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Transcript

Interviews I Shall Never Forget

Sir David Frost

Broadcaster and Producer

Chair: The Rt Hon Lord Owen CH FRCP

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1977 – 79)

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Lord Owen:

It's very nice to be here to introduce David Frost. He's going to speak. It's all on the record. There's going to be a question and answer session at the end which David will take, but if you would announce your name and affiliation.

We were at Cambridge together but we didn't notice each other. He was a famous person when I was a junior hospital doctor, and I watched with envy as he crossed the Atlantic three times a week in Concord. He's had an amazing career. I've been grilled by him on television, I should think 15 to 20 times, and I think he is quite easily the most formidable political interviewer in the business. I used to say to myself, 'Don't relax. Don't say anything foolish. Just careful, careful, careful.' And then I would proceed to produce some extravagant comments which I would bitterly regret later. And it was always at that moment when you were most relaxed that the real crunch would come.

I'm not going to steal all that he's going to say, but in 1977 when he did his really famous interview with Richard Nixon, it's easy to forget, why was he chosen? Well, he was a much more formidable figure in the United States than many of us in this country recognise, that's the first thing. But it was an extraordinary entrepreneurial event, and he is an entrepreneur on top of all these things. He risked all of us money on this particular interview.

And what an interview. I don't know if many of you have watched it recently. I would just draw up why he is so formidable. Can you imagine Nixon, of all people, President of the United States, ending up almost right at the end of the interview, turning to David and saying, 'Well what would you say?' And here is the interviewer telling him what to say in a way... I sometimes think only a Methodist could have done to Nixon.

There is that behind David, which you should never forget, in simple terms, leading him to make the only real apology that he ever made. It was a formidable achievement. And it did a great deal of good for Nixon. And I think in a way he realised it, but he'd led up to it by letting him talk, getting his confidence, being with him, sensing him. And that's the skill of a great interviewer.

Anyhow, enough from me, this promises to be a great and informative evening. It's my pleasure. David Frost.

David Frost:

Well, thank you. Thank you all very much indeed and thank you, David, for a marvellous and generous introduction. And even more exciting than the one I

had the other day which was at the Rover House Hotel. They didn't have anyone like David to introduce you, but they had a toastmaster in scarlet livery who was supposed to tap his gavel on the table and say, 'Pray silence for Sir David Frost.' I don't know if he was nervous or what, but instead he tapped his gavel on the table and said, 'Pray for the silence of Sir David Frost.'

He knew what he's talking about. But they are powerful, aren't they, those toastmasters. I was speaking a couple of months ago at a dinner and they were serving the coffee and the toastmaster came over to me and said; 'Would you like to speak now, Sir David? Or shall we let them enjoy themselves?'

But it's a joy to be introduced by David, who is a good friend, a dear friend. And at the same time, as he's been rightly described as the best prime minister we never had. David Owen, the one and only, thank you for being here. It's an honour for me that you're here this evening.

Actually, in fact, going through those examples of toastmasters getting things wrong, there's of course... The media is a great home for mistakes and errors and so on, and I've collected them through the years. I remember in the early days of TV-am, well there weren't many later days of TV-am, but we sent a young reporter to the Holy Land and he sent back a report which began, 'Welcome to Israel, a Mecca for tourists.'

There was an LWT shop steward and he was very angry and he said, 'There have been certain allegations made against me. And I intend to find out who the 'allegator' is.' Love those things.

Radio is very good. BBC Radio, they're very serious about the news that's on and getting it right and having sort of neutral music before the news so that there's no embarrassing juxtapositions and so on and so forth. And I was listening the other day and the newscaster said in a very serious tone of voice; 'At the unorganised conference today... I'm sorry. At the UN organised conference...'

And there was a couple of months ago, also on BBC Radio, and it was a disc jockey who said, 'And now a record for Mrs Silvia Davis, who is 111. I'm sorry... And now a record for Mrs Silvia Davis, who is ill.' Love that stuff. Love it.

We have a local paper in the country and it had the best classified ad I've ever read about a month ago. It said, 'Unused tombstone for sale. Would suit

family called Nesbitt.' I wonder what had happened to Mr Nesbitt, or indeed Mrs Nesbitt.

And Glenn Hoddle said, 'I never make predictions and I never will.' Not possible to have both of those.

But there's Jimmy Young, do you remember Jimmy Young's memorable quotes on the programme? There was one where he said, 'The pendulum has swung full circle.' And another one, I love this one, 'Has there ever been any link between asbestos and asbestos-linked diseases?' Yes, Jimmy, there has. He also said, 'A lot of actresses have complained that as they get older, the parts dry up.'

Oh, and this was Kid Jensen in an interview. He said, 'What's your name?' And the guy said, 'My name is Muhammed.' And Kid Jensen said, 'Ah, yes, Muhammed. That's one of the most popular Christian names in the world.' But it is a joy, they go on in these fields.

This is Terry, Terry Wogan, 'And now, we welcome Derek Jacobi, famous for his performance in *One Claudius*.'

And of course sports are very good area for these bloopers, as it were, or errors, that people make. This was Terry Venables, 'I felt a lump in my throat as the ball went in.'

And this was Ron Atkinson, 'Well Clive, it all depends on the two M's... movement and positioning.'

And this was from a boat race, the Oxford-Cambridge boat race a year or two ago, at the end of it. This was on the radio, the radio commentator. And at the end of the race he said, 'And what a gesture. The wife of the Cambridge President is kissing the cox of the Oxford crew.'

I still play some cricket and I was playing last season and I just noticed to my surprise that the fellow that was standing next to me was wearing a panty girdle. And I said, 'How long have you been wearing a panty girdle?' And he said, 'Ever since my wife found one in the glove compartment of my car.' A main moment, that. A main moment.

But actually going through the years, the examples, they keep thudding out. Of course, actually next year it's 50 years since *That Was the Week That Was* began, 50 years ago. And I always remember the audience went from 2.5 million which is what, 10:30 at night – 10:30 in those days was a bit later than it is now. And that was what they were hoping for in terms of audience, and then it went, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12 in six weeks. And I thought for the first time I

could afford to go into Harrods, which I'd never done in my life before. And I went in and I was just signing a cheque and the guy behind the counter said, 'Mr Frost, I just want you to know, we never miss your show.' I thought, oh thank you very much. He said, 'No, if we're out, what we do is we make sure we're back by 10:15 so we can be there in front of the set at 10:30.'

Oh, thank you very much. He said, 'And if we're at home, what we make sure we've done is that we've laid the table for breakfast and done all the washing up by 10:25 so that we can be there in front of the set at 10:30.' And I said, 'Oh, thank you very much indeed,' and handed him the cheque, and he said, 'Do you have any means of identification?' You can't win, as they say.

Of course that was a very different time, then. *That Was the Week that Was* was, I mean in those days digital television meant switching on the set with your finger. And if you had a three and a half inch floppy, that was something you kept very quiet about. That was when a church outing meant the whole congregation and not just the priest. And safe sex just meant her parents were out for the evening. Things were very, very different in those days.

And *That Was the Week that Was* did have this enormous effect on the viewers and on the figures for the viewing and so on and so forth. And it was very thrilling and then we went on from that... Actually, one tribute to one person was Bernard Levin. All the team were fantastic, but Bernard Levin was absolutely wonderful. And actually they would never have a *That Was the Week that Was* without the fact... And the pilot show, he was confronting a group of people he couldn't stand, which he eventually did in the show every week, either with one person or a group of people or whatever.

And it was a group of Conservative ladies, now not conservative ladies with a small C, but with a bloody great C, with things saying, 'Bring back flogging,' and things. There was an MP called Sue Osborne who was very passionate about flogging and bringing back flogging, and so on. And we always said that he was the only man who rang Tim, the speaking clock, to hear the voice say, 'At the third stroke...'

But anyway, so he took on these Conservative ladies who kept making marvellous accidental comments. One woman kept saying, 'Mr Macmillan has always satisfied me.' And then a few minutes later she'd say it again. And there was another woman who wouldn't ever actually say what she was getting at and she would say, 'Mr Levin, how would you like your daughter to be walking along a dark street at night and nothing done about it?'

And at one point Bernard finally said, 'Do you realise that the Conservative Party central office has bigger wastepaper baskets than anywhere else in

Britain? Because of the stupid letters that you send to them. Bigger number than anywhere else in Britain.' And one woman said, 'And they need them, Mr Levin!' And he said, 'Was that my point or yours?'

But anyway, what happened was after the show was done, two middle high ups at the BBC looked at it and thought it was outrageous and so on, and then, praise the Lord, the Conservative Party complained about the way these ladies had been made a laughing stock of. Actually, they'd needed no help. They'd done it for themselves.

So higher higher ups at the BBC had to view the programme, which the previous lot had said mustn't go on the air. And they loved it. The higher higher ups thought that; a) the complaint was ludicrous, and b) that it should go on the air after one more pilot. So but for the Conservative ladies and Bernard Levin, it might never have gone on the air.

The other great contribution Bernard Levin made was his letters back to people who had sent disgusted letters to him. And some of them, 'What's a Jew boy doing on a programme like this?' that's sort of rare, but in addition to that, he would write back and say, 'Dear so-and-so, I thought I should just write to you and say that someone has obtained a supply of your note paper and is sending out insane letters under your name.'

And the other one he did was send letters, at the end of his letters would say, 'Dictated by Mr Levin and signed in his presence by.' So he played a big part in that programme, right through to the end. He was absolutely tremendous. And right through to the end... and the last I remember, there was one occasion when we had a celebration, the 40th anniversary of TW3, and although he was somewhat ill now, he was still able to come along and glean some pleasure from it, and a little return for all the pleasure we had gleaned from him in the process. And he right to the end, he was writing, wasn't he. The last three years of his life he wasn't well enough to write, but he was writing right through to the end at that particular stage.

And then of course, there were various characters in the 60s that emerged in a big way, like for instance George Brown, the Foreign Secretary, who had a bit of a trouble with drink. Not necessarily that he drank a lot, but that he couldn't necessarily cope with it. And there was one memorable occasion when he was on a visit to Peru and he was talking to this delicious creature in purple and so on, and some music started playing, and he turned to the delicious creature and said, 'May I have the pleasure of this dance?'

And the delicious creature said, 'There's three reasons why I will not dance with you, Mr Brown. First, you're drunk. Secondly, this is not a dance tune,

this is the national anthem of Peru. And thirdly, I am the Archbishop of Lima.' A memorable moment.

Other characters I remember from that period. Gilbert Harding, you remember Gilbert Harding? 'What's my line?' and things like that. And he was not known in America but he was known here, and he went to America and he was handed the immigration form and it had in one of those ridiculous questions – they still have versions of them but this one particularly said, 'Is the reason for your visit to overthrow the Republic?'

And so he thought, this is bloody silly, and so on. So he put, 'Not sole purpose of trip.' God bless him. God bless him for that. And he was arrested when they got to [inaudible]. Only for ten minutes or so, but he was a great character.

And towards the end of the 60s of course, I was starting to do more and more interviews and so on, having started with TW3 and so on. Doing more and more stuff in America. I remember one show we had in the late 60s in America with the editor of *Time* magazine, the editor of *Newsweek* and the head of TASS, the Russian news agency in New York.

It was a discussion about the great 'ifs' of history. That 'if' this, 'what if', 'what if'. And one of the questions came up, 'What if it has been Khrushchev who had been killed and not JFK?' And the guy from TASS immediately said, 'Well I can tell you one thing, Aristotle Onassis would not have married Mrs Khrushchev.' Bloody good line from what we assumed was a humourless Russia. But extremely good.

And there was also Ed Sullivan, the great character of American television. He had a sort of Sunday night at the London Palladium sort of show on a Sunday night, and he was very good in terms of booking people, getting the Beatles on and things like that. But he was absolutely terrible at introducing people, and terrible at introducing them in terms of efficiency and also in terms of exactly what he said about them.

And for instance, we used to collect these. And at one point I remember there was, The Supremes were on and he said, 'Now, ladies and gentlemen, here they are. Three young ladies, The Supremes from Detroit. Tell me girls, where are you from?' Well what do you say at a point like that?

There was also, there was an occasion when Jack Jones, who actually is still singing now and he's about to do another tour in this country, but Jack Jones was on and he was in the rehearsal. Everyone did a rehearsal at four o'clock

of the Ed Sullivan Show on a Sunday afternoon with one audience and then the real audience came in at eight and it was live at eight.

And Jack Jones sang his song and ended the song. Ed Sullivan, this maestro of, not talent so much but maestro of booking and everything, went... like that to Jack Jones. And this was the highest accolade anyone in America could get. Ed Sullivan had loved your song and actually beckoned you over to congratulate you. He once did it to Jose Feliciano and there was a terribly long pause. But it got worse, actually, because when someone helped Jose Feliciano over, Ed turned to the audience and said, 'Jose Feliciano, ladies and gentlemen. He's really overcome his handicaps. He's not only blind. He's Puerto Rican.' Well, the letters from Puerto Rico are still coming in.

So in rehearsal, Jack Jones sings. He beckons Jack Jones over and says to him, 'Tell me Jack. Wasn't Alan Jones your father?' And he said, 'He still is.' And afterwards Ed said, 'This is very good. Very good. We'll keep this in tonight. All right?' 'All right, yes, it's your show. Okay.'

So he sings the song at night, eight. Beckons him over and says, 'Is Alan Jones still your father?' I mean, what do you say in the circumstances?

The worst thing that happened, actually, was to Richard Hearne, Mr Pastry. He'd been on 28 times, he's on the 29th time and he'd always been asked by Ed to do a piece of shtick called the Lancers. He liked this shtick, and he'd done it 28 times. And now he's on the 29th time, the last year of the show and he says, 'What would you like, Mr Sullivan?' Mr Sullivan said, 'The Lancers.' He said, 'Oh the Lancers is the only show in America I ever get to do and people are going to think that that's the only thing I can do!'

Well, he insisted, Ed insisted. He wanted the Lancers. But a sort of compromise was worked out whereby he would introduce him, say, 'Here you are, Richard Hearne, Mr Pastry. Tell us Richard, what have you got for us tonight?' And Richard would say, 'Well Ed, I thought I'd start with a song, then do a dance, and end with some juggling.' And Ed would say, 'Oh no, please do my favourite, the Lancers.' And he said, 'Oh, all right then, Ed.' So Ed would get what he wanted, but at least the seed of versatility had been sown in the minds of the great American public.

So there they are that evening, and he says, 'Here he is, Richard Hearne. Mr Pastry, what have you got for us, tonight, Richard?' And he said, 'Well I thought I'd start, Ed, with a song, then do a dance, and end with some juggling.' And Ed said, 'Fine.' Leaving Richard Hearne saying, 'Oh no, please let me do the Lancers! It's the only thing I can...' Those are the things that can happen in the dear world of showbiz.

We're approaching our time for questions, so we can do that next and obviously we've got to the stage there, at the end of the 60s. We're going to come on to talking about interviews and the people I've interviewed. But I'll talk about whoever you'd like me to talk about. So if any of you have got any... it doesn't just have to be about interviews. It can be about anything. Anybody got a question they'd like to ask about anything?

Question 1:

In the TW3 programme, do you want to say something about Will Rushton?

David Frost:

Oh, Will Rushton. Will Rushton was brilliant. He was somebody... one interesting thing, he was portly and chubby at the beginning and one always thought of him as chubby. In fact, he had diabetes later, and he was actually incredibly slim. But somehow, one had never adjusted to that fact. You still thought of 'chubby' Will Rushton.

But he was so fast on his feet with the people. His ad-libbing was good, and I think the great thing about him was that he got better and better as the years went on and it was a real... as an artist as well. And it was a real tragedy that his life was cut short.

Private Eye and all of those things... he was another Shrewsbury graduate, wasn't he? I think so. He was always the life and soul of any occasion. And he was sorely, and still is, sorely missed. Sorely missed indeed.

Question 2:

You were sometimes criticised for having rather too gentle a style in interviewing. What do you think of the aggressive style today? The sort of Paxman approach.

David Frost:

Well, I like avoiding talking about colleagues specifically by name and so on. But those two points there that you're making are very interesting. I think the important thing is, how do you get the best out of somebody? And the quote I suppose that John Smith, the late John Smith made last time he was with us, he said afterwards to me, 'You have a way of asking beguiling questions with

potentially lethal consequences.' And I said, 'Well I'll be happy to have that on my tombstone, frankly.'

So I think that's the thing... sometimes when people think that you may be being soft or easy or mild or whatever, the question can still be... the content of the question can still be... if often sometimes more challenging because they can't get out of it by huffing and puffing back again and thus evading the thing.

And sometimes a question can sound almost playful until the person works out what it... For instance, I remember interviewing Neil Kinnock before the 1987 election. And the question I actually worked out the night before, because obviously a lot of the best questions are ad-libbed, but not all of them by any stretch of the imagination. This one was the simple question, 'If you become prime minister and Labour retains what it has at the moment, which is a policy for nuclear disarmament, would you send British boys into action against an opponent armed with short-range tactical nuclear weapons?' Tough question, which way are you going to go on that.

He started by saying, 'Well of course, nobody wants a Holocaust.' And I said, 'That's why I said, small, tactical nuclear weapons. Whether you would send British boys into action.' And the quandary was obviously, do you say surrender, which is disaster in one sense? Or sending British boys to their certain deaths on the other? I mean, that's obviously the two danger points. And he didn't say the word surrender, but he started talking about the fact of the armies of people in the Welsh hills resisting and so on. So the implication was that side.

Interestingly at that point, just before... *Frost on Sunday* was automatically put on the PA, just after it had been done. It was only later in the day and so on. And that particular day, it became sort of soon after that, it was always done. But that particular remark slipped the ears of people at nine to ten in the morning. And it was only when the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, in fact, spotted these dynamite quotes by about four in the afternoon. And in fact, immediately the Conservatives pointed out these particular words and it became a four day story, in fact.

But it sounded like an absolutely playful, almost a cocktail party question, until you realised... Or take another example that just springs to mind, of Trudeau. I was interviewing Trudeau in Canada, and I said, 'If you were awoken in the middle of the night by someone shaking you, would your first words be in English or in French?' Well, there was a wonderful pause when again he

realised this is not just a party question, but there's half the voters at stake here.

So there was the pause, it was great, we got the pause. People knew it was live, and so on. And after that, then came his recovery, which he says, 'Well, sometimes my boys wake me in the morning, and if they say, 'Hi Dad!' I say, 'What's up, kids?' And if they say, 'Monsieur...' I say, 'Oui? Oui? Absolument.' So I guess it would depend on what language the person who was waking me was speaking.' 'That's why,' I said, 'They only shook you.'

But it was, again, a fun light question can really hit home, as can a really tough one.

Question 3:

Who's the most formidable and impressive political interviewee you've ever interviewed?

DAVID FROST:

The most formidable. God, that's difficult. I mean, obviously Richard Nixon was formidable in a number of ways, obviously. And had a good mind and great ambitions which were not fulfilled and so on. Most formidable.

One of the most surprisingly formidable people was General Schwarzkopf after the Gulf War, because all of us, when we grew up, whether we were Northumberland Quays or Sydney Sussex we were all thought in those days of military types as being cretins and so on. And it's such a change, many years later, to come across General Schwarzkopf who'd just won this victorious battle, that he was more well-read than I was. He was sophisticated. He was genuinely anti-war, and so on.

And he at one point said the thing about, you know the great fuss was about when America stopped on the road to Basra and so on, because it was just a carve up at that point. And actually, I think the right decision, because as George Bush said later, the whole coalition would have fallen apart if Syria and other countries... Well, the people of Syria never knew they were in the coalition, in fact. Apparently true.

So General Schwarzkopf. And he was clear in his thinking and on this thing about, which he said I had recommended us continuing... And that was a shock story that ran on, that he had gone against what Bush had done and he'd recommended continuing. And in fact, it then emerged when people read

the transcript more closely, that in fact, he had recommended continuing the day before. But on the actual day when George Bush decided to stop, he did not object. He agreed.

So the fact that he had wanted to continue a day before was still powerful news, but it wasn't as powerful in terms of Schwarzkopf and George Bush as it had sounded. And the other thing that that proves, that story, which goes on for days and days, but that you should never do as Cheney in those days as a defence did, and they all attacked what the papers said that Schwarzkopf had said, not what he'd actually said.

So that is always a danger. Through the years, I've had people calling up and saying, 'When *That Was the Week* was stopped, he made a vicious attack...' and he hadn't said a word. But I could easily have leapt in and said something like, 'Well I don't like him, either,' or whatever. Although I'd never met him at that point, so I didn't know him. But in other words, never, never respond to what people say someone else has said until you're sure that they've actually said it. Because it can cause you a diabolical lot of problems in that particular case.

So Schwarzkopf would certainly be one. Nelson Mandela was one of the most charismatic, along with Robert Kennedy, of people that one can think of that one interviewed. His ability to still cover the waterfront, this is ten or 15 years ago and I mean he was saying for instance... I was saying, 'A lot of people say, 'How was it? You may have found religion but how was it that you came out of this 28 years of incarceration not feeling bitter?''

And he didn't feel that as a sort of compliment, he just said, 'David, I would like to be bitter. But there is no time to be bitter. There is work to be done.' That was still just before the election, and so on. But not taking an easy compliment and saying, 'Well it's very kind of you to say that,' or whatever. 'I would like to be bitter. I don't want to be sanctified for being un-bitter. I would like to be bitter, but there is no time to be bitter. There is work to be done.'

So he springs to mind with a wider range than even one could have expected or hoped, indeed. That was a great experience. And FW de Klerk, the more one reads and the more one learns, he did deserve to be there at the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony also receiving a Peace Prize I think at that time. And everything he says and other things he underlines that have happened since, every time I interview him, he is more passionate and more revealing, in fact. Well deserved, his part.

Question 4:

I watched your interview with Joan Bakewell that week on the Nixon tapes, and I thought it was fascinating. It still left me with one question and I've got the chance to ask you the question, which is, did you like Nixon?

David Frost:

Very good question. I think the answer is no, because particularly at that time, one couldn't. Because the thing was, at that time – 1977 – there were 30 people or so who were in jail, not for very long sentences, but they were suffering in jail for doing things that Nixon had told them to do. And that really affected the feeling that you could like somebody, do you know what I mean? In that sense. That it was impossible to... at times, you could feel a certain empathy rather than sympathy for him. This man who so wanted to be great and wasn't and all of that.

But it just was too... that was one half of the problem of liking him, was the historical surround at that time. If he was here today, that wouldn't apply, 30-odd years later and so on. And the other thing was, of course, that he – in terms of liking and disliking, he had no real close communication with other people. It was always as if there was a sort of transparent screen protecting him from the rest of the world and even his friends and so on and so forth.

I remember going down, the vital session on the terms of the contract, and people warned me that Nixon always believed in five minutes of small talk, of which he had none, before you got down to the subject of the meeting or whatever. So clutching at straws in that first five minutes, I mentioned Brezhnev because he'd been mentioned in the *Los Angeles Times* that day. And Nixon said, 'Oh, I wouldn't want to be a Russian leader. They never know when they're being taped.' I mean just such an irony of course.

And of course one of his more famous pieces of small talk was the day when, as we were walking in to do the seventh session of the interview in the house where we had two dressing rooms, two bedrooms at each, and then we walked through the kitchen where our aides would be and into the room where we did the interview.

And as we walked through on that particular day, he tried to be one of the boys with the cameraman – 'Come on, we're all hard hats together against these characters,' and so on, 'These flaky characters,' and so on and so forth. And he tried to be one of the boys with them. And this particular day he tried to be one of the boys with me, and as we walked through the kitchen to where

we were doing the interview, he said, 'Did you do any fornicating this weekend?' Yes, yes he did. 'Did you do any fornicating this weekend?'

Now, I was stunned and indeed if I hadn't seen the stunned look on the faces of the people in the kitchen, I would have thought I'd imagined the whole thing. I mean, it was just stunning. More, I knew that he didn't really want to know the answer, either. So I said, 'Oh, I never discuss my private life.' And we went into the room and we were into the interviews and so on.

So that thing about small talk was another half of this thing about liking and disliking and so on, because it was very, very difficult to get... In fact, when we finished editing the four main shows, then there was another one later and so on. The first two had aired, Watergate and Foreign Policy. And so I went to take my leave of Nixon's, to thank him as it were. And went down to his house down there.

For the interviews we had to use, we couldn't use San Clemente because there was a Coastguard station out at sea that when he was President would switch off if he wanted to broadcast to the nation for ten minutes. But this was 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ hours of interviewing and he was no longer president. So they wouldn't switch it off for him. We did it up the coast and so on, and did it there.

That worked quite well, but again, he was... Once again, he didn't have any small talk, and that's why what worked was once he was absorbed in the interview questions, and if they absorbed him, then you got real answers out of him. But he had to get absorbed first. And so the reverse of what usually happens in interviews, where sometimes there are people who are very, very confident in the green room and terrified when they're on screen, in a way Nixon was sort of the other way around. He was nervous before getting in and then once he was involved in the questions, then you got the best man, when he forget that he was on duty in that sense.

But in terms of... that was the essential quality, really, of Nixon. That you had to get through the barriers. You never really got through the intimacy barriers. But when, with this last session with him, he was for 20 minutes... I was there with my girlfriend Caroline, and for 20 minutes Nixon was what I have never read about him being anywhere ever, and he was carefree. It was extraordinary to see him carefree.

He opened the door and he said, 'Hello, David!' That was the first surprise because he'd never called me David in the course of the last month of all these sessions and so on. And then we went in, and he was relaxed. The perpetual screen was down. He said to Caroline, 'Come let me show you around the house. That was the room where Brezhnev used to sleep, in

there. Great swordsman, you know, Brezhnev. The Russians are, you know. Dostoevsky, all of them the same.' And going on about that.

And then he came back into the main room again and he said to Manolo, his maidservant, bat man, I suppose: 'Manolo, go and get out the caviar the Shah sent us for Christmas. But before you go, give us your impression of Henry Kissinger.' Which was then hilarious, and then he went and got the caviar and came back again.

And just for that 20 minutes, you saw what a liberated Nixon could be like. But he never was, really. And I don't really know anyone else who's really seen that sort of carefree him. It only lasted 20 minutes, and then the sort of curtain came down again. And not that he became rude or anything like that. He was never really rude. He was affable but he was distant. And he went back to that again. But in that brief moment, it was a unique privilege really to see a carefree Richard Nixon.

Question 5:

My question is on intelligence and presidents, not whether they're smart but secrets. David Brooks at the *New York Times* has written on this issue of once presidents or prime ministers sort of receive their first top secret briefing, that all of a sudden they know the secrets of the world. And that maybe they become closed off to good ideas that come from people who don't know the secrets that they do.

In your interviews with presidents and prime ministers, what's your sense of that? That once they go into this other world, are they closed off to good ideas from people who don't know what they know?

David Frost:

I don't think I'd agree with David Brooks on that. Because I think that a lot of the time, I mean they have much more confidence in terms of examining new ideas because they do know something about it, when they didn't know anything about it before. So I would have thought that it doesn't necessarily act as a closing up mechanism. I would think that their horizons are widened, I would have thought, rather than narrowed.

And I would think that in fact, that... No I would think that they resist that. I mean, there are people obviously, if someone is suffering from bountiful inferiority complex or something, then nothing they're told will necessarily

change that. But in general, I mean I think you do generally see that people widen their horizons gradually. Some not forever, of course.

And afterwards there's a difference, too. What it is difficult to explain, but there is a difference. When you meet someone who's had power, real power, it's had an effect on them. I don't know what it is. It's not that their knees bang together or there's anything particularly physical about it, do you know what I mean? But there is a sense that what they've been through has had its effect on them and the person who's had power is different from a person who hasn't had power – who's done it well, and who's done it badly, too.

But the basic point is, I think that does have an effect. And so I think, no, I don't think it closes people off. I don't think that. I think it opens them up more. Except of course, if they cultivate an incredibly protective sort of team around them whose sole job is to try and keep the facts away from them. That's a different problem and that's a real danger

Question 6:

This is a missed opportunity question. So, over the course of your very long and distinguished career, who do you wish that you had had the opportunity to have interviewed and why?

David Frost:

Well, there were two or three along the way. Thinking back, I would have liked to have interviewed Harold Macmillan. I would have liked to have interviewed Ariel Sharon. In fact, ironically enough, after years of trying to get Ariel Sharon to do an interview, we got a letter agreeing to it, because he did very, very, very few interviews. And two days later, he had his stroke. And so he'll never give another interview, really. That was really a disappointment. A big disappointment.

Robert Kennedy I was lucky enough to interview, and he was outstanding. Because like with Nelson Mandela, with the modest response to that question, he just had that ability. And self-deprecation is a great quality in American politicians and there's much less of it over here. No, and it's a real skill and people should cultivate it. I mean, if they want to get re-elected or whatever.

But I remember, Robert Kennedy I was saying, a lot of people will say that the reason you're often described as ruthless is because of the things you had to

do as JFK's campaign manager back in 1960. And that was why. And a number of [inaudible] replied, but he just said, 'Oh, no. That's just my friends making excuses for me.' And it was very refreshing to have that sort of honesty and so on.

In the lighter sense, I would love to have interviewed Dennis Thatcher, who was a great character. I mean I remember once him saying to me, he was mad on golf as you probably well recall. And he said to me at a dinner, 'Well at least I hit too good balls today. I trod on a rake.'

And I remember once there was a dinner in Washington for Margaret Thatcher when she was given the Congressional Medal of Honor or whatever by George Bush senior. And Dennis was there of course with Margaret and so on. And after there was a dinner for about 80 people in the private part of the White House, and after dinner, George Bush stood up first and said his speech and so on and so forth and introduced Margaret. And Margaret stood up and gave her speech.

And then Barbara Bush stood up. And then introduced Dennis. Well then, every Brit in the room knew that Dennis had never uttered a single word in public in a speech ever. Never, ever, ever. And so we waited. And he stood up and said, 'As Julius Caesar said as he entered Cleopatra's tent, 'I haven't come here to talk.'

Lord Owen:

Well I think on that delicious note we should end what has been a fantastic evening and thank David, really very much indeed.