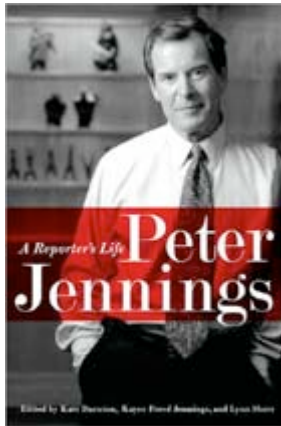


Review



PETER JENNINGS: A REPORTER'S LIFE

edited by **Kate Darnton, Kayce Freed Jennings and Lynn Sherr**

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Biography

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When ABC newsman Peter Jennings died from lung cancer in 2005, he left a void in the industry that has yet to be filled. Along with the likes of Walter Cronkite, Chet Huntley and David Brinkley, Jennings helped revolutionize television news, sitting on both sides of the desk, transforming the genre from a 15-minute afterthought to a major component of network broadcasting.



The editors of PETER JENNINGS: A REPORTER'S LIFE, including his wife, have collected the thoughts and memories of scores of family, friends and colleagues who are universal in their praise and turned these stories into an oral biography. It seems as if Jennings was almost predisposed to the profession. As the son of one of Canada's most respected radio broadcasters, he got an early start, hosting his own children's show as a nine-year-old. Formal education held little interest for Jennings; these days he might have been diagnosed with ADD. His success, despite dropping out of high school, was truly remarkable.

Jennings was just 26 when he was handed the anchor assignment for ABC News in 1965, a job to which he admitted he was not suited at the time. He earned his stripes by going out into the field --- far, far afield to Europe and the Middle East where he thrived on the exotic surroundings and the action.

The entries in A REPORTER'S LIFE reveal a man in a hurry, ever curious and always willing to do whatever it took to get the job done, even when that meant putting himself in harm's way. Jennings was no "Scud-stud," a term used to describe reporters who made a name for themselves during the first war in Iraq; he didn't even like to fly. But he impressed everyone, from his sound men to heads of state, with his ability to soak up information and

present it to his audience.

When he stepped down as an active reporter to once again take over the anchor desk for ABC News, he brought that same restlessness with him. He was a demanding boss, always expecting the reporters to do the same thorough job he did. But his humanity was always evident. During the coverage on 9/11, he wanted the audience to see the devastation of the World Trade Center rather than in-studio shots of him. And he was never afraid to defer to experts or admit he did not know every issue involved.

Many of those interviewed said that Jennings never wanted to be the center of attention, which made his on-air revelation of his illness all the more conflicting. For him, it served as an abject lesson, another chance to educate his viewers.

The format of A REPORTER'S LIFE both works and doesn't work. Since it's not a straightforward biography, it appears choppy at times, a series of mini-monologues interspersed with Jennings's own words. It is also understandably biased; you won't find too many speaking ill of him. On the other hand, these are the people who knew Jennings best, and the book serves as their final chance to pay him tribute.

--- Reviewed by Ron Kaplan

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