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**Real News or Fake News:
The Future of Journalism**

**Edited Transcript of Address given by
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Acknowledgement of Country (Margaret Hinchey, rsm)

Welcome everybody, and we acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where we are standing, the custodians of the land where we're gathered here today, the Burramattagal people. I pay my respects to the elders past and present, and those still coming, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the nation.

Today I'd like to especially remember and mention the Wangan Jagalingou people who are traditional owners in Queensland and who are battling to save their land against the Adani [Carmichael coal] mine that threatens. They have struggled very hard to retain their native land rights. At the current time there have been efforts in the Senate by the Attorney General, Senator George Brandis, to amend the Native Title Act and to water it down. It will particularly affect these people so last week there was quite a success in the Senate; with the help of Senators in the Labor Opposition and Greens and Independent Nick Xenophon who fought against the changes being proposed and it was defeated - for the moment. A little success - so I just thought I'd let you know to think of those people who are so grateful for the help with writing letters and emails that they were given but we still need to be vigilant. There could be some cases where native title could be extinguished because of mining interests.

Dr Margaret Van Heekeren

Good morning, everyone. Firstly I'd also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and pay my respects to their elders past and present and to any indigenous peoples from any nation who are here today.

Thank you for inviting me to speak. I have my own connection with Our Lady of Mercy College (OLMC) next door, as the school is my alma mater and it was my mother's before me. But I do take delight in being back - so thank you.

I am a media historian. One of the main aims that I want to do today is share with you some of my research into the past history of fake news, because this is certainly not the first time that we've been here. In looking at that history and



considering what a problem it has been for a very long time, as I'll go into shortly, I hope that should bring us some comfort that we can get through this, we have before.

As we can see, fake news - there are headlines everywhere. For a long time there have been headlines everywhere, and journalism, it would appear, is under threat as people struggle to know what they can and can't believe. Ongoing cuts and redundancies suggest that a fundamental feature of the democratic ideal is descending in a tailspin.

Yes, journalism is in a spin but not, I would argue, a tailspin; rather it's in the midst of a cyclic turn that, as I'm going to explain shortly, is a necessary reminder of the importance of journalism in society and the need to prioritise quality journalism.

Fake news, we are told, is a disease, a cancer, a crisis, a war on information; but is this hyperbole relatively as fake as the situation it describes? Fake news is not new. It has been overcome in the past and the signs are, and they're getting more encouraging every day, that it will be overcome again.

By looking at the history of fake news, we can gain an understanding of why and how fake news proliferates at particular times and importantly for us today how societies have dealt with the problem and taken action that has led to its minimisation.

One of the earliest known examples of fake news, or false news as it is better known historically, comes to us two millennia ago from Plutarch, believe it or not. Welcome, Plutarch. Plutarch tells of a barber who spread what was thought to be false news of a battle defeat for the Athenians in Sicily. The barber was stretched on a large wheel like a rack for punishment. Unfortunately for him, it was later found his story was true, but such was the level of suspicion at the time he was not believed. I think that's another lesson that we can take today.

Again, we see echoes in the distrust of news and information that we share today.

Meanwhile, in Rome bearers of false news were often put to death and corn-sellers were known to be among the worst offenders, as trading on false information benefited them financially. Today, we can look to the present where



the creators of false news sites and accounts gain financial advantage through advertising.

To the Middle Ages and in 1275 the British Crown was so concerned about the destabilising impact of the spread of rumours and false news that it included a clause in the first ever Statute of Westminster outlawing such activity.

Come the 1600s and the arrival of the printing press and beginnings of modern journalism - for those inclined, there was now a new means of spreading fake news. The *Daily Courant* - the first daily newspaper in Britain - had only been off the presses for three years when accusations of false news were made against it in 1705. The seriousness of such accusations cannot be underestimated. Just three years earlier, the then Queen of England, Anne, only two weeks after becoming queen had issued a proclamation that reinforced that 1275 statute. Queen Anne's proclamation described the consequences of false news as 'great peril, mischief, subversion, destruction' and promised the utmost severity and rigour of the law to offenders. That false news law was not abolished until 1887.

In the late 1800s France introduced laws to jail the purveyors of false news, but France was not alone and the scourge continued. In fact, it worsened. Again, advances in technology, just like digital media today, exacerbated the problem. The advent of the telegraph allowed fake stories to spread much faster around the world as international tensions arose in the late 19th century and on towards the outbreak of the First World War. Rogue wire service operators used the new technology to send out fake reports of battles, massacres and assassinations. One such operator faked a first-hand account of the sinking of the *Titanic*. Many of these stories were picked up by newspapers and published, only to be debunked later on.

In Australia, the proliferation of such news prompted one man to author a poem titled *Cable Course* - cooking up false news by cable. This poem was published in the Brisbane *Truth* in 1907. The poem speculates on the location of the fake news creator whose work is spread around the world and again, very similar to the difficulty that we see in identifying fake news generators today. The poem, is quite long but I'll just read part of it, because I think it's the most pertinent.



Most trivial incidents he [embellishes] and lends a lustrous label and fakes the news which folks peruse at every breakfast table.

The reference to 'every breakfast table' is telling and suggests the saturation of fake news akin to what we see today. Why?

My research of historic newspapers reveals a similar scenario. Fake news was a major problem throughout the First World War, in the inter-war years and, to a somewhat lesser degree, by the Second World War. It's in times of tension which is certainly the situation that we're in at the moment that fake news tends to proliferate. It was still enough of an issue in the post-war period to prompt calls for the newly formed United Nations to take action and this led to the drafting of the Convention on the dissemination of false news in 1947. The Convention on the International Right of Correction, as it was called, was not actually ratified until 1963 and even today only has 12 signatories, the majority being South American countries.

So why was fake news so prolific in the first half of the 20th century?

Primarily it was generated for propaganda and came from governments, press proprietors, activists and, just like today, anyone with a cause and a lack of scruples.

I'll turn now to a specific example and compare the impact of fake news 100 years ago to today.

One hundred years ago last month, so in April 1917, what is regarded as one of the most scandalous fake news stories of all time - though we're probably challenging that with new records at the moment but for the past century has been regarded as one of the most scandalous pieces of fake news, and it made its way around the globe. On 17th April two English newspapers, *The Times* and *The Daily Mail* published a story claiming that the German army was running a corpse utilisation factory and was boiling down the bodies of dead German soldiers to extract fats for making fertiliser, lubricant and even soap, among other products. The report was picked up by many regional newspapers in Britain, as well as others around the world including the *South China Morning Post* in Hong Kong, the *Washington Post* in the US, and even in Australia, including the *Daily News* in Perth and the *Albury Banner* and *Wodonga Express*. Back in Britain the story was used as the basis for a cartoon in *Punch*.



The story was widely accepted. Many people in countries fighting against the Kaiser's army were predisposed to believing the capability of the German troops to commit bizarre atrocities. Today, we would call that an echo chamber as the story reinforced previously held beliefs.

How many people did this story reach? Historical newspaper circulation figures are notoriously difficult but research estimates reasonably put the *Daily Mail's* circulation in 1917 at just under one million and *The Times* at 137,000. If we go to some of the locations where the story was published, we could say about 1.2 million copies of newspapers containing the corpse factory story were sold. Now circulation figures don't take into account readership, so, as you would know, if you buy a newspaper and bring it into your home, maybe your partner and others in the house will read it as well and of course, in 1917, newspapers were commonly read by large numbers of people in libraries, taverns and other public venues. A conservative estimate, and I mean seriously conservative here, would put the readership of the corpse factory story at around 10 million people.

Let's fast forward almost 100 years to the US election campaign last year. Amidst the plethora of the fake news stories, the most read - and this is according to analysis by BuzzFeed - was the report, you probably heard of it, it was believed to have been generated in Macedonia, that the Pope had endorsed Donald Trump.

Research in the United States has identified that this fake news story was shared by 960,000 people - roughly the same number who bought the *Daily Mail* in England in 1917. Of course, many of us didn't know about the Pope-Trump story until we heard it via mainstream media. I certainly came across it that way, and it was already being discredited.

US research showed that most of the 900,000-odd who shared the story were likely Trump supporters and inclined to believe that the world leader of the Catholic Church would make such an endorsement. It reinforced their belief in the omnipotence of Trump. The research also shows that the story discrediting the endorsement fiction was shared only 36,000 times.

Go back 100 years and it took until 1925 - so eight years - before the corpse factory story was finally laid to rest as false.



In both situations, we had a significant number of people effectively taken in by fake news, followed by difficulty in debunking the initial report. I've used this example to demonstrate that the recent outbreak of fake news is nothing more than that - an outbreak of the disease, if you like, that has periods of dormancy and periods of virulence.

If we look to the past for ideas as to how to combat fake news, we find many of the measures previously taken are again being adopted. This is undoubtedly a coincidence but it stems from an ongoing human trait that ultimately prioritises and seeks the truth.

The corpse factory was not the only fake news story of the First World War. There were many, many more regarding battles and casualties. At around this time, we start to see, in Australia at least, where my research in this aspect is concentrated, a spike in the number of newspapers that publish editorials or advertisements reaffirming their publication's commitment to accuracy and promising no fake or false news on their pages. We are seeing similar now, with fake news being touted by government, media and journalism scholars.

In the US, researcher Claire Wardle published an important piece on the First Draft News website earlier this year which creates a taxonomy of fake news. She makes two fundamental distinctions: fake news as misinformation and fake news as disinformation. The first, misinformation, refers to the inadvertent sharing of information that is false. This could be a journalist erroneously reporting from a poorly informed source or a member of the public sharing a story that they believe to be true on social media. Disinformation, as she correctly states, is far more serious and relates to the deliberate invention or distortion of facts. Simply put, misinformation is human error, disinformation is human malevolence.

Fake news as disinformation is created for propaganda purposes, for financial gain or simply out of a malicious intent to disrupt. Action to limit the spread of disinformation is gaining momentum. Social media sites and search engines, including Facebook, Twitter and Google, have announced measures to minimise the extent to which fake news is seen and in some cases to tag untrustworthy content, just like newspapers have been doing in the past and newspapers are doing again now.

Google and Facebook are funding fact-checking groups to check for fake news. During the recent French election, Facebook suspended 30,000 automated sites that appeared to be spreading propaganda. Governments around the world are also taking notice.

As we have seen, there is a strong history of countries using legislation to combat the spread of fake news and there remain many countries in the world where people can be jailed for spreading fake news. Legal solutions are, however, problematic as they can easily impinge on the right of free speech and can be manipulated.

The Reporters Without Borders organisation details a range of instances around the world where governments have arrested or jailed journalists for reporting news that the governments would prefer not to be published. For example, in the Ivory Coast six journalists were arrested and held for allegedly reporting false information, although it wasn't, about a mutiny in the country's security forces. And of course, it is only four years since the three *Al Jazeera* journalists, including Australian Peter Greste, were imprisoned and put on trial in Egypt for allegedly reporting false news that was a threat to national security.

Most governments are moving more cautiously. Just last month the German cabinet approved a draft law which would see social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter fined up to 50 million Euros if they don't quickly remove defamatory fake news or hate speech from their sites.

In January, a House of Commons committee began an enquiry into fake news in the UK and, as you're probably aware, in Australia just last week a Senate committee began its enquiry into public interest journalism and the examination of fake news is on its remit.

The UN is again involved. In March, its rapporteur on freedom of expression joined regional human rights activists to issue a joint declaration on freedom of expression, fake news dissemination and propaganda. The memorandum called on member states to ensure the dissemination of accurate information.

It is reassuring that governments and media are taking steps to address the problem but it's also our responsibility as news consumers to do our bit. We can do this by becoming critical news consumers, questioning the sources and



veracity of our news, especially what we view online and on social media. If something seems too good or too awful to be true, then chances are it is. Check and see if anyone else is reporting the story or there are stories outing it as fake news. Google can be your friend in this way.

There are also sites - the best known one is snopes.com and for some time now it's actively been tracking fake news stories and outing them, and if you just Google Snopes it comes up straight away.

Of course, some of the greatest damage caused by fake news has been to climate change action and particularly in Europe to social justice for refugees. In relation to climate change, researchers have found that disinformation campaigns, including fabricated controversies and 'alternative facts', have done considerable harm in slowing people's awareness of and response to communities of climate change. One of the major problems that has arisen, of course, is that this has allowed a validation of the climate change sceptic as some sort of quasi-expert with an alternative, as it would have it, justifiable view.

The acceptance of refugees in Europe has been further problematised by false reports of refugee perpetrators of violence and crime, created by Far Right groups seeking to demonise and disrupt. Unfortunately, some such reports are picked up by mainstream media and spread around the world in seconds. For example, many of you may have heard on Australian news the report of male Middle Eastern refugees mass-raping women on New Year's Eve in Frankfurt, in Germany. Hopefully, those of you who did hear or see it also heard or saw some hours later that the story was a fabrication. Would such a story receive such coverage even today, five months later? I don't think so.

As I mentioned earlier, in the past few months alone, action to curb fake news has grown considerably, and with their ongoing struggle to stay financially afloat quality news media have little left but their reputation for accurate reporting. The catchcry of much of the past decade or so, to be first with the news and correct later if need be, must give way to a more considered approach as quality news outlets cannot afford to peddle the same sensationalised, trivialised and fake news that their financial but not ideological competitors do.



This is why. The other action we can take as individuals is to support quality journalism. One of the worst casualties of outbreaks of fake news is the collateral damage to all journalism as people become wary of everything they read, see or hear. We all know of the saying 'Don't believe everything you read in the newspaper' and that, of course, is a direct result of the historic dubiousness of some print media content.

As murky as journalism has been at times, there have always been professional and dedicated journalists working to uphold the core journalistic tenets of honesty and truth, and gathering news responsibly and ethically.

In the current media, quality journalism may or may not be in print form. News is not necessarily truer or better just because it is in print. Of course, there is a host of excellent journalism in print as there is on radio and television; but we have an ever-increasing number of online-only publications that also produce high quality journalism. Find quality journalism in whatever form you prefer, and subscribe.

One of the mistakes that many news organisations in the early days of online and social media was to distribute content for free, but with advertisers' dollars now going elsewhere they can only survive with additional income from subscription. We all know that if we want a quality product it will come at a premium. Compared with a takeaway cappuccino, most news subscriptions are a bargain.

We can also be active in promoting quality journalism when we see stories that contradict fake news or see news that you regard as important knowledge for the greater good. Share the news in whatever way you can, by social media or even by mouth. As in all struggles, the strongest, the most vocal, the most resilient will win, and your voice can contribute.

In conclusion, it would probably be comforting to think of fake news as a modern day problem that has led us into a post-truth era. However, a long history of fake news, news manipulation and distortion reveals that there has probably never been a genuine era of truth. It is, as it always has been, the role of those who seek veracity, and journalists among them, to sort fact from fiction, truth from lies. But they cannot do so alone.

Thank you.



Q: What can we do, if anything, to encourage more questioning, both on the radio in interviews as well as in reporting? I find the assumption that we just need to read something and believe it questionable. Since most of us don't really have answers for the big questions of our current reality, we need support in daring to ask deeper questions and reporters usually accept what the person is saying. What can we do?

A: Margaret: That's a massive question. I think there's a whole other discussion that needs to be had that relates to the type of journalism that we have today. We talk about being objective and also the problem is most of our western journalism is based on the notion of conflict, so all journalists are really seeking is to get this side and that side, and that's what becomes called false balance, which is what you're identifying.

We look at climate change in particular. A lot of media have given far too much time to sceptics because they wanted to balance. We can see that happening in the anti-vaccination debate as well. You get this false balance. I think we do need to revisit the discourse of our journalism, how our journalism is done, how do we do that? These things take a lot of time.

Asking the deeper questions, that's where Mark Colvin is such a loss. He always went further and got people to explain. He was a thinking journalist, whereas, as you're identifying, a lot of the news that you hear, people are just asking something, getting the answer and then moving on. We need more Mark Colvins.

Q: What's done in universities, for example, to awaken these critical questions and the responsibility they have to our current and future society as a journalist. They have an enormous responsibility.

A: Margaret: We need to come back to the education system. Firstly, media studies, for some reason, despite how pervasive media is in our lives, has not really taken off as a subject at school. There was some playing around with it a couple of decades ago, but if we were to have students who were more critically trained in how to view the media that would help.



Our school education system does not really prioritise critical thinking. By the time they're at the HSC level they are spitting out rote learning. So it goes back to our education as well.

Q: When community consultations are held and the people who have the power have already made the decisions ... I live in the outer Western Suburbs; go over to the local shops to buy the newspapers, there will be three stacks of [one] waist high, and I've got to look for [another] or [alternative] paper. People are really only getting one side of the story. I don't know how you counter either of those.

A: Margaret: It's interesting, because we were having that same discussion at morning tea. I think there's obviously common concerns that arise, and what do you do? People have always bought the papers that fit most with their beliefs. We talk now about people just looking at certain Twitter feeds or at Facebook and they're in this echo chamber.

Originally newspapers were partisan. We've only had objective journalism for about 120-odd years as an ideal. People are more comfortable with ideas expressed in a way that suits their beliefs. The only way we can control that would be to have governments come in and legislate and forbid - but with a belief in freedom of expression, we can't do that.

If people want to choose newspapers that some of us think are not the best, and look at stuff online that we don't think is best, who's got the right to challenge that? Again, if we had better education from a young age into critically appraising the media, then that perhaps could shift what people buy and look at.

Q: Does that training begin when they go into journalism? Is it continued? Is there a basic screening process for journalists to enter that field?

A: Margaret: Journalism training concentrates on how to get information and present it to the public. I think it's probably more important that everybody else in every other course, including the journalism students as well, do more with critical thinking.

Q: The commercial media channels - they often have news items that turn out to be not quite true in the long run. Why do they continue to do that when



they've got to have a rerun to correct their incorrect message? I know they want to get out there first and hold people's attention but it doesn't do much for the channel itself, does it?

A: Margaret: No, it doesn't in the long run and I think we're starting to see that people actually do value accuracy and I think we'll see a move back from online. You've probably heard of the term 'click bait' which is putting forward stories that are sensationalised or may not be quite true but they know they'll get a large viewing audience. Historically, in newspapers, you'd say 'If it bleeds it leads' which again is something sensational. You know it will attract people to it.

We probably are at the start of an era where everybody can make up news. People who are purporting to offer real journalism are going to start focusing their attention more on being accurate and that will distinguish their product and that will make people go to them. I hope.

Q: I would suggest that print media, newspapers, is mostly for older people. I think young people would be on their devices. Fairfax appears to be cutting back on staff. But where do we go if one type of media is flooding the market. For a long time now, interviewers have directed their question to a person perhaps after some stressful happening. – “How sad do you feel about such-and-such? How angry are you?” - Not “How do you feel?” Just “How angry do you feel?” Is that some form of questioning that directs people's opinion?

A: Margaret: It comes back to what I mentioned before about how journalism tends to be based on conflict. That's why we want to get emotions out, such as anger, such as sadness. Those emotions are a conflict with the norm that we perceive as happiness, and so that's the sort of journalism we have. Do we get the sort of journalism we deserve? I don't know.

I've been training journalists for years at universities, and I say to them, do not ask those questions, because you don't get very good answers. If somebody has lost somebody, they're in a sad situation, saying 'Are you sad about this?' - well, yeah.

You do what you can as a journalism educator to try and improve journalism by trying to encourage deeper questioning, but then you know that the students



will walk out of your class and turn on the TV and what they'll see. You can only try.

Q: Programs like [ABC TV] Media Watch - that's required viewing for me on Monday nights - you see the same offenders popping up time and time again. It appears they don't learn and the people who are subject to the bad journalism, false reports or rehashing old stories, they don't watch Media Watch obviously so they're just going to go blithely on their way being fed all that.

A: Margaret: The biggest numbers of people who watch *Media Watch* are probably journalists. Originally I was a working journalist and you always lived in fear of Monday nights. Even inadvertently you may have done something that puts you on *Media Watch*.

Again, it comes back to critical thinking and whatever form we have it in, even if it's just personal and how we look at something, the more the better.

Q: It seems to me that part of what I do to check things out is to try to find the longer term thing going on. I find the Rear View program on ABC is really helpful because going and invading Afghanistan, they'll talk about what's been going on there for the last hundred years, so you get more of a perspective on what's going on now, and that seems to be what's lacking in the current journalism. It's what's happened this instant and you don't get much of the rest of it.

A: Margaret: That's the whole premise of why I do what I do - which is as a media historian to try to make sense of the present by looking at the context with the past. I think the media likes the fake news story. I think they've built it up to be worse than it actually is. I'm not saying it's not a problem but where I get to is that we've got a much larger problem with humanity and where to find the truth. When do people want to see truth, when do people want to hide the truth? These are age old questions and I think by placing something in that historical context, getting a background view, it gives you that better context for what's happening at present, and perhaps that doesn't seem as bad as you would think without that knowledge. Or it might be worse if things are shown to be that way.



Q: Is fake news sometimes used to hide the truth?

A: Margaret: Yes, I think that touches a bit on the question we had before, when somebody just dismisses something as fake news. It's a good way of not wanting to acknowledge something as true, and creating disbelief and uncertainty, so definitely, yes, it is used for that.

I must say, as much as I'm arguing that this is a cyclical thing that we're going through now, Trump is a complete wildcard. He is different. But then, who believes what Trump says, apart from Trump's supporters?

Q: We were also talking about politicians using news media to get away with their own agenda. The 'children overboard' scandal here with Peter Reith, where deliberate lies were told, it wasn't until the Navy came out and said, this is what actually happened - so that's where some journalists take for granted that if the government says it it must be true. If the prime minister says it.

A: Margaret: There was a lot of soul-searching among journalists after that. How could we have missed it? And they just did not do a good enough job. They believed what the government said at the time. It is one of the great failures of Australian journalism, that incident, that it was not uncovered.

Q: I think the fake news has arisen because of the desperation for revenue from advertising, because it draws more people and therefore they can earn more money from it. Then also I assume in a lot of non-democratic countries they use fake news as propaganda. And then because we live in a global economy ... What do you think about that?

A: Margaret: Yes, definitely, unscrupulous people wanting to make money set up fake news sites. They get advertising from it. So they're doing it out of greed. There'll always be people selling whatever it might be, news or whatever, if they can make a quick buck without worrying about the quality of what they're doing.

Q: Because they want to cash in to this going viral thing?

A: Margaret: Yes, absolutely. They are making money out of it. That's where governments are starting to step in, particularly with the German government, because those fake news sites get them on to Facebook or Twitter and they go viral. That's where Germany leads now. If they're not taken down quickly,



Facebook and Twitter will be fined. That's putting pressure on those companies to not allow as much from fake news sites. They won't get the shares, they won't get the advertising, and so they will fall away.

Q: I always thought a strong public broadcaster, publicly funded, like the ABC or the BBC, somehow gave a better news environment. In the US they just have the National Public Radio and it's subscription funded. Can you comment whether we have better media in Australia because of our publicly funded broadcasting balance, on the basis that they're not chasing profits or trying to make money?

A: Margaret: Absolutely. I agree entirely. Although there is always debate about how biased they are for or against the government, the journalism that we have produced on the ABC and BBC - the resources put into the stories that commercial media won't touch, the type of stories that are published - if the ABC doesn't do that, we'd be much poorer in our knowledge of various issues. There just would not be some stories if it wasn't for the publicly funded broadcasting services, because they don't chase the dollar like the commercials do.

Q: Do you consider religious newspapers propaganda pieces or actual newspapers?

A: Margaret: I have worked for religious newspapers for both the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church, many years ago. The Anglican one was at a time when a lot of early abuse stories were breaking. Fortunately the editor of that paper was very keen that we go with the facts and not try to soften the story for the church, but that is quite unusual in the religious press.

I don't think the religious press is any different from any other interested parties that publish their own newspapers, and I think the readership know there's going to be that inherent perspective. I think that is to be expected.

Q: How did you get into journalism and in your profession? As a lecturer now for young people wanting to be journalists, what's your assessment of the quality or any difficulty you see in that? What about whistleblowers and journalism?



A: Margaret: Thank God for whistleblowers. As I said, I finished Year 12 here at [OLMC] Parramatta and then a few months later I went off to what was then Mitchell College in Bathurst to study journalism. I grew up at Telopea, just down the road, and I remember probably around the age of ten Dad coming in off the train with *The Sun* newspaper under his arm and the *Sydney Morning Herald* in his briefcase. I grew up in a household where the Fairfax newspapers, *The Sun* then and the *Sydney Morning Herald* were read and we watched the ABC. That was my background.

After I completed the course I came back to Sydney, I worked for a film magazine for a while, then I got the travel bug and spent a lot of time travelling with my husband whom I'd met while at college, and we moved back to the Central West [of NSW] that we loved. I worked in radio, television and print while I was there.

Journalism is a hard occupation to do with young children. It's a 24/7 type job and even when you're not in the office you're aware of what's happening. It was when I was raising a family that I moved across to journalism education, which I loved, and doing research into journalism as well.

Commenting on the students we have today touches on what I said before about critical thinking. I wish they were prepared more for critical thinking from school. All university courses are relatively short. Semesters are two lots of 12 weeks in a year. That's 24 weeks that they're actually in classes and doing assessments, so in any course you don't have a lot of time with them, so if they came in better prepared from the school system it would help.

Q: Where do you advise them to seek employment after they graduate?

A: Margaret: Wherever they can get a job. Doing a Bachelor of Journalism or Communication is seen now as the equivalent of what Bachelor of Arts used to be. It actually prepares you for a lot of jobs - in doing research and with information. Interestingly, I've just moved back to Sydney this year after the past ten years or so at Charles Sturt [University] at Bathurst, so I know the employment trends from there for our journalism students. Despite everything that the media sector has been through we have the same number of students employed at the end of the degree. It's never changed.

This is for two reasons. One is because, very sadly, the layoffs that have been occurring have been the experienced journalists, the senior journalists. There still has been hiring, because it's much cheaper to have a 23 year old than it is to pay a 50 year old. The major problem with that, of course, is that you're losing so much experience and knowledge. There are some brilliant young people out there, but there aren't many 23, 25 year olds who can bring to a story what a 50 year old can.

So they didn't have as much problem in getting jobs, but also there have been so many new opportunities opening up. There are jobs called 'social media reporter' now. All sorts of digital journalism positions. So that has picked up where some of the older print jobs have gone. The graduates are getting jobs.

Q: Are all the newspapers just going online? Will they still employ reporters for online content?

A: Margaret: Oh, they are. Over the past year, we now have BuzzFeed increasing the size of its operations in Australia. The Guardian, only available online in Australia, is doing very well. I believe it's going to break even over the next year. It employs journalists in Australia, so it goes on. The New York Times has just set up an Australian operation. Even the Spectator of the UK, regardless of what you think of its politics, has an Australian office as well. So yes, there's a lot going on.

Q: Could you comment on the recent strike by journalists at the [Sydney Morning] Herald?

A: Margaret: I can only just feel so sorry for them. Journalists don't take that action lightly. It's increasingly difficult with current industrial relations laws to do so. It just shows their desperation with the situation at Fairfax.

I grew up with Fairfax newspapers and then by the time I was 18 I was buying the *Sydney Morning Herald* every day and I have done a lot of research into the history of Fairfax, so it's a real love of mine. Though Fairfax newspapers and the *Herald* are a real passion of mine, I'm beginning to wonder whether maybe for the *Herald*, its time has gone. We have talk of the TPG private equity firm buying it now. Maybe it's time for it to rest in peace. That really distresses me personally, but maybe it now has had its day.



Q: A final comment on the Sydney Morning Herald?

A: Margaret: Greg Hywood has done, as far as investors are concerned, quite a good job in that it's actually reasonably healthy now. The problem is that the priority is for the investors and it's not for the quality of journalism. There is money there that could be put back into journalism. This goes for all companies. It's how much they want to put money into funding quality journalists to produce quality journalism. In Australia particularly we have a problem because we don't have the philanthropic culture that they do in the States where there's a lot of good stuff happening there through funded journalism, and we don't have that.

Thank you

Margaret, what a morning! Thank you so much for all that you have given us. In particular that history of journalism and fake news was an eye opener to me and to everyone else. Just marvellous. The lack of scruples behind a lot of that sort of practice, I suppose a lot of us perhaps think that but you said it, which was very helpful. Also the knowledge that this sort of journalism and news has broken out over millennia and it gave a sense of great hope, I thought, that in every age there have been those who have challenged and sought the real truth and presented it. That gives us a great sense of hope.

You've given us also some very good tools to explore in terms of the sites - Snopes, Trove - but also encouraged us to dig further and follow the story: does it reappear or does it just fizzle out as well.

So thank you so much for giving us your time and expertise this morning. We really appreciate it.

END

