris World’s Fair, suffering from acute lack of Boston Red Sox news in the Paris Trib, seeing every château in the Loire Valley, and winning the coveted Most Cooperative Child Award (\$10).

TWO HARVARD By my senior year—1938-39—the winds of war were felt even in remotest Southboro, and in between trying (unsuccessfully) to get laid, and trying (successfully) to make admission into Harvard automatic, we talked nervously and hesitantly about Hitler, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, and communism. At Princeton, someone had started the Veterans of Future Wars, which we felt was extremely sophisticated and convinced us that college would be cool. I participated in as many extracurricular activities as possible: I won four letters (in football, hockey, baseball, and tennis), was on the debating team, choir, and glee club—where I stayed even as my voice changed from alto to bass—and was yearbook editor and monitor. In retrospect, I seem to have been building a résumé without knowing what I needed a résumé for. In any case, I got into Harvard with highest honors in English, French, and Greek, plus a pass in physics. There was never a question that I would get into Harvard, or go to Harvard. My father had gone there. My grandfather had gone there, and many generations of Bradlees before him, a total of fifty-one, all the way back to 1795 with Caleb Bradlee. No alternatives were suggested, or contemplated, much less encouraged. My brother, after being “asked to leave” St. Mark’s, and being kicked out of Brooks School for smoking two days before graduating, had just as naturally gone to Harvard. But Freddy quit Harvard after only a few months. Unknown to any of us, he had gone to New York and landed a role in a Broadway play, by God. From his early years, he had play-acted, speaking aloud to himself in different accents, perfecting a talent for mimicry that astounded us all. He could then—and still can—make me cry with laughter imitating my mother, my grandmother, my Uncle Sargent, and later various in-laws, never mind Noel Coward, Mrs. Roosevelt, Tallulah Bankhead, and Katharine Hepburn. He had done summer stock in various locations on the East Coast while still in boarding school, and there he was on Broadway, barely nineteen. My mother, the “artistic” member of the family, was slightly uncomfortable with an actor son, while my father, the nature-loving jock, was proud as could be. The impact of the new freedom at Harvard blew my mind. I was only a couple of miles across the river from the Beacon Street womb, but I might as well have been on a different planet. There was a story about the difference between the Ivy League colleges. At Princeton, they showed you where the

swimming pool was and taught you how to swim. At Yale, they shoved you into the pool and watched you swim. At Harvard, they didn't care if you swam—or sank. Even attendance was optional in all but a few classes. I didn't attend a single class in Michael Karpovich's course on the History of Russia (got a D). You could take as many—or as few—courses as you wanted to take in any semester. You could drink what you wanted, when you wanted to. As far as an innocent could see, the path ahead stretched invitingly toward discovery and excitement, without consequences. Except that Hitler had sliced into the heart of Poland the week before we arrived on Harvard Yard. Britain and France declared war on Germany on September 3, the week we registered as freshmen. We were the first class at Harvard to know, really know, that we would be going to war. That knowledge colored our every action, and our every reaction. It led me and many of my friends into the Naval ROTC, which had achieved elite status at Harvard by promising its cadets only the choicest assignments—destroyers or cruisers—once they were commissioned. We never even thought about what life might be like on a destroyer or a cruiser. We hadn't even seen one, but the knowledge that we were headed for the glamorous and dangerous destroyers or cruisers put a spring in our step. And so, before I really could enjoy my freedom not to have to do anything, I had to attend ROTC classes and Memorial Hall drills, or face the prospect of slogging my way through the mud of Europe as a GI. The winds of war made it easy to succumb to an unattractive, self-pitying attitude of eat-drink-and-be-merry-for-tomorrow-we-go-to-war. Especially drink. I hadn't taken another drink for two years, after winding up in the clink at Keene, New Hampshire. But the card games, the rathskellers, the coming-out parties, and whatever the hell it was that pulled us into the Ritz Bar so often, changed all that.

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Yours in Truth: A Personal Portrait of Ben Bradlee, Legendary Editor of The Washington Post, A Very Private Woman: The Life and Unsolved Murder of Presidential Mistress Mary Meyer, All the President's Men, Tuxedo Park: A Wall Street Tycoon and the Secret Palace of Science That Changed the Course of World War II, Insurgency: How Republicans Lost Their Party and Got Everything They Ever Wanted, Conversations with Kennedy, The Final Days, Mary's Mosaic: The CIA Conspiracy to Murder John F. Kennedy, Mary Pinchot Meyer, and Their Vision for World Peace: Third Edition, JFK Revisited: Through the Looking Glass, Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers, Grace and Power: The Private World of the Kennedy White House, The Last of the President's Men, Watergate: A New History, The Secret Man: The Story of Watergate's Deep Throat, Katharine the Great: Katharine Graham and Her Washington Post Empire, The Making of the President 1960: The Landmark Political Series, The Powers That Be

What people say about this book

Nan Healy, "The Real Newspaper Business Fondly Remembered. When the Watergate Hearings were in full swing in 1973, the country was transfixed by these daily, televised events which focused on the question famously first asked by Senator Howard Baker: "What did the President know and when did he know it?" Ben Bradlee, the editor of The Washington Post to whom Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein reported, was the guiding force behind the reporters' revelations in The Post which triggered the Congressional Investigation and ultimately the resignation of Richard Nixon as President of The United States. Anyone who remembers that time and was interested in what transpired, will find Ben Bradlee's account informative,

educational, very inclusive, suspenseful, and highly entertaining. .Watergate, however, occupies only part of this wonderful book. In it, we learn about Ben Bradlee's childhood, his college years, the time he spent in the Navy during World War II, and his early career as a journalist (which included several international assignments) before he reached The Washington Post. The World War II section alone is worth the read because of the richness of the information which should have much appeal to World War II history buffs. There is also a considerable amount of interesting detail about his and his second wife's close friendship with John and Jacqueline Kennedy when the Kennedys were in the White House. Kennedy buffs will enjoy Ben Bradlee's keen insights into President Kennedy both as a man and a President. There are also great stories about his friendships with some of the great journalists and cartoonists of the day such as Art Buchwald and Herb Block..Perhaps the best of this book is Ben Bradlee's willingness to let the reader get to know him, faults and all. It's not often that a man of Bradlee's standing, accomplishments, celebrity and experience will be honest enough to do that. I was sorry when I finished A Good Life and wished there was more to enjoy. I think you will also. Nan Healy”

Anthony Geishauer, “It was an amazing life ... truly.. Ben Bradlee is bigger than life, but it was good to see from where he came. He was a lousy Harvard student and he suffered many of the problems the rest of us have early on. Having gotten married just before going to Vietnam, I know how he felt getting married just before going into WWII. I'm only half way through this epic bio, but I find it fascinating. Hard to believe he didn't know anything about JFK's womanizing, but he said he didn't. I think I'm just about to get into the best part of the book. "A Good Life" is all and more than what I hoped it would be. Highly recommend it.”

Tucson Bluesman, “A very good autobiography (with a few too many typos). I would have given this five stars. However, as a retired journalist and journalism teacher I was surprised that Bradlee's autobiography had so many typos — either misspelled words or omitted words. I expected a higher standard of editing. Yes, most books have a typo or two, but I seemed to catch a typo every 10 pages or so — too many for an autobiography of the former Executive Editor of The Washington Post (or is it the Washington Post — lower case “the” — since it varies throughout the book?). This is a great read if too many typos don't bug you...”

rklowrie, “A look into Ben Bradlee's personal life and relationships. I have been fascinated with the life and work of Ben Bradlee since I watched 'All the President's Men" in 1976. He changed the face of journalism and politics by the way he handled the Watergate scandal as well as providing credibility to the Washington Post. I was hoping Bradlee's memoirs would provide more insight into his professional life as an editor and newspaper journalist instead of a bombastic view into Bradlee's sexual exploits and romantic trysts. For those in the loop of Washington politics, it is invaluable!”

Gail M. Buchanan, “Great events of the day. It was a fascinating read about a man who lived a very interesting, close to the events of the day life. I felt he was also self involved. I didn't like his treatment of his first two wives. Then he was captivated by a much younger, very ambitious woman. Some of those happenings took away from his incredible ability.”

Bart, “Bradlee provides a candid and entertaining look back over his career. Ben Bradlee's book, "A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures", is a warm, candid and entertaining look back over a remarkable career and personal life. His writing is honest, revealing and to

the point. He indeed has had an interesting life. The Watergate and the Pentagon Papers experiences are covered in detail. I became interested in reading this book after reading the book "All the President's Men" and watching the movie of the same title. I would highly recommend this book! Ben comes across as an smart, honest and decent man who worked very hard to earn his achievements."

Norma Ely, "Very good and I am looking forward to the upcoming movie Very good and I am looking forward to the upcoming movie entitled The Post concerning Bradlee and Katherine Graham and the Pentagon Papers and starring Tom Hanks and Merle Streep. Woo Hoo!"

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R, "Ben Bradley. Brilliant. Straight from the horses mouth"

The book by Reza Kahlili has a rating of 5 out of 4.5. 146 people have provided feedback.

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