A True Texan *Facing the Nation:* Bob Schieffer

“Good evening from Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona, I want to welcome you to the third and last of the 2004 debates between President George Bush and Senator John Kerry. That is it for this week. Thanks for joining us on *Face the Nation*. Live from the White House, CBS News.”

These lines that I just uttered are some of the most famous lines to ever come out of the mouth of not only a journalism icon, but a Texan icon. This man would hold the title of correspondent to the White House, Pentagon, Department of State and Congress. He would moderate three presidential debates, and he also hosted shows *60 Minutes, Face the Nation* and *CBS Evening News*. This icon shares the same alma matter with me, or at least soon to be alma matter (please don’t remind me) …TCU. He served in the Air Force and worked at the *Star-Telegram* in Fort Worth before heading to Washington, D.C., where he would begin his storied career of more than 60 years. Now, a lot of you can probably already guess who this man is. I remember eating my breakfast before church and seeing him host *Face the Nation*, but I also remember how badly I hated hearing his voice and that ticking sound on *60 Minutes,* because it meant I had school the next day. This man is Mr. Bob Schieffer. Mr. Bob Schieffer is a man who has contributed to the journalism field in more ways that we can count, but he also represented Texas every chance he got along the way. He has lived one of those lives where you just wanted to borrow his eyes and plug them into a television and watch everything he has lived, experienced and witnessed. In fact, that’s what I hope today can do for us. Mr. Schieffer’s story will take us from the jungles of Vietnam, to the nation’s capital, to the stage of three presidential debates, but we begin today in a car, in Fort Worth, Texas, when Mr. Schieffer gets a call on November 22, 1963 from the mother of the man who just committed one of the most atrocious acts in history… Mrs. Marguerite Oswald.

Mr. Schieffer’s story begins right here in Fort Worth, Texas, where he was raised and attended North Side High School. Mr. Schieffer then made the extremely long, five-mile journey to TCU for his college education. At TCU, Mr. Schieffer excelled in journalism and was a member of the Phi Delta Theta fraternity and the Air Force ROTC program. After graduating in 1959, Mr. Schieffer headed to serve our country in the United States Air Force at Travis Air Force Base in California. Mr. Schieffer served as a public information officer, and upon an honorable discharge, he returned home to Fort Worth to begin his journalism career as a reporter at the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. In a CBS interview in 2013 commemorating the JFK assassination, Schieffer gave an account of one of his most historic days in his journalism career. On the morning of November 22, 1963, Schieffer was working the city news desk in Fort Worth when he received a phone call asking for a ride to Dallas. Schieffer responded, “Lady, we don’t run a cab service.” When the lady responded that the police had her son in custody for the shooting, Schieffer and a friend drove her to Dallas. Schieffer recounted pulling up to the Dallas police station to a swarm of press. The three made their way into the family-only area by pretending to be handlers of Mrs. Oswald. Schieffer was about to be face-to-face with Lee Harvey Oswald. Schieffer was ultimately booted from the restricted area, but this unparalleled access allowed Schieffer to write in a context that no other journalist came close to matching.

While Mr. Schieffer had early success, he admitted in a 2015 chat at the JFK presidential library that he really took off when he was tasked with traveling to Vietnam to report on local Fort Worth soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War. Schieffer sold the paper executives on the idea to put an ad in the paper that said, “Send us your loved one’s name and we will find them in Vietnam, check on them and tell their story for those at home.” Letters flocked in with names to check on. In total, Schieffer found 252 of these heroes. During the chat with the JFK library in 2015, Schieffer recounted a story from Vietnam where he walked up to a young Marine with weapon in hand and said, “I’m Bob Schieffer from the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and your mother asked me to check on you.” Schieffer recalls the young Marine breaking down in tears and bawling. Schieffer described this moment as the most satisfaction he has received from being a journalist, simply because he was from this kid’s hometown. Schieffer was quoted on his time in Vietnam in a TCU publication from 2013: “In those first days my only goal was to locate as many Texans as I could. I had come to share their war.” After these two hit pieces by Schieffer, he was promoted to the local television station *WBAP*. In Schieffer’s 2003 book, “This Just In: What I Couldn't Tell You on TV,” Schieffer recounted a story of his little girls asking him if he knew he wanted to be a TV star when he was a child. His answer: “Well no, we didn’t have TVs when I was growing up.” This television promotion was foreshadowing a larger one though, because in 1969, Schieffer headed to CBS News in Washington, D.C., where he finished his career.

 After Schieffer headed east, Schieffer anchored CBS News shows beginning in 1973. The Sunday shows were Schieffer’s specials during this time - from the *Sunday Evening News* to the *Sunday Night News* - I guess we could call Schieffer a Sunday Special for his first decade at the Washington bureau. From 1970 to 1974, Schieffer was a correspondent to the Pentagon, from 1974 to 1979 he was the White House correspondent, and in 1982, Schieffer became the chief Washington correspondent. It was during the time as the chief White House correspondent that Schieffer still claims he received his biggest scoop. After begging then Chief of Staff to President Ford, Dick Cheney, for an interview and receiving a constant “No,” Schieffer asked if his good buddy and fellow journalist Walter Cronkite could step in and say hello to the President. Cheney agreed and ushered the men to a back door to see Ford. Now keep in mind during this time the flu vaccine had just come out and the public was skeptical of its safety - something we can all relate to right now - and America was wondering whether government officials would be partaking in the vaccine. So as Cronkite and Schieffer say hello to President Ford, Cronkite asks the President, “Mr. President will you be taking your flu shot?” Ford responded. “Yes, I will be Walter.” Upon the question, the White House press staff literally wrestled Cronkite out of the office according to Schieffer. That evening, Cronkite opened his *CBS Evening News* with, “Good Evening. The President told me in an exclusive interview he will be taking his flu shot.” In a 2015 TCU interview, Schieffer describes the Watergate scandal during this time as being the era with the most pressure on him as a reporter, but even with multiple correspondent role changes and pressure throughout the roles, Schieffer continued to climb the ranks of journalism and got a seat at the table of mainstream news.

In an interview with *TCU Magazine* in 2008, Schieffer was quoted, “I wanted to be a reporter because I wanted to talk to the people who made the news. 'Face' was the only assignment I ever had where the newsmakers come to you; you don’t even have to go to them. I loved every minute of it." During his time on *Face the Nation*, Schieffer interviewed world leaders, Presidents, legislative members and regular people who made news exciting.

Schieffer also has quite a track record with presidents and has interviewed every sitting president since Nixon. I have to say Schieffer has humorous accounts of each president. Schieffer recalled these stories in a 2016 interview at the LBJ school at the University of Texas at Austin. Schieffer described asking President Nixon if his new advisors were going to be in-house consultants. Nixon then replied, “Oh no they will be outhouse consultants.” With Reagan, Schieffer recalls heading out to the South Lawn to watch Marine One depart and Reagan turning around to wave to the crowd like the President always does. Schieffer describes himself waving back and then looking around and not a single other person was outside, it was just him. Outside of his interactions and interviews with presidents, Schieffer is most notable for hosting three presidential debates. Schieffer moderated Bush/Kerry in 2004, Obama/McCain in 2008, and Obama/Romney in 2012. After his stellar performance on *Face the Nation* and amid a need for a new moderator, the Commission for Presidential Debates turned to no other than a Texan to moderate our nation’s contenders for democracy. In a September 2020 interview with Episcopal High School in Northern Virginia, Schieffer told students that his main goal was to ask questions that illuminated the differences between candidates, that he conducted 26 two-hour interviews, and had a total of 300 questions prepared for a debate. Schieffer’s dedication to his profession and his mission were always his north star.

Schieffer retired from CBS News on May 31, 2015. Signing off from *Face the Nation*, Schieffer told the audience of four million, “I will never forget the trust you placed in me and how nice you were to have me as a guest in your home over so many years. That meant the world to me. And it always will. Thank you." Since his retirement - I don’t know what is more Texan than this: Schieffer has now been playing in a band Honkey Tonk Confidential. Now I’m not one for regular ole’ quotes, but I am one for Texas quotes, like the one from author John Gunther. “If a man is from Texas, he will tell you. If he is not, why embarrass him by asking?” Mr. Schieffer certainly lets you know where he is from, from the purple socks he wears every day to support his Horned Frogs to his Texas twang found in his news monologues, Mr. Schieffer is a Texan, a Texan titan who has cemented his legacy to the field of journalism for generations to come. Live from Fort Worth, Texas. That is the story of Bob Schieffer.

References

CBS News. “Inside Kennedy Reunion Ahead of 50th Anniversary of Assassination.” *CBS News*, CBS Interactive, 22 Nov. 2013, www.cbsnews.com/news/inside-kennedy-reunion-ahead-of-50th-anniversary-of-assassination/.

“A CONVERSATION WITH BOB SCHIEFFER.” *A CONVERSATION WITH BOB SCHIEFFER | JFK Library*, www.jfklibrary.org/events-and-awards/forums/past-forums/transcripts/a-conversation-with-bob-schieffer.

Library, LBJ Presidential. “An Evening With Bob Schieffer.” *An Evening With Bob Schieffer - LBJ Presidential Library*, www.lbjlibrary.org/events/an-evening-with-bob-schieffer-1.

Schieffer, Bob. *This Just in: What I Couldn't Tell You on TV*. Berkley Books, 2004.

“TCU Commemorative: Schieffer.” *TCU Magazine*, www.magarchive.tcu.edu/articles/2003-01-F02.asp.

“Time in Vietnam: Bob Schieffer.” *Bob Schieffer | A Walk in Purple Socks*, 30 Jan. 2018, schieffercollege.tcu.edu/bobschieffer/stories-of-integrity/time-in-vietnam/.

“Veteran Journalist Bob Schieffer Previews First 2020 Presidential Debate.” *Episcopal High School - VA*, 30 Sept. 2020, www.episcopalhighschool.org/news-detail?pk=1227631.