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*Lecturer*

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PRESENTATION

**Elaine Westbrooks**

Good evening and welcome. My name is Elaine Westbrooks. I'm the University Librarian and Vice Provost for University Libraries at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am so excited to welcome you to the first event in our “Well Read” series, and I promise you it's going to be an engaging event an engaging conversation and you will definitely learn something new.

I am super excited to introduce our guest tonight. Freddie Kiger. Freddie does not need any introduction to many people, but for many of you who don't know all the awesome things that Freddie has done, I'll just go through a few things. First, I could say that Freddie is a Tar Heel through and through. He has two degrees from the University of North Carolina. He currently lives in Chapel Hill but grew up on Tobaccoville Road in the northwest Forsyth County. He continues to give back to the university and Chapel Hill day in and day out. Freddie is a civil war expert and historian and very well known for that, and he has been a teacher with the Chapel Hill-Carrboro school district for 20 years. Some of you might be familiar with Freddie's work as a lecturer with the UNC General Alumni Association through his North Carolina History series. Some of you may know him from his podcast known as *Threads From The National Tapestry*. Some of you know about his history with sports. From 1974 to 1978, Freddie was a statistician for Dean, Coach Smith and the Carolina basketball program. He's also been a researcher, a statistician, and analyst for ESPN. He's the recipient of Emmys from 1999 to 2001 for his work on the SportsCentury program. He's been on the local airwaves. He has been a freelance broadcast producer. I mean, Freddie does it all. I could finally say that one of the most impressive things about Freddie is his work with the Olympics. He's a veteran of four Olympics and it is through his experience working on the Olympics that he met the legendary Tar Heel journalist, Charles Kuralt. So tonight, he will be sharing some of his stories about his great friend.

So for those of you in the audience, you can submit questions using the question box, and we'll save some time at the end of Freddie's presentation to answer your questions.

So Freddie, I can't thank you enough for joining us. Welcome, Freddie.

**Freddie Kiger**

[Audio] so much for that kind introduction. A couple of thoughts before I begin. First, I am very flattered to be a part of this series and second, kudos and a heartfelt thank you for what you and your staff do, and do so well. Thank you from someone who for decades now has made great use of your resources in my research, both for ESPN and for my presentations on the American Civil War in North Carolina history. What you do and what we have here at Carolina is world class. Our university library is not only brimming with incredible resources, but maintained by a dedicated and highly professional staff, and just the type of caring and friendly folks Charles Kuralt would have sought out for some of his stories, and speaking of fine folk, thank you [Blue], Josh, Julie, Katie, Matt, and others who helped this liberal artist clear more than a few technical hurdles. Lord knows without your help, I'd be face down in the cinders. One final thank you. Thanks to all who join us this particular evening for the “Well Read” series. It's very much appreciated that you are with us, all of us Tar Heels.

After years on the road, this is where it ended, in the old Chapel Hill Cemetery, the campus where, as a young man, Charles Kuralt arrived filled with dreams and future stories to tell. You know what? Please forgive me but for a quick aside. Let's get something you may be thinking out of the way. Soon after Charles passed in 1997, and to the absolute surprise and shock of everyone, we learned that he lived a double life. Some can't forget or forgive him for that. Yes, his double life seemed to counter everything we believed he represented, yet, as a CBS colleague explained, like many good writers and poets, he had a public persona that was a screen between his private thoughts and the rest of the world. It wasn't deceptive. It was just that he was a very private person, despite being a very public man. For this presentation, I'd like to dwell on the man who loved to spin stories about common people, who saw goodness in them, who sought out human beings and in doing so, well, he brought out their humaneness. As to his transgression, in the end, it seems Charles was just like his subjects. He was human.

So the stories he shared with us while on the road, well, it started this way. It was early fall and they were on an airplane doing what most did at that time on flights. They were drinking. Cameraman Jim Wilson and Charles Kuralt chatted and looked out the windows. On a clear night, and 30,000 feet below, lights from countless little towns mirrored celestial lights above. In my mind's eye, there was perhaps a pause in their slightly slurred conversation, then Wilson looked out one window and spouted, “Look down there! Every one of those rights has a story to tell.” Charles immediately answered, “Yep, damn right!” Wilson then added, “Here we are flying to a story and flying right over 10,000 stories.” Kuralt chimed back, “100,000!” Then came his epiphany. “By God, next time we go somewhere, we ought to drive and find out what's really going on in this country”, and so was born the idea for one of the most successful segments in television news history, *On the Road with Charles Kuralt*. Wallowing in racial strife and knee deep in Vietnam, God knows we needed it. That journey began on a Thursday night, October 26, 1967, and in a *CBS Evening News* final segment, Walter Cronkite introduced us to a new piece of colorful foliage, and children playing in leaves, Kuralt began in his own inimitable way, it is death that causes this blinding show of color, but is a fierce and flaming death. To drive along the Vermont country road in this season is to be dazzled by the shower of lemons and scarlet and gold that washes across your windshield. And so that's the way it was, and would be for several decades.

From his office on wheels, a 23-foot motorhome, and assisted by a small crew, Charles and his colleagues made *On the Road* something not to be missed, and he did it by avoiding interstates. He favored back roads. He knew that's where he'd find the true strength of this country, its people. Indeed, as to this country's ever expanding slabs of concrete, he once mused, “Interstate highways allow you to drive coast to coast without seeing anything”, and I might add, without feeling anything either, but on all those back roads he sought, he found, and he felt, and we all are the richer for it. Of course, there would never have been an *On the Road* series unless there had been a journalist whose upbringing steered him in that direction.

Charles Bishop Kuralt came into this world on the tenth day of the ninth month in 1934, and according to Charles, he was on the road even before birth. His father, Wallace, backed their Chevrolet out of the hay barn, helped his wife, Ina, into the front seat, and off they sped out of Jacksonville, North Carolina, south on US 17, through Dixon, Folkstone, and Holly Ridge, the car barely slowed for stop signs, and in just over an hour, they reached the hospital in Wilmington. Charles was born the next day, a Monday, and with, as he put it, rambling in his blood and 50 miles already under his belt. They named him for his paternal uncle, Carl, (Norse for “a man of the common people”). As it turned out, how appropriate. He grew up in rural simplicity. The Onslow County farmhouse where he spent his early childhood had no electricity, no indoor plumbing. There was a well on the side yard and to ward off winter temps, there were fireplaces, and for meals, a wood burning stove. His mother was a schoolteacher and his dad, at the time, a social worker. They didn't make a lot, and so much like Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, young Charles spent his childhood enjoying whatever nature allowed him. Even then, he was quite the fisherman. He made kites from newspapers. He made slingshots from dogwood branches. After supper, his maternal grandmother and grandfather spun tales, and particularly it was grandma Bishop, who read O. Henry stories to him, and poems by Kipling and Poe. It was she who created his love for words, their linking, their rhythm. However, it was his father, Wallace, that spawned his love for the road. His dad, a field supervisor for the state, plopped his son in the passenger seat and off they'd go, through places like Edenton, Plymouth, New Bern, and Swan Quarter. All the while, while he was smoking Tampa Nuggets, his dad talked about history and filled his son with local lore. It all stoked the fire within Kuralt and by the age of six, he knew he wanted to be a reporter. A few years later, he got to be one.

Now with his family in Charlotte, he hosted a show on W-A-Y-S – WAYS. Late Friday nights, the station ran a mellow, soft words, and music show. Charles often dropped by and when he did, he’d step out on the fire escape, then hang a mic on him, and while looking out on the city, he without notes created poetry by painting verbal canvases to what he saw. Even *Variety* magazine took note. A little later, in the fall of 1951, 16-year-old Charles arrived in Chapel Hill. While here, there were stints at fledgling WCHL, at WUNC, and he was elected editor of the DTH. Incompletes in recreation, however, kept him from graduating with his class, but greater things awaited. A job at North Carolina's largest evening newspaper, *The Charlotte News*, and that, and his people column, in March of 1957 led him to CBS.

We opened this session with that plane ride to, for the record, Cleveland. Not long after that flight, in early fall of 1967, Kuralt met with CBS president Fred Friendly and laid out his idea. Fred Friendly’s answer was anything but friendly. He thought Charles’ idea to go out on the road was a waste of time. However, Friendly was soon replaced by Dick Salant. To Kuralt, Salant was fresh meat, so once again, Charles asked if he could do what he burned to do. “Why don't you just let me wander for three months to see what I might find”, and Salant answered, “What do you think you'll find?” Charles mused, “Farmers bringing in their crops, first graders starting school, county fairs, town meetings, pulse of the country, you know?” Distracted by a pile of work stacked on his desk, Salant said, “OK, try it, but keep the budget down.” And so it would begin. Cameraman Jim Wilson's neighbor in Maryland, a *National Geographic* photographer, had a Dodge Travco motorhome that once was beige, but with wear had turned pink. Well, they rented it, a 23-foot land cruiser, the first of what would be six. In it, the original crew, Kuralt cameraman Wilson, sound man Bob Funk, and lightning man Bill Lewis, set out from New York City in an October rain and wandered through small New England towns looking for a story. Not one showed itself and Kuralt admitted he was nervous. But then the sun came out, and the glory of the foliage revealed itself. Children playing in leaves kick started the story and series that originally was to be called *Travels with Charlie*. Each episode was to end *CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite*, the same anchorman who envied Kuralt’s writing, confessed he had real reservations. This was a hard news show, and there was no room for fluff features, and yet, after that first installment in late October, well, it won him over.

To file his stories, Charles sought out people he had not met before. He sought out people wedded to the places they lived and worked, not for themselves, but for others. He found men, women, and children who had no delusions of superiority or motives for greed. They touched him and superimposed over murdered national leaders, civil rights strife, and Vietnam, his stories about them touched us and moved an entire nation. According to Charles, he read the papers every day, and found, again in his words, the front pages full of selfishness, arrogance, and hostility toward others, but on the back roads, he found good people whose stories he wanted to tell, and quite honestly, we wanted to hear, and given those troubled times, we needed to hear. And he did it so simply.

More times than not, he didn't seek out a story. Charles thought it a mistake to show up having already decided what the story was going to be. Instead, they found him. For a piece, there was little pre-planning. A perfect example, in Ohio at the height of the Vietnam War, the crew passed a farmhouse where two oaks in the front yard were linked by a homemade yellow banner which read, “Welcome Home Roger!” Dismissing it, the crew rolled on. A few miles later, Kuralt turned to cameraman Izzy Bleckman, who was driving, and said, “You know, we ought to go back there and find out who Roger is.” They did, and soon learned that Roger was coming home from Vietnam. Family and friends had put up a banner and gathered picnic style to welcome him home. His mother had baked a cake. Roger's wife held a baby he had never seen. Izzy captured anxious family members who kept peering down the road, anticipating Roger’s arrival. And as he did that, Kuralt worked his magic. He chatted at length with the family, then he walked up to his cameraman and said, “Let's go”, and Izzy countered, “Yeah, but…” and Kuralt cut him off. “We don't need to see Roger.” Back in the bus, Kuralt went straight to his typewriter and wrote copy, while chatting with the family unfolded in his head. The next night the story aired. It was entitled *Welcome Home Roger*. Throughout, there was never an image of Roger, yet Charles wrote his copy in a way that reached out and touched the collective aching heart of every family in America, who was waiting, waiting for a Roger. Their Roger, if you will, to come home. You see, Charles had that ability to see a story, to feel it, and with his prose, to capture it. Ever the wordsmith, he had the ability to take something complex and convey it in the most down to earth, single syllable way. Oh, yes, he knew the power of words. Here, with themes still relevant to us today in these troubled times, I'd like to share a few examples of his incredible ability.

There was a piece entitled *And Then the Curtain Fell*. It was a story about a man in Stitzer, Wisconsin, who you'll never read about in a history book, but was a hero, if to no one else, his family and to Charles. The piece opened with a beautiful voice singing, “My darling, I am dreaming”, and then Charles’ copy began. “That is quite a voice Bob Parrish has, so said the very famous opera teacher who took him on as a student when he was young. There followed recordings and performances and applause, but Bob Parrish’s wife died, alas, and he had children to raise. So the farm boy, who was poised to become an opera singer, returned to the farm. A life on the land is an uncertain one, but less uncertain than a life on the stage. Is this a sad story? Mostly no, it isn't. Fame eluded him, but not success. In Stitzer, Wisconsin, Bob Parrish made a life for his family and filled that life with music. He is a success. Not 10,000 more like Bob Parrish. Of this sort of stout hearted man, there is only one. How you going to keep them down on the farm was the question people used to ask. The answer is, pretty often life will see to that. But Bob Parrish, farmer, is still a good singer, and something more. He's a good man.”

That piece contained 175 words. Only eight of them were three or more syllables. He understood the power of simple delivery and words, simple, powerful. His magic? Charles found things that folks saw every day, but maybe never truly understood them or appreciated them. Like this icon, something familiar to many North Carolinians, if not all, the Hatteras Lighthouse. The piece was entitled *Seeing the Light* and his copy read, “This is the story of an old hero of the North Carolina shore, a hero that has been standing at attention on Hatteras Island for a long time now. Park Ranger and historian, Rob Bowling, can tell you about its arrival here. Here it rose, and here pretty soon it will fall. Unless it is moved. The sea is approaching, and the sand is retreating in spite of the jetties, and the huge bags that can only slow the inevitable. This hero has saved lives, many lives. It has been more reliable than the moon. But the moon can hang in midair. The Hatteras Lighthouse cannot. The Hatteras light really isn't needed anymore, but it is historic, and it is beautiful, and you'd think we'd want to stand by something that has stood by us for so long.”

That piece helped spur the 1999 effort to save our precious landmark, and like Wisconsin's Bob Parrish, Charles made certain that in a world of hate, hurry, and greed, he, and therefore we, noted common folks who are quite uncommon. Like an unusual surgeon who operated on dolls and stuffed animals, the episode *Lions and Tigers and Bears* was all about a doctor of sorts who lived and practiced in a second floor workshop on Lexington Avenue in Manhattan. Charles opened with one of his favorite ploys, a question. “Do you know what Irving Chase does in a cluttered little shop he took over from his father 50 years ago? The sign on the door does not say enough. It ought to say ‘mender of broken hearts’. Here’s a man who can take a child's most cherished companion, or an adult's, and make it new again. Irving Chase is a master restorer of dolls and stuffed animals, and a restorer, most of all, of the faith of their owners. After all, without his magic, they would be forced to feel that they had loved too well. Mr. Chase, you're right. People of all ages who bring their treasures to you are basically children. Age does not make an adult. What makes us old is broken heartedness, and that is something you can cure. People walking up the single flight of stairs to Irving Chase’s on the east side of Manhattan tend to look forlorn and dejected. People walking down, however, don't. They have been given back a bit of the world as it used to be when it, and they, were wide-eyed together.”

Another part of Charles’ magic, not only his words, but his delivery. The producer of CBS’s *Sunday Morning*, Mary Lou Teel, remembered that Charles, to get a feel for his delivery, liked to read his copy out loud. In fact, Teel said he made an art of it. Once in the early 80s, she recalled an evening where he was to sit in for Dan Rather on *CBS Evening News*. In a room filled with scrambling activity of clicking and clacking teletype machines, the shouting of newsmen and women, Charles began to read his copy for that night out loud. And when he did, everyone, everything stopped to listen.

Now, while listening and running through six motorhomes and enduring some 50,000 miles a year while out on the road, it's not always sunshine and smiles. On the road, lessons were learned and here are a few that Charles picked up.

Never sleep on the side of the bed next to the telephone, that’s where everyone else sleeps to answer the wakeup call, which means the mattress on that side of the bed is broken down. If you rub a thin film of soap on a bathroom mirror, it won't steam up when you shower. And when making a motel reservation, just say ‘down and out’ upfront, they will understand. You want a room downstairs with an outside entrance, no lugging suitcases upstairs and down halls, and upfront means just that, a room in front of the motel so you can avoid the diesel refrigerator trucks that invariably park all night in the back with their engines running.

And a few more tips. When in a café, do not order chili, for it’s usually disappointing and can be lethal. And stay out of gift shops, gift ships are well named for there is nothing in them that you would want to keep yourself. And if you travel by air and connect at a hub, carry a bandage with you and wrap it around your ankle, that will ensure you get an electric cart.

And while out there, Charles and his crew had many chances to chuckle at others and themselves. A man told Kuralt that he and his wife stopped in Texas for a bite to eat, wondering how to pronounce the name of the town, they speculated “Mehia, Mecsia, Mecsha”, so they asked the waitress, “Miss, would you tell us how you say the name of this place?’ she leaned in and slowly, deliberately answered ‘, Dairy Queen”. They overheard a question and answer session between a tourist and a Chicago cabbie, responding to which way to Lake Michigan, the driver quipped, “Walk east until your hat floats”.

From Mrs. Willard Watson in Deep Gap, North Carolina they learned that you will have good luck if you see a red-haired girl riding a white mule. According to a Jonesborough, Tennessee innkeeper, an East Tennessee breakfast consists of a jug of good corn liquor, a thick beef steak and a hound dog. Feed the beef steak to the dog. On a toilet stall wall in Northern Idaho, one of the crew found written in graffiti, “I hate this part of Texas”. And at a truck stop in Iowa, someone scratched a message on the condom machine, “This gum tastes like rubber.

And I'm very certain there were many, many more. Two more episodes of note. Two with messages we, today, might want to hear, should hear. In the episode entitled *The Road Less Travelled,* Charles allowed us a peak into his very soul when he wrote, “if you ever grow wary of the modern world, take a turn toward Vermont where the pavement ends”. Vermonters are devoted to their thousands of miles of unpaved roads and Vermonter, Howard Jillson Coffin can tell you why. Coffin tells us that first Vermonters love the rutted path, I think because it’s the way things used to be and not the way things are becoming. In Vermont, they call it “Preventing the Future”. An unpaved road keeps you from driving too fast or forgetting too fast. Robert Frost, the poet of New England wrote about the charms of the road less travelled, surely that must have been an unpaved road, maybe this one. We are in a great rush now, of course, but we used to meander just as the dirt roads of Vermont still do.

On the unbending interstate, you can see the future ahead of you, many, many miles ahead. On a dirt road, however, you can see something better than that, you can see the past. Given where we are in this world today, that message sounds so reassuring.

Finally, an episode that quite frankly we need to be reminded of right now entitled *Proof Through the Night,* Charles wrote “There may not be a more American place anyone or anywhere than the one you're looking at, not because Annin & Co. In New Jersey has been the source of a river of red, white, and blue since its founding in 1849. Annin is the oldest and largest flag maker in America. Its flags have flown at every inauguration since Zachary Taylor’s, and at the North Pole and at the South Pole, and on the moon, but look around, a woman of China sews flags here and a man of Haiti rivets them. A worker from Burma folds the flags, and another from Ecuador sees to the stars, they are from everywhere. You know how fabric is made of threads laced together so that the whole is stronger than any of its parts, who are these workers, but the threads of our fabric.

This is not the dawn’s early light, nor twilights last gleaming, but there is something to hail here nonetheless among these flag makers who are a living flag themselves. Does the star-spangled banner yet wave over the land of the free and the home of the brave? Ask the workers at Annin & Co., they will tell you. Indeed a most timely message, yes, even today. We are many, but in times like these, we have to be, we must be one.

After hundreds of thousands of miles, Charles decided to park the motorhome. Oh, CBS kept him busy, but life on the road began to catch up with him. His diet was terrible. He gained weight and he chain smoked. It was heart surgery in 1995 and then in July of 1997, he wrote his former dean at Carolina. To Bill Freddie he wrote on 2 July:

“Dear Bill, thanks for your note, I have been in the hospital, groggy and a good deal out of it. I don’t think I am dying, in fact, I seem to be recovering nicely, but this experience has given me intimations of mortality. I know you have better things to worry about, but I thought I would ask if you have any way of finding out if there are a couple of burial plots in Chapel Hill. Of course, the campus would be ideal, but I know that is probably out of the question. Maybe over the next week or two, you could have someone enquire about availabilities in town and if that is also out of the question, I will go farther afield. I should have thought about this 40 years ago. Sorry to ask you to look into such a bizarre question, love to Ida and I hope to see you before the roses finish blooming.”

Then down at the bottom, as you can see from this image, he handwrote:

“I am now only beginning to appreciate the love I have for Chapel Hill; it is a moving place the more I think about it, and you have made it so.”

Two days later, even before Charles’ letter reached his friend, the Freddie’s phone rang at 6 a.m., it was Karen Beckers, Charles’ assistant and she said, “I've called you because I must tell you that Charles is gone, complications from lupus, heavy doses of steroids, immunosuppressants, pneumonia”. On the 4 July, how ironic, how interesting, Independence Day, after a lifetime of being on the road, Charles Kuralt finally rested. The news spread back to CBS, veteran journalist, men with iron wills and constitutions, Walter Cronkite, Andy Rooney, and Dan Rather all wept, meanwhile, Bill Freddie and town manager, Call Horton, met at Old Chapel Hill Cemetery and huddled over a map. They found that local resident, George Hogan, had several plots. Hogan had worked at the Rams Club back when Charles had been the editor of the DTH and admitted that Charles’ anti-athletic scholarships editorials irritated him, still no matter, they asked him for two plots. To their request, Hogan answered, “No, I won't sell them”. There was a pause and then he said, “But I will give Charles two”, and then he added, “He was the only man I could watch on television without turning it off”.

You know, an entire nation felt that way. Getting to know Charles and working with him as I did for two winter Olympics, I make a point often to go by, visit, and chat with him. Confronted as we are in these times, with challenges, pandemic, and we’re far too many, too quick, to point fingers and blame, his people, their stories, his words, and his themes may indeed be right now the very best medicine for every one of us everywhere.

Thank you.

**Elaine Westbrooks**

Wow! Well, Freddie, thank you so much. I can't tell you how much I appreciate the fact that you agreed to be our first guest for our “Well Read” Series, and like I told everyone at the beginning, I knew we wouldn’t be disappointed by your wonderful presentation, so thank you so much.

We have a question for you, and I think folks know that you can submit them through the comment box. But the first question that has been sent is, “How long do you spend researching your subjects and how long do you rehearse delivering it?”

**Freddie Kiger**

This particular subject or all in general?

**Elaine Westbrooks**

Well, they don’t say. they're not very specific.

**Freddie Kiger**

OK, I will address both. Thank you and thanks for the question.

I firmly believe that history and its presentation should be a story and the last five letters of the word “history” itself is, indeed, story. So that being said, every time I go to research a topic, whether it be a biography or an event I go to – in many instances – the very facility that you folks represent and dig on my own to pull out not only the bare development of the story itself, but to find the human interest elements that makes Charles Kuralt, that make the Battle of Gettysburg, that make Kitty Hawk and the Wright Brothers all of a sudden feel more personal, and I will go to as many works and resources as it takes to be able to find more than just what day, who was involved, and what happened and the significance, but also to find what was the weather like? Did this particular person like this or that? The ocean, perhaps, was like glass, or the weather was this or that, because that’s what we, as human beings, relate to and that’s what makes history a story and stories sticks, they stick.

I can't tell you that for every topic, whether it be Charles Kuralt or, again, some particular Civil War topic or North Carolina topic, I'm going to go into as many works. Some of them I'm able to recall from personal experiences, that being for Charles in particular, and for many sporting events, but I will say this that you were kind to mention those three Emmys that my colleagues and I were very fortunate to win. I share them with those people at the Wilson Library in the microfiche department who very sincerely and so wonderfully helped me to prepare for that particular… and I might as well mention that. To do my first assignment for ESPN Sports Centry, I was given the assignment to find at least one sporting events in North America for every day from 1 January 1950 until 31 December 1975, and I had to have it done in three months. I lived in the library, but it was a fascinating experience and wonderful things came by it.

So a roundabout answer, but the best answer, the number of works required to take the event and make it a story.

**Elaine Westbrooks**

Thank you. Another question we have is about Kuralt’s famous address for the 1993 Bicentennial for Carolina. The first question is, “I've heard that that almost didn’t happen”, so that’s the first part. And then the second part is, “Do you know if he worked with anyone on that speech or is that all 100% Kuralt coming out in that address?”

**Freddie Kiger**

Well, I’ll address the first part Elaine. For many of those who may be tuning in, perhaps you were there, and what a wonderful evening it was and it was an evening that almost missed Charles Kuralt, for the event was planned, the bicentennial event on 12 October 1993, of course University Day, but on the day before, Monday 11 October, Kuralt called Steven Tepper who was the Bicentennial Executive Director from Elizabeth City Hospital to cancel his appearance, because Charles’ father, Wallace, had suffered a stroke over the weekend and Charles said he just simply couldn’t drive to Chapel Hill and be away from his father for an entire day. And so that evening of the 11th during the platform rehearsal, Tepper explained the situation to the platform committee, and one man in particular had a very strong reaction, a calm reaction though strong. It was UNC System President, C.D. Spangler Jr. and his reaction was reported by Faculty Marshal, Dr Ron Hyatt. Dr Hyatt said that in a quiet but firm voice Spangler said, “I’ll make my personal plane available to him if he wants to come up just for the evening”. Spangler wasn’t bragging and he wasn’t flaunting, he was simply rendering a service to the university and to one of its favorite sons.

So Spangler’s pilot picked Charles up in Elizabeth City in the late afternoon of 12 October, brought him to Chapel Hill, and many of you will remember following Governor Jim Hunt’s opening remarks, Kuralt stepped to the podium and if many remember, as I do, remember how he started. “I speak for all of us who could not afford to go to Duke and would not have gone even if we could have afforded it. We are Tar Heels born and Tar Heels bred, and we are glad to be alive on the 200th anniversary of the establishment of public higher education in the new world, and immeasurably proud that this occurred 12 October 1793 here on the crest of New Hope Chapel Hill”. And then came those words, “What is it that binds us to this place as to no other?”

Elaine, Charles might come to one as he did to me twice in Lillehammer to ask for ideas and research, but once he sat down at his typewriter, all this flowed from his mind and from his creative element. Again, I emphasize how he wrote such simple single syllable words that took complex, convex ideas and broke them down into the most simplest of form, and yet in such a way that we all could relate to.

Yes, he gathered, he borrowed for the research and the background, but when he pulled together to write those pieces, that was Charles Kuralt and his genius.

**Elaine Westbrooks**

Great, thank you. So we have more questions for you, so we have a question about one of your favorite moments with Charles Kuralt. To be specific, can you talk about a favorite sports-related moment that you had with Charles in the time that you spent together.

**Freddie Kiger**

Well, I wish I was there. We were in France in Albertville and it was early February and, of course, at the time that we were there, there was a ballgame here in Chapel Hill between the number one ranked Duke Blue Devils and the number nine ranked North Carolina Tar Heels, and the story as was related to me from one of my friends and CBS colleagues and also another Tar Heel, Draggan Mihailovich. Draggan told me that he and a few people stayed up until four in the morning so that they could listen to the Duke/Carolina basketball game on Armed Forces Radio. They thought about giving Charles a call, but he was asleep. Of course, we all remember that was the Bloody Montross Game, and the game in which North Carolina knocked off number one ranked Duke, 75 to 73. And although Charles may have been asleep and missed that sporting extravaganza moment with Draggan and a few others in the early, early hours in the Alps of France, the next morning when Draggan did see Charles, Charles winked at Draggan after exchanging good mornings and after the wink simply said, “Harken sound”, he knew. He found out.

And so I think about that particular moment. It didn’t matter where Charles was on the road, he kept up with what was going on and, perhaps, the illustration is still up or the image, this is Charles and I in the broadcast center and faintly behind of us is a little thing that I put up, Franklin Street . there were names of New York avenues all over the broadcast center and I decided to make it Chapel Hillian, and I asked for Charles to please, if he would take a second, and he said, “Let’s go to the Franklin Street sign for the image to be made”.

**Elaine Westbrooks**

Thank you. We have another question, I don’t know, this could be a tough question for you, but which passion came first, sports or Civil War history?

**Freddie Kiger**

For me?

**Elaine Westbrooks**

Yes.

**Freddie Kiger**

Interesting, that’s a great question, thank you. I would have to probably say that at an early, early age because of the incredible influence of my father, who was a World War II veteran, and at a very young age following my father with my mother and younger sister to all the army reunions of the 331st Infantry Regiment 83rd Division in little places like Beckley, West Virginia, and Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and Columbia, South Carolina, and Cumberland Gap up in the mountains, and even at that early age, I sat in the back of these Holiday Inns and I listened to my father and all of these men relate these stories of their experiences and powerful they were, and emotionally told, and even at a young age, I got it to how powerful and fantastic these memories were for them at a time when death was tugging at their elbow each and every day, but yet they were with people that would become the best friends they ever had in their journey through life. For them to get together and to revel in one another’s company, and to spin those memories even though some of them were not the most pleasant, I came away with that experience about stories and history.

And very soon thereafter, and you could not escape it, we grew up in the country where I had nine sets of parents, my father had eight brothers and sisters, and so wherever I roamed along Tobaccoville Rd in the neighborhood, there were already nine sets of parents to keep me on the straight and narrow, the Kigers were very, very athletic, and so even at the early age, I knew when the Kigers put up a tennis net, when they put up a basketball goal, when they played volleyball together, when they played softball together. And so as far as organized sport, I began playing Little League when I was eight years old and continued to play sports and then to cover it once I got to high school, never understanding or imagining that it would take me to these wonderful, wonderful places and people that I would later get to meet.

History first, but soon on the heels, sport, and that’s exactly right, the question was phrased so well, those indeed are my two passions.

**Elaine Westbrooks**

I think we have one final question for you. This is about journalism and what do you think the lessons that today’s students can learn from someone like Charles Kuralt.

**Freddie Kiger**

That’s a great question. Oh my goodness. First, punctuation, syntax, the lack of emojis, [audio]. We’re in 2020 and we've returned to the third dynasty of somebody’s Egyptian rule with hieroglyphics. Charles prided himself in the use of the language, prided himself in choosing words carefully. That is something that I would love to see a return to and accuracy, accuracy. Charles made a point of making certain that everything that he did, every piece he wrote was backed up two and three sources deep at least, and so rather than someone’s blog or someone’s, if you will, email or blog stump for them to get something off their chest, I wish there would be a return to civility, I wish there would be a return to accuracy, and I wish there would be a return to the love of the language and to the rhythm of the words so that we might not only be educated but educated in a civil manner.

**Elaine Westbrooks**

Well, Freddie, I have to tell you that we have received many kind words through the chat box here.

**Freddie Kiger**

Thank you.

**Elaine Westbrooks**

We just can't thank you enough for your time tonight and your wonderful stories and your knowledge and information. It’s been a tremendous night and a lot of people have certainly expressed that through the comments. What I can say for our audience members is that a recording of tonight’s talk will be available at tarheelstogether.unc.edu, so there will be a recording there.

I also would like to take this opportunity to invite you to the next event in our “Well Read” program on Tuesday 11 August at 17:30, we will have Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, David Zucchino. He is a journalist and contributing writer for the New York Times and he has covered wars and civil conflicts in over two dozen countries, including the Apartheid Era of South Africa, Iraq, and Lebanon. Stay tuned for more information about this event.

I just want to close by thanking Freddie for your amazing stories and your time, we really appreciate you being our first kickoff for our “Well Read” Series, and I can't thank you enough. I would also like to thank all the folks that have made this event possible. It’s been a lot of work to put this event together, but I think we feel really great that Freddie has kicked this off really well. All I can say is thank you so much, Freddie, and go Heels.

**Freddie Kiger**

Go Heels and thank you, Elaine, and everyone. Good luck with the series. Again, I am so flattered to have been invited. Thank you so much for allowing me to share.

**Elaine Westbrooks**

Great, thank you. Goodnight everyone.