

MY FIFTEEN MINUTES

**Athenaeun Society
May 4, 2000
Peter C. Macdonald**

Mr. President, Mr. Denison, members of the Athenaeum Society, and honored guests. It was Andy Warhol who said, "In the future everyone will be world famous for fifteen minutes." This paper describes my brush with fame.

One day in mid - June of 1998, upon returning to my office after lunch, I was checking the answering machine for messages, as is my habit when our secretary is either out, or has not returned from lunch herself. There were the usual messages, lawyers asking for hearing dates or continuances for their cases, individuals calling with questions about traffic citations, persons calling saying that they could not report to jail for their weekends, and many other messages that come through our office every day. Then came one that has had a dramatic impact on my life, to say the least. It was, "This is Trevor Nelson with *60 Minutes* calling for Peter Macdonald. Please call me back at (212) 975-6374." There were a number of lawyers standing around, waiting for their afternoon cases, and at least one was heard to say, "Damn, what did you do?" I thought that I had done nothing that could possibly be the subject of a *60 Minutes* scrutiny, so I called the number later in the afternoon. I was surprised by Mr. Nelson, who answered directly and identified himself as an associate producer, and who wanted to know if I knew that Ft. Campbell was the most dangerous military installation in the world. I became defensive, defending the post, asking where he got the information that he was using, and simply trying to get my wits about me. Our conversation lasted about an hour, during

which time I found that he was inquiring about issues of domestic violence in the military in general, and Ft. Campbell specifically. We ended our conversation with his scheduling of a face to face meeting with me early the next week. Something I had said had interested him enough to fly here from New York. This conversation began an eight month odyssey that ended with "The War at Home," which aired on January 17, 1999. Many people have asked me what the experience was like, enough to make me think that you might also want to know what it was like, and to give you some feel for how *60 Minutes* operates. One day last year, when I was somewhat idle, I calculated that fewer than ^{+bored} 3,000 people have appeared on ^{over 30 years} *60 Minutes*. If you have seen *The Insider*, the story of Jeffery Wigand and the Brown and Williamson Tobacco Co., you have some idea about how *60 Minutes* operates. My experience was not too different, except that I was under no pressure to go on camera. This paper obviously is not a scholarly piece, based on extensive research, but almost none of the society's papers are.

Trevor arrived the next week, and I was surprised by his youth. The voice on the phone was very deep, confident, but also friendly, in a New York fashion. I am accustomed to New Yorkers, as my parents, older sister, and younger brother all migrated to New York from Kentucky some 20 or more years ago. We spent the afternoon together, talking about domestic violence issues at Ft. Campbell, and I shared with him my unhappiness with how Ft. Campbell was addressing the issue of domestic

violence on post. I still wondered how he had arrived at the conclusion that Ft. Campbell was the most dangerous military installation in the world. He stated that this came from Department of Defense statistics. There had been three domestic violence homicides the previous year, one of which involved me in that I had issued an emergency protective order on behalf of the deceased. I now knew that this was how Trevor had even obtained my name. We ended the afternoon with Trevor asking me what my schedule was like the next week. I asked why, and he replied that he was going to arrange for Ed Bradley to fly down the next week to do an on camera interview. My knees weakened - it must have been noticeable to Trevor - he said that I should not worry because I was not the subject of the inquiry, but only an integral part of a story that they had been working on for over a year. Still, it was daunting to think that Ed Bradley would come to Hopkinsville to interview me! The arrangements were made, and I went home to tell Margaret what had transpired. With my domestic violence contacts around the country, I knew that I would be able to find several people who specialized in issues of domestic violence involving the military and they could perhaps give me more information. I wanted to find out as much as I could about the military and domestic violence - on a national scale - I knew only of my experience with Ft. Campbell. I knew of one person with the Battered Women's Justice Project in Minnesota, but I could not get in touch with her - she was in a mountain cabin for two weeks with no phone. My next contact was another national expert, who

said that it was ironic that I had called - she had just ended a conversation with another advocate who was calling with concerns about domestic violence in the military, and who seemed very knowledgeable about the subject. I was given her name and number and phoned her later in the day. We had a rewarding conversation - at least for me - because she was able to give me a great deal of background information about domestic violence and the military. About 15 minutes into our conversation she interrupted me to say, "you're the one!" I asked what she meant, and she replied, "you're the one who is going to be on *60 Minutes*." Needless to say, I was shocked - did everyone in the world know? She explained by saying that she had been after *60 Minutes* for some time to do a segment on domestic violence in the military. She had been an advocate for battered women in Connecticut for a number of years and had as her clients a number of women who had been battered by sailors stationed at the New London Submarine Base. This began a relationship that included almost daily phone calls from her, endless email messages and fax transmissions. She wanted to make sure that I was up to speed on the military - her father is a retired admiral and she said that she had been frustrated by the Navy for years in its treatment of domestic violence, not unlike my experience with Ft. Campbell.

About two days after Trevor had arranged for the filming, he called to say that the filming for the next week would have to be canceled. There was "a crashing story" that needed immediate attention. I was beginning

to learn the language of television. This story would occupy several weeks of work and the filming would have to be rescheduled. I thought that perhaps this was the end of it. However, Trevor continued to call me, asking questions, and established a pattern of talking to me at least twice a week. Then, on October 2, 1998, Trevor called to ask if I could come to New York the following Monday. Jangled nerves again! I could not - there was already a conflict, but I could arrange to fly up the next day. He asked if I wanted Margaret to come, I demurred, said that I didn't think that it was right for *60 Minutes* to pay her way too. He said that it was actually saving them thousands of dollars, in that there would not be the expense of flying everyone, Ed Bradley, film crew, producers, etc. to Nashville and then arranging to come to Hopkinsville. He also said that he wanted me to feel comfortable, and I would have been with Margaret there. She is a calming force for me - Trevor must have had a great deal of insight and experience to realize this. It was set - we would fly to New York the next Tuesday, have dinner with Trevor and Mike, whom I did not know about, did not ask about, and wondered if it was Mike Wallace, although it was my understanding that Ed Bradley would be the interviewer. We arrived in New York the afternoon of October 6th, went to the hotel that they had arranged for us. This hotel was the Stanhope, a charming European style hotel directly across from the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Central Park. After checking in, we decided to walk for a while through the park before meeting Trevor and Mike for dinner and some orientation for me as

to what would take place the next day. Central Park in the fall is gorgeous - the trees starting to change, cool weather, but not cold. We had a very relaxing stroll. Trevor was right - I was beginning to feel a little more comfortable. We returned to the Stanhope, changed clothes, and took a cab to meet Trevor and Mike at Palio, a beautiful Italian restaurant that Trevor had suggested - he said that he wanted our experience in New York to be memorable. The restaurant's first floor was a bar - a square bar in the middle of a room with hand-painted murals from the medieval horse race in Sienna, Italy - the Palio, on all four walls. Trevor soon arrived, with Mike, who turned out to be Michael Radutsky, the producer for the segment, as well as Trevor's boss. Michael also was so young - I thought that these two young men could not possibly hold the positions that they held. We had a drink in the bar, and then went upstairs to dine. It was an unbelievably beautiful restaurant. I immediately asked Michael what would take place tomorrow, only to be interrupted by Margaret, who said, "Wait, I want to find out something about Michael and Trevor." I had already learned in short order that Michael was a lot like me - he got right to work. But Margaret was right, we needed to get to know each other - I felt that I did know Trevor after a face to face meeting and numerous phone calls, but we had just met Michael. We learned about their personal lives - Michael, despite his youthful appearance, was 41. He was married to a nurse, lived in Princeton, New Jersey, and had three children. His wife was from Alabama. Trevor was from Manhattan, married to a teacher in a

private school, and had no children yet. His mother is a federal prosecutor in New York. Michael had graduated from the University of Wisconsin and Trevor from Berkeley. We shared something of our lives too, including our two sons, who were currently in Europe for three months. Margaret was asked to order wine for the dinner and the sommelier handed her the wine list, which was enormous. I could tell that she was disconcerted, even though Michael and I were talking a mile a minute. I later learned that her discomposure was the result of the wine prices! She finally settled on one of the less inexpensive wines - ¹⁶⁵~~\$300~~ a bottle! But Trevor had said that our experience was going to be memorable, and he was right thus far. We continued to talk and I learned that they would not be telling me what would be asked the next day. Experience had shown *60 Minutes* that knowledge of the questions beforehand resulted in rehearsed and unnatural sounding answers. I was given only a very general idea of what the questions would be - but Trevor and I had spent hours discussing my relationship with Ft. Campbell. Michael and Trevor would compose the questions for Ed. I was now referring to him as Ed, even though I had not yet met him. We learned that Ed, Mike Wallace, Morley Safer, Steve Kroft, and Leslie Stahl were referred to as "the talent." Each of the talents had five production teams consisting of a producer and an associate producer. It was the responsibility of the producers to find stories for the talent. It is apparently a publish or perish atmosphere. Michael and Trevor worked under two year contracts - if they didn't produce, their contracts were not

renewed. Trevor had earlier told me that he felt fortunate to be paired with Michael - he considered him a star and had previously worked with Leslie, with whom he could not work, for various reasons that I will not reveal.

My sister, who lived in New York, had asked if she could attend the taping. This would have made me feel more at ease, and Michael and Trevor had gladly agreed - they had agreed to all of my requests. It never did hit me until the next morning why they wanted me to feel comfortable.

After this delightful three hour meal, we said our goodnights and returned to the Stanhope. Trevor had told us to order breakfast in the room, relax and enjoy our visit. We were complying.

I was able to sleep very well - about seven hours, which is a lot for me. We arose the next morning and ordered breakfast, quite an elaborate one, but they had said to get what we wanted. It was brought into our lovely room and wheeled to the windows overlooking the museum and the park. After this delightful meal we got dressed and took a cab to 524 West 57th Street, directly across from CBS Headquarters. *60 Minutes* is located in another building. We went to the reception area to wait for my sister Ann, and to meet with Michael and Trevor. Michael and Trevor came out before Ann arrived and Michael and I immediately started talking, at the same time and very rapidly - Michael's natural style and mine at present because of nervousness. My sister arrived and she observed Michael and me, turned to Margaret and said, "Pete's really wired this morning, isn't he?" Introductions were made between Ann and Michael and Trevor. Michael

then suggested that it was time to meet Ed before the taping. We walked back toward his office and on the way were introduced to Don Hewitt, the founder of *60 Minutes* and its executive producer. He is a charming man and after about five minutes of small talk we went on to meet Ed. Rapid heartbeats again. Ed Bradley is a wonderful man. Charming, sensitive, and extremely intelligent. His office is relatively small, crowded with memorabilia, overlooking the East River. We talked for a while and I asked if we could take pictures to memorialize the event. The pictures were taken and it was time to start the taping. We went down the hall to a small room, dark except for the television lights. There were two chairs, facing each other, approximately two feet apart. Props to resemble bookshelves were in the background, and there was a small seating area immediately in front of us, about eight feet away, where Michael, Trevor, Margaret and Ann would sit. I was introduced to the film crew, from Chicago, and not CBS employees. Michael explained that *60 Minutes* used independent film crews and never crews from CBS. I was waiting for makeup, but it was explained that makeup was never used - the soft lighting used did not require the use of makeup. After seeing the final product on air I agreed - I wish that I looked like that all the time! Ed and I were fitted for microphones and it was time to start. Now I realized why Trevor wanted me to be comfortable. I began to comprehend that what I was about to do would be seen by some 30 million people! I started to think that maybe I would not be able to speak, much less make any intelligent comments. This

is when the professionalism and sensitivity of Ed Bradley took charge. This must happen to him every time he interviews someone, with the exception of public figures. One question and I was at ease, not even aware that there were other people in the room, that there was a camera right over Ed's shoulder, trained on me, or that there was a camera right over my shoulder, trained on Ed. He had a series of questions that had been prepared for him by Michael and Trevor, based on what I had told Trevor in prior discussions. It soon became apparent to me that Ed not only was able to follow up with questions of his own based upon what I had just stated, but also that he obviously understood domestic violence, something that cannot be said for a large number of people who deal with it daily. He was able to ask questions that could not have been asked if he did not understand the issue. Fifty minutes later, he turned to Michael and Trevor and asked if that about covered it. One more question was asked and it was over - fifty minutes that seemed like five. We said our good byes and left, but not before both Michael and Trevor said that they were ecstatic - I had provided something that they felt would be invaluable. It was something that I felt the need to say, even though I knew that perhaps it was not the most popular thing to do, because I feel so strongly about doing whatever it takes to combat domestic violence. I need to make it clear that what I said was nothing that they wanted me to say - it was based on my own experience with the military. I knew that it is their job to get me to say things - I am not totally naive. But this was nothing they had to coerce

from me. Their charm and style comes partly from wanting guests to say things, but we had formed a bond that continues to this day. I still talk with Trevor about once a month, not about domestic violence and the military, but about other things. He has become more than an associate producer to us - a friend.

Ann had promised us lunch so we left the building, got into another cab, and started to the Union League Club, where she and my brother in law are members. I, with some trepidation, asked them how it had gone, from their perspective. They assured me that it was great. Still, there were feelings of what should have been said, and maybe should have been said in a more articulate manner. We had a delightful lunch at the club, a bastion of conservatism, which was ironic, considering my political bent. The Union League Club has hosted every single Republican Presidential candidate. The club had restaurants, a beautiful library, billiard rooms, lounges, reading rooms, bars, and guest rooms. After touring the club, we returned to our hotel, changed clothes, spent a few hours in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and left New York. Needless to say, the experience had been like something in a dream, almost surreal.

Trevor continued to call, to discuss what I had said, to ask me questions, and just to talk - we had become friends. They continued to work on this story and others. Trevor told me of his difficulty in getting someone in the military to talk on camera. A Colonel in Alaska, responsible for the batterer's treatment program at an army post, had

renege on her promise to go on air. It seemed to me that the segment might not ever air. People knew that I had been to New York and I was asked almost daily when it was going to be on air. I didn't know and didn't know if it ever would. Trevor called in November to say that he was coming back to Hopkinsville to talk with General Robert Clark, and that he wanted to see me again. He also said that Ed was coming the day after to interview Kathy Spence, the mother of a young woman who had been killed by her military boyfriend. Kathy lived in Nashville and I knew her, having met her when she was appointed the administratrix of her daughter's estate. We talked on the phone occasionally. She had asked if I could come to the taping as she would feel more at ease if I was there and I agreed. After talking to Trevor when he came to visit, I learned that he would meet Michael the next afternoon in Nashville and that Ed would fly down on Saturday morning. He told me when Michael would be arriving, and I said that that was a coincidence because Andy and Peter were returning from Europe at the same time. I asked what airline and from what city, and found out that they would be on the same plane. I told Trevor to tell Michael to look for what I expected would be two very scruffy looking young men. He met with me again the next day and I rode to Nashville with him to answer more questions for him while Margaret followed. We got there and Michael left with Trevor - they were going to dinner with Kathy to explain what would take place the next day. Andy and Peter were amused - they said that when they landed in Nashville some

man had come up to them on the plane and asked them if they were Judge Macdonald's sons - obviously Trevor had told Michael about the scruffy young men.

The next morning I drove to Nashville for the taping with Kathy. We met in a hotel near the airport, talked for a while, and Trevor went to get Ed, who was arriving that morning. Michael explained that they would be leaving as soon as the taping was over - Ed had to get back and so did he - his wife was the chair of a charity event in Princeton and if he didn't get back, he would be in serious trouble. Ed arrived, met Kathy, spent some time with me, and we went to a suite for the filming. Again, there was an independent film crew from Chicago, the same one that had been at my taping. Seeing Ed with Kathy only confirmed my impression of him. He was sensitive and compassionate with this grieving lady. It was one of the most extraordinary things I have ever witnessed. Once again, after about fifty minutes, Ed turned to Michael and Trevor and asked if that about covered it. They said yes, and then all three got up and left hurriedly - they had planes to catch. Kathy and I spent some time together and then I came home.

I continued to talk with Trevor about twice a week and he called in November to arrange for a film crew to come film me in court. The date was set and they filmed my court session for about two hours. The segment had about fifteen seconds of these two hours in it.

Now it was time to wait. People still asked when it would be aired.

I had no idea. Trevor continued to call every day or so.

It must be noted that Major General Robert Clark met with me twice during this entire process. The meetings lasted several hours each. It was his intention to make necessary changes to the domestic violence response at Ft. Campbell, and I believe that he succeeded, far beyond what my original expectations had been. He went beyond the call of duty to correct what I thought were glaring deficiencies. I regret that he was cast in an unfavorable light, but I will add that *60 Minutes* planned to re-run "The War at Home," in September. Trevor called me to let me know when it would be shown, but called two days later to say that it had been decided not to show a rerun, because it would have been unfair to bash Ft. Campbell for ten minutes and then have Ed add that positive changes had been made on the post.

People continued to ask when it would be on. I told them I didn't know. Then, on Tuesday, January 12, Trevor called to say that it would be aired the following Sunday, January 17. This date was selected because of what Don Hewitt expected to be a record audience. The audience would be larger because it was to immediately follow an NFL playoff game. Trevor told me that the segment was to be first, also an indication that Hewitt felt it was the most important of the three to be aired. Don Hewitt has the final say on what goes on, when it goes on, and what is the content of each segment. Michael and Trevor had told me about how he decides if a segment is ready for the air. He, along with the talent and the producers

view the proposed segment. But Hewitt does not look at the screen. He looks away or down and only listens to what is being said. They told me that he believes that if one can understand what is being conveyed orally by the talent and the persons interviewed, then it is appropriate for airing.

Now when people asked when the segment would air, I would nervously say, "this Sunday." I had no idea what would be in the segment. I knew what I had said but they never told me what portions would be used. The editing continued until Sunday afternoon, with additions and deletions being made continuously. Trevor would call several times a day to check to make sure that something I said was correct and to get further information. I assume that he was doing the same with the other three participants. TV 43 told me that they had expressed news segments to Trevor as late as Friday afternoon. I had mentioned earlier that Michael is high strung, to say the least. Every time I was on the phone with Trevor, he would apologize and take another call - it was almost always Michael.

Sunday came and it was unnerving. That morning in church Terry Fuqua tapped me on the shoulder and said that he had just heard my voice, as part of a commercial for the segment, on CBS Radio News. It was becoming difficult to breathe. The game lasted until almost 7:00. My mother called after 6:00 and wanted to know when in the hell the game was going to be over. She was apparently as nervous as I. As you know *60 Minutes* starts at 6:00. We, of course, did not get to see the entire segment because of the weather interruption, which included a tornado hitting Ft.

Campbell, but Trevor sent me a studio quality copy and I received another from other friends in Nevada.

I do not regret for a minute being on *60 Minutes*. I attended the first meeting of the Department of Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence last week. This Task Force was established, as part of the defense budget, by Congress to explore domestic violence within the military and to report findings and recommendations at the end of three years. The executive director began the three day meeting with a statement to the effect that we were there as a result of the segment on *60 Minutes*. I felt somewhat uncomfortable because the task force is comprised of twenty four individuals - twelve from the military and twelve civilians. However, this discomfort was dispelled over time because I learned that the military members are truly interested in addressing domestic violence within the armed services. This past Monday I received an email from Trevor giving me the news that he and his wife are expecting their first child and how excited they were. He also informed me that "The War at Home" had received a Gracie Award last week. The award is given by an organization known as American Women in Radio and Television. The award is for outstanding investigative journalism. Trevor was very proud that he, Michael and Ed were so honored and shared some comments Ed made in his acceptance speech.

The segment has already had a significant impact on how domestic violence is treated in the military and I hope that the work of this task force

will dramatically reduce the incidents of abuse in the military and that the recommendations made can be used by the civilian population as well.

Trevor had told me numerous times that being on *60 Minutes* would change my life. He was right.