

## Chapter One

1953 to 1974

No way will I ever forget walking through the dark streets of our nation's capital around midnight July 27, 1974. I'd hoofed it a lot on muggy evenings that summer from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch's* Washington bureau on Pennsylvania Avenue to my small apartment in Foggy Bottom. But it was different this time. I was oblivious to the deserted George Washington University campus, the landmarks and the more than one shadowy corridor on my route.

I could think of nothing but the event I had covered just a few hours earlier—a cataclysmic milestone in our nation's history.

The Judiciary Committee of the United States House of Representatives had climaxed months of the unraveling of a sordid saga of political espionage by adopting an article of impeachment charging Richard M. Nixon, the President of the United States, with obstruction of justice.

Any remaining hope of Nixon's presidency surviving the politically cancerous Watergate scandal was doomed by the committee's action. Wishful thinking by a few die-hard Nixon supporters aside, the Washington establishment knew the President was a goner. The House Judiciary Committee had ensured his downfall. It came with his resignation from the presidency the following August 9.

I was one of the reporters sitting in the hushed silence of Room 2141 of the sprawling Rayburn House Office Building as the committee members, all with solemn faces, approved the impeachment article. Another scribe present was *Post-Dispatch* colleague Lawrence E. Taylor. Many of the biggest names in American political

journalism were in the room. If memory served me right, the person crowded into a seat next to me was Anthony Lewis, a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for the *New York Times*.

Taylor and I would share the byline on the story of the committee action that would be blazed across the front page of the next day's Sunday *Post-Dispatch*. It undoubtedly was the biggest byline in my newspaper years. It had to be a triumphant high of my reportorial career—albeit at the expense of a nation agonizingly distraught over a political conspiracy with the trappings of a Shakespearean tragedy.

At thirty-three years of age, I had traveled far on the path of journalism. My dream to be a newspaper reporter had crystallized when I was in the eighth grade.

Admittedly, I had probably entertained notions of being a professional athlete or fireman, or perhaps an accountant, when I first entered the job market in 1953 as a paperboy in my hometown of Belleville, Illinois. Tending to my route for the *Belleville News-Democrat* was a formidable challenge requiring multiple hours every day except Sunday.

The eighty to ninety subscribers I serviced lived in a row of largely pleasant residential blocks along West Main Street. The demands of the job were considerable and entailed more than bicycling through rain and snow in cold winter months. For instance, it took a while for me to reach the point where I could toss a paper onto a front porch without stopping my bike. Even after I finally got the hang of it, my pitching arm still sometimes sailed a paper onto a porch roof. My clients were not impressed when that happened.

Some days were better than others, and not just because of the weather. The *News-Democrat* editions on Wednesday and Thursday were chock full of grocery and other ads that made the papers thick and unwieldy, almost impossible to fold. Stuffing all of them into the canvas bag looped around my bike's handlebars was out of the question. So, I had to carry the overflow in a separate bag dangling from my shoulder. Extra dexterity was in order as I negotiated yards, streets and alleys.

Every Saturday morning I had to collect. This involved a visit to the front door of each home on the route to collect the weekly charge for the paper. It might go well or it might not. If too many people were not home or simply not answering the door, I wouldn't garner enough money to cover the weekly cost that I had to pay the *News-Democrat* for my papers. Consequently, the amount I still owed the newspaper would be deducted from my profit margin in an ensuing week. On the other hand, I might pocket as much as \$10 to \$15 on a good Saturday. Feeling flush with so many dollars, I couldn't wait to get to one of the numerous little grocery stores or confectionaries to treat myself to soda, candy bars and packages of baseball cards.

The Saturday routine never varied. After collecting, I pedaled to downtown Belleville and the building housing the *News-Democrat's* offices and printing plant at 120 South Illinois Street, only a short hike down from the Public Square.

There, I joined the other paperboys from throughout the city in turning in the money to a distinguished-looking woman with white hair. She was perched behind a counter in a small office space that necessitated some jostling among the carriers anxious to transact their business with her and head out. I often was among the last to reach her

because most of the other paperboys—I don't remember ever seeing a papergirl—seemed older and bigger than me.

I unquestionably felt a bit intimidated as the woman took my small black money bag and dumped the contents to the counter. I nervously awaited her verdict as she counted the coins and currency. Thankfully, I was in the black more often than not.

On some of these occasions, I noticed several well-dressed men entering and leaving the building. Compared to a lowly paperboy, they exuded an air of superiority. I learned from veteran carriers that they were reporters, the people who actually wrote the stories appearing in the paper. Their importance was immeasurable because, without their work, we would have no papers to deliver.

I may not have realized it immediately, but the newspaper bug had penetrated my skin. I allowed myself to fantasize about writing stories that people might actually read. I was duly impressed by the significance of the reporters.

My entrance into high school in the fall of 1954 necessitated the surrender of my paper route. I had no regrets. I did not miss it. Remembering those reporters, however, was another matter. I knew getting to write stories about people and sports had to be a great job.

A kid could dream, couldn't he? And I did.

