TOM PUTNAM: Good evening. I'm Tom Putnam, the Director of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. And on behalf of John Shattuck, CEO of the Kennedy Library Foundation, and all of my Library colleagues, I want to welcome you to this special forum to help mark the 110th birthday of Ernest Hemingway later this summer.

Let me begin by thanking Lillian Ross. We are honored by your presence here with us today, tying us directly to Hemingway whose papers are housed in this Library. I want to also acknowledge the sponsors of the Kennedy Library Forums, including lead sponsor, Bank of America, Boston Capital, the Lowell Institute, The Boston Foundation, and the Corcoran Jennison Companies, and our media sponsors, *The Boston Globe*, WBUR, and NECN.

"Ernest Hemingway, who may well be the greatest American novelist and short story writer of our day, rarely comes to New York." So began Lillian Ross's portrait of Ernest Hemingway, published on May 13, 1950 in *The New Yorker*. To her surprise, what she viewed as a candid and affectionate profile of Hemingway as hard-hitting, warm and exuberantly alive was tremendously controversial. Yet not only has the piece withstood the test of time, it serves as a model of her work, providing "a picture of a man as he was," she writes, "in his uniqueness and with his vitality and his enormous spirit of fun intact, to describe as precisely as possible how Hemingway, who had the nerve to be like nobody else on Earth, looked and sounded when he was in action."

This classic eyewitness account helped establish Lillian Ross's reputation as a journalist who disappeared in her reports, permitting characters to reveal themselves with their own words and actions. "Dialogue," she once wrote, "is the most effective and most interesting way to define a character, making it unnecessary for the writer to intrude with any song and dance routine of his own." The author Irving Wallace once observed that, "Miss Ross's unique writing style -- spare, direct, objective, fast -- can suddenly, almost

sneakily, nail a personality naked to the page." "She is," Wallace concluded, "one of the most creative, innocent bystanders of our time."

Our moderator this afternoon is Susan Morrison who joined *The New Yorker* in 1997 as a senior editor. She currently serves as the fashion editor of the magazine and as article editor, responsible for overseeing and editing long form pieces, "The Talk of the Town" and "Shouts & Murmurs".

I should note that the *Portrait of Hemingway* is on sale in our bookstore, and Miss Ross has agreed to sign copies at the conclusion of our forum. We've also assembled a display table outside the hall with photos and Miss Ross's correspondence with Hemingway, which is part of our collection.

Hemingway very much liked *The New Yorker* profile, and he, his wife, Mary, and Miss Ross remained friends for many years. In response to the controversy around the essay, Hemingway replied, "Don't worry about the piece. It's just that people got things all mixed up. I take the wind like an old tree, have felt the wind before, north, south, east, and west." Several years later, he told Miss Ross that people continued to talk with him about the profile: "All are very astonished because I don't hold anything against you, who made an effort to destroy me and very nearly did, they say. I always tell 'em, how can I be destroyed by a woman when she is a friend of mine, and we've never even been to bed and no money has changed hands?"

In addition to their close relationship, Miss Ross describes her strong connection to Hemingway as a writer, stating that it was from Hemingway's fiction that she learned how to write fact. In so doing, Lillian Ross became a pioneer of literary journalism. And as *New Yorker* editor, William Shawn, once observed, "Employing methods of her own invention, Miss Ross demonstrates that although truth is not necessarily stranger than fiction, it can at times arrange itself more artfully."

Please join me in welcoming to the Kennedy Library, Susan Morrison and Lillian Ross. [applause]

SUSAN MORRISON: Thanks very much. I'd just like to start by saying a couple more things about Lillian to fill in the blanks. Lillian is one of the very few *New Yorker* staff writers who has worked with all five of the magazine's editors. And in addition to writing hundreds of pieces for virtually every section of the magazine, she's the author of a dozen books, including *Here But Not Here*, her memoir of her professional and personal relationship with William Shawn, one of the magazine's editors, and most recently, *Reporting Back: Notes on Journalism*.

And I like to tell everyone that with all that under her belt, Lillian is still one of the most prolific and energetic reporters that we have. Her son, Eric, in the front row will tell you that it's not at all uncommon for me to call Lillian in an afternoon with an idea for a "Talk" piece that needs to be reported that evening. Lillian will head out, do the reporting, pull an all-nighter writing the piece. When I come in in the morning, it's in my inbox, you know, great little gem of a piece. And when I call her to tell how terrific it is, she'll be on the treadmill, can't take the call, so. You know? It's incredible. It's humbling.

But we're here tonight mostly to talk about Hemingway. So I thought, Lillian, why don't we start by … Tell us about how you first met Hemingway.

LILLIAN ROSS: First of all, thank you all for coming out on this rainy night. I have been asking people, who reads Hemingway now? Who are they? Who are the people even interested in talking about him? And so I was told that about three hundred of them will be here tonight. And I was very happy to hear that. And I hope you'll ask any questions you have about it.

I'm just delighted to hear that people do read the writing, because the writing is what it's all about -- not the way he shot lines or fished or hunted or caroused around town having a little fun, which a lot of people resented somehow or other, because some people -- especially some people in the academic world -- thought that a writer should sit around in a tweed jacket with those patches on the sleeves and a pipe in his mouth and a fire roaring by his side and just try to make them happy.

Well, I really don't like that view of what a writer is. I've always been grateful, grateful to this day, for what I learned from Hemingway as a young writer just trying to find my way. Coming across these beautiful short, clear, moving sentences was really a big light for me. And I would hope that young people would find that kind of excitement, if they're interested in writing, by reading those sentences today. It's been sort of obscured in a way by all the talk, some of which might have been engendered by Hemingway himself because he didn't pander to the gossip columns. And he didn't pander to a lot of the kind of people we all see writers pandering to today. They may have resented that. I'm not sure. It's always been a bit of a puzzle to me because my mind and my interest has always been in the writing.

Working with Susan Morrison at *The New Yorker* is inspirational because she … I think she doesn't know it, but there's a lot in what an editor does with a writer that helps create that light. I've always felt that I was lucky to be at a magazine where I've found that kind of editorial help.

But in writing, what I discovered about Hemingway is that he was very generous, really, very generous in the way he revealed to some people some of the secrets of his writing. And for those who are interested, you can find it in his own words in the profile I wrote some sixty plus years ago.

SUSAN MORRISON: Lillian, why don't you read the section -- there's a section in the profile Lillian wrote where he compares his method for writing to musical composition.

LILLIAN ROSS: Well, he said at some point -- critics years later thought that that idea was theirs. And they would write critical pieces pointing out that he wrote the way Bach wrote music. But he also learned (and he talks about it himself in this piece) he learned from the impressionist writers, impressionist painters whose work he would see in the museums. And when he was in New York sixty plus years ago, he took his son Patrick to the Metropolitan Museum. And I accompanied them. I wrote in the piece, as we walked along, Hemingway said to me, "I can make a landscape like Mr. Paul Cezanne by walking through the Luxembourg Museum a thousand times with an empty gut. And I'm pretty sure that if Mr. Paul was around, he would like the way I made them and happy that I learned it from him."

He had learned a lot from Mr. Johann Sebastian Bach, too: "In the first paragraphs of *Farewell*, I used the word 'and' consciously, over and over, the way Mr. Johann Sebastian Bach used a note in music when he was emitting counterpoint. I can also write like Mr. Johann sometimes, or anyway, so he would like it." At another point he says in the profile, when he spends several minutes looking at Cezanne's painting, "Rocks: Forest of Fontainebleau" -- he's talking to Patrick who at that time was a freshman at Harvard – he said, "This is what we try to do in writing, Mousie, this and this, and the woods and the rocks we have to climb over. Cezanne is my painter after the early painters, wonder, wonder painter. Degas – Degas was another wonder painter. I've never seen a bad Degas. You know what he did with the bad Degas? He burned them."

SUSAN MORRISON: Lillian, you've just talked about how generous Hemingway was with his time, with you, with his words. A little bit later we can talk about your incredibly voluminous, wonderful correspondence with him. But one of the things that makes this profile so distinctive -- I mean, in my business, people always refer to this as the first

modern magazine profile. I mean, there really wasn't anything like this before Lillian's piece about Hemingway. But what makes it so special and unique is that it's so full of Hemingway talking. He's such a great talker. And he's so, you know, as you said, generous with his talk and his ideas. And he's very free around you. And I wonder if that's why … You know, we just heard about how, when this profile came out, it was a great shock to you and to Hemingway that it seemed it became suddenly enormously controversial, that a lot of people, critics and academics, as you say, thought that it was a hatchet job, thought it was devastating. But you and Hemingway both saw it as just, you know, an accurate reflection of who this high-spirited, terrific talker was. Now, why do you think it caused such a scandal?

LILLIAN ROSS: Actually, it's always puzzled me, the why of that. And I suppose it has something to do with an area that we're not going to go into tonight. But what I loved about being with Hemingway is it was so much fun. I've always liked having fun in the work I do. And Hemingway was full of humor, including the way he joked around, often using sports metaphors about competing with other writers. He knew that a wonderful writer was, and always has been, one of a kind. There is no basis for competition.

In one of his early letters to me, dated September 30th, 1949, sixty years ago -- and it was four months after my profile was published in *The New Yorker*. He was fifty and was finishing writing a new novel. And he wound up about it saying that that this book is, "better than I could write the best day I ever wrote. Hope so anyway. Pitching to empty stands, too, pitching double-headers to empty stands and fighting twenty-round fights with Steve Ketchel without a paying customer in the house. Well, doctor, when you are half a hundred years-old and know your trade, what the hell is the difference under what conditions you practice it?"

I loved the way he talked. And I didn't know who Steve Ketchel was. Didn't have to know who Steve Ketchel was in order to get the point. It was in this letter, by the way,

that he wrote, “What do you think of these for titles: *Over The River and Into The Trees*, or *Our One and Only Life*? I trust you as I should trust no one. So tell me what you think. The first one,” (which he used), “is out of Stonewall Jackson. The last one is mine.”

He might sign his letters ‘Ernest’ or often use one of his own joke names, like Huck van Hemingstein. Once he wrote to me and said, “I usually introduce myself as Hemingstein when meeting known anti-Semites and their friends.” About himself, he said, “Your legend grows like the barnacles on the bottom of a ship, and is about as useful, less useful.” Also, he would always give me wonderful advice. Once he wrote when I told him I was trying to ski, “Nobody has any real strength in their legs anymore, because they do not climb. Skiing is all out on a ski lift basis now. They don’t know the mountains.”

He had all sorts of opinions that he generously shared. This is what he had to say on loyalty: “I know you will stick like the third or fourth infantry division.” Well, that was great to hear. On Hollywood, he said, “The technicians are the nicest people, I think.”

You might find what he had to say about suicide of interest.

SUSAN MORRISON: Let me interrupt for a second. The prevailing notion after Hemingway died was that he had committed suicide. Hemingway’s wife, Mary, always maintained that was not the case. And Lillian agrees with her, that Hemingway valued life and thought [simultaneous conversation] suicide. And so you’ve always been persuaded that it was an accident, right?

LILLIAN ROSS: Also, I’ve always objected to the way people, some people, arrogate to themselves the right to say what someone is thinking or someone is feeling, or why somebody did this or somebody did that. I’ve always believe that nobody knows what goes on in anybody else’s bed, and nobody knows what goes on in anybody else’s head.

But on suicide, he had opinions. This is what he said about a playwright who killed himself. Mary, his wife, said it was an accident. And I agree with that. He wrote, “A guy makes a little money with a play like *Mr. Roberts*. Nothing occurs to him better than to kill himself? You’d think he’d buy himself all the women in the world or go to Chica(?) or take a good room at the Ritz in Paris and be the Proust of the people. No. He kills himself.”

SUSAN MORRISON: Before we came down here, we were up in the Hemingway room upstairs, which is incredible. I don't know if it’s ever open to the public, but it was really amazing to see. And one of the things that’s up there is, you know, hundreds, dozens of Lillian’s letters to Hemingway. They had a voluminous correspondence that went on for about, almost fifteen years. Right? And just reading the ones that I’ve read from Hemingway to Lillian, it really struck me, I mean, especially in this age of Twitter, how he seemed to really depend on your letters. He called Lillian’s correspondence, “the best thing since Penicillin.” And at one point, you know, in every letter it says, “Write if you have time. It makes a lot of difference to me.” He always wanted there to be a letter from you waiting for him. Now, do you know, was this correspondence unique to him? Or did he have a lot of, you know, heavy, serious correspondence like this with other people?

LILLIAN ROSS: Well, I don't know. All I know is that I enjoyed hearing from him, whether it was in person or whether he was writing. And the letters were more freely written. Writing is a very, very difficult and disciplined trade. And it’s work. And writing the letters, he was having fun. And he would meander around in his letters. And I liked it. I was having a good time. So, naturally, I responded and just encouraged them. And it was more fun for me.

SUSAN MORRISON: But the tone, the particular sense of humor in the letters is so modern, you know? It sort of almost reminds me of the sort of old Chevy Chase/Bill Murray era of *Saturday Night Live*. It's very funny and sardonic and sharp. And it's full of something, well, Lillian and Hemingway refer to as his "joke Indian language," which is another thing that you've speculated made people turn against him in the profile.

A lot of times, he would just say, you know, "Me hungry. Me finish book." He had this kind of Indian talk where he skipped all of the articles. And it's very funny. But also (you and I were talking about this once) you speculated that he might have written this way or talked this way because it was just more efficient, too. He was trying to save time. He was just trying to get through everything a little bit more quickly.

LILLIAN ROSS: Sure, sort of like texting.

SUSAN MORRISON: He would have. Yes, exactly. The other thing that is interesting about it is if you think about how clean and spare Hemingway's prose style is, even on the page, it's kind of the natural culmination of that -- you know, just stripping out every extraneous word. But it's got a real, personal tone that's pretty wonderful. But a lot of people thought that when you quoted him talking like that in the profile that you were just trying to do him in and trying to show him as a fool.

LILLIAN ROSS: I guess so. But I think the people who attacked him in that way were really talking about themselves. Because maybe they didn't have a sense of humor. Or maybe they didn't like the idea that he was going around having a good time. Maybe they thought he should be sitting with them in front of the fire and wearing one of those jackets and talking.

Well, he said what he thought. He said what he felt. And he was free to do it in the letters. But about himself he was very serious. Once he told me he was going to, "write longer

and oftener. I'd forgotten how quickly I come back from being tired and stale from overwork when I do get good exercise and live on the sea and sleep." And then he wrote that his blood pressure has been getting … He had it under control and so on. But he tried his best to take care of himself.

In 1952 he told me, by the way, while writing *The Old Man and The Sea*, "I've tried to go past the best of whatever I could do best and to see how far you could concentrate in prose. But I tried to do it without making any break in a straight, simple story." He told me that the book was popular with the people around his home in Cuba. "Down here, nobody sees any symbolism in it at all. They think it is about *la punta mar* and an old man and a fish and sharks, just the way I wrote it. Somebody wrote a highbrow review of it, and a fisherman asked me [Spanish]? I told him that *simbolismo* was [Spanish]."

SUSAN MORRISON: Reading the correspondence, you get the sense that one of the reasons that Hemingway and Mary lived down in Cuba was to be isolated from all the, you know, get away from all the kind of literary nonsense of New York City. And yet he seems to really enjoy hearing the little bits of literary gossip and little news of new books and everything from you. And occasionally in the letters, there are wonderful, sort of one-liners, little bits of lit-crit, or takes on writers. I jotted a couple of them down that I love.

On Faulkner, he said, "Writing would sure be easy if you went up in a barn with a quart of whiskey and wrote five thousand words on a good day without syntax." And then the other thing, you were talking about how he often used baseball and boxing metaphors all the time. And I love the description of Melville: "Melville is like a truly good left-hand pitcher with no control, but who has played with every club and knows everything."

Now, you took him once to meet the great *New Yorker* writer, Joe Mitchell, who was your friend and colleague …

LILLIAN ROSS: I took Joe Mitchell to his hotel room. And I thought, here I was introducing one of the greatest reportorial writers of the 20th Century to the greatest fiction writer of the 20th Century. And the truth is that they didn't have much interest in each other. I would write to him before I took Joe Mitchell to meet him -- because Joe Mitchell is one of my heroes -- and he didn't get excited about it. I wrote to him and tried to explain who Joe Mitchell was and what he was. And he seemed to like hearing about all that. But I don't think he had a genuine interest. He had a genuine interest in F. Scott Fitzgerald. He did a lot of talking about … He called him "Scott". And he did a certain amount of talking about Gertrude Stein. And he told me that she became mad at him because he sort of deserted her. She thought that she had a kind of ownership of him, and he certainly didn't want anybody to own him. And I never met Gertrude Stein, but I know a little bit about her and what she's written. And if I were stuck in a room with Gertrude Stein for half an hour, I think I'd go out of my mind. But maybe I'm being unfair to her. I don't know. But he did have that kind of interest in Fitzgerald. And, as you say, in Melville and some of the older writers.

SUSAN MORRISON: That reminds me of the Mailer discussion.

LILLIAN ROSS: Yeah, here it is if you want …

SUSAN MORRISON: Do you want me to read it? Or do you want to read it?

LILLIAN ROSS: You do it. Give them the date Mailer wrote it.

SUSAN MORRISON: Okay, now remind me of what this is. This is a letter that Mailer wrote to you about Hemingway.

LILLIAN ROSS: Yeah, but then I had told him about *The Old Man and the Sea*, and I tried to tell Norman Mailer about …

SUSAN MORRISON: All right. So here's Mailer on *The Old Man and the Sea*: "I read the Hemingway thing with a chip, due mainly to Hemingway's letter about it in *Life* magazine. I know what it is about him I can't stand. He is always saying in effect, 'I am a man who happens incidentally to be a great writer. I know that all of you will be interested in my noble, strong and beautiful attempts to exercise myself as a great man and will be happy when I succeed – except for professors, other writers, and assorted cocksuckers.' Anyway, I thought it was good and would have been better if it hadn't been so full of shit. I thought the best thing about it was the conception of the story, but I just can't bear his prose. It sets my teeth on edge, at least Hemingway's prose of 1952, which has lost of all the simplicity it used to have. I think if he had written the story twenty years ago, it would have been half as long and twice as good. Finally, and who will listen to me? I know that if I had gotten the idea and know as much about fishing as he did, I would have done it better, because it's the sort of story that needs only to be written without affection. And I never would have made the mistake of assuming that Norman Mailer as a fisherman is more interesting than the Cuban fisherman himself. I feel nastily competitive, but it's his own goddamned fault. There's a kind of strong child whose will one feels always forced to combat. And the end of it is to be as childish as the child."

Anyway, I mean, getting back to what you were saying about how competitive these high testosterone writers were with each other, well, here's my question. What did you respond? What did you write back to Mailer?

LILLIAN ROSS: Oh well, one doesn't respond. Mailer was another one you just enjoyed for what he was. I did learn later on in my life that it doesn't work in a way to try to introduce one genius to another. For example, I wrote about John Huston. When I first went out to Hollywood, I met these wonderful characters. And that was in 1950. And four

leading characters who were so rich as characters, I wrote to Bill Shawn, editor at *The New Yorker*, and I told him it was so exciting, they were novelistic. And I said, "Why don't I try to write a report?" He had asked me to write about the making of *The Red Badge of Courage*, John Huston and *The Red Badge of Courage*. And I said, "Why couldn't I cast the report in a fictional form?" And he said, "Go ahead and try it." So I did and it became the book, *Picture*. So John Huston also remained a friend for many, many years.

SUSAN MORRISON: Now when that came out as a book, Hemingway blurbed it.

LILLIAN ROSS: Oh, yeah.

SUSAN MORRISON: And his blurb for *Picture*, "It's much better than most novels," which is great. And it really was a breakthrough piece of reporting. I mean, again, in the same way that the Hemingway piece kind of invented the idea of the magazine profile, *Picture*, way, way before Tom Wolfe and any of those guys came on the scene, was this form of narrative journalism that people just hadn't seen before.

LILLIAN ROSS: It's very exciting to use dialogue as I continue to think and as I'm able to do. And I write these little stories that I love to do for "The Talk of the Town," for Susan, who is the editor of it. The way you can use dialogue to move a story along is very exciting.

But I started to tell you about having one genius meet another, just for what it's worth. I was in Rome with John Huston when he was making *The Bible*. And I was writing a profile of Fellini. And I thought, oh how exciting that it will be to have Fellini and John Huston meet each other, because they are two geniuses. And so we arranged a party of some kind. I've forgotten who arranged it. And both came each with his own entourage. And Fellini and his entourage stayed on one side of the room, and Huston and his

entourage stayed on the other side of the room. So I learned sort of early on that it's not too easy to bring geniuses together with each other.

SUSAN MORRISON: Well, to get back to *Picture* and the methodology of *Picture* for a minute, you were saying before that Bill Shawn once talked about your remarkable dual gift for invisibility and observation. And, I mean, I've known you long enough to know that very often as -- usually in the context of high praise -- people will describe your work, your method as a sort of fly on the wall method. And I know from being your pal for so long that that's a phrase that drives you crazy. And I understand that. But I think it would be interesting for you to explain to people your aversion to that phrase.

LILLIAN ROSS: Well, my reporting was called early, early on, as though I were a fly on the wall. And I thought it was a hateful expression. Bill Shawn especially disliked it, because I certainly didn't feel like a fly. But that became a tiresome phrase. And in journalism schools now the teachers teach reporting as it should be done by a fly on the wall. It's called the "fly on the wall" method of reporting.

SUSAN MORRISON: Well, correct me if I'm not explaining this clearly, but to me it suggests a kind of just complete passivity, like you're just kind of sitting there, taking it in. Whereas what you do and what great reporters do is that you are fully engaged with the subject, you know? You are, even to some extent, maybe even moving the dialogue and the action along. You're not just sitting there like a tape recorder.

LILLIAN ROSS: Oh, sure.

SUSAN MORRISON: But there's an inertness suggested in the phrase, "fly on the wall," but is completely incompatible with the sort of results that a reporter like you gets. And I think that's the big misunderstanding, is I think that people think that if you, any

old person could just be in a room writing down what happens, they would get great results. But that's certainly not the case, that there's a lot more going on there.

Which brings me to another thing. In Lillian's book, *Reporting*, which is a wonderful collection of many different pieces that she's done over the years, there's a terrific preface which I think has, like, ten points, sort of advice for young writers. And one of them is your unusual style of reporting without ever using a tape recorder, and said you take notes. And I know a lot of other reporters who do this, too. Again, correct me if I'm getting this wrong, it's sort of the same thing. It's as if you're relying on this machine to get it all down.

LILLIAN ROSS: Absolutely.

SUSAN MORRISON: You're not really intellectually engaged with what's going on. You're not going to pick it up and absorb it in the same way.

LILLIAN ROSS: Exactly. I think the tape recorder is the enemy of writing, really. Because that isn't what you do. And, you know, I can boast (it is a boast) that I've never had, in all the years, all the decades, I've never had anybody question the veracity of the dialogue, a quote, or a fact. But I think your ears can pick up a truth, and the truth of what the person is who's speaking if you use your own ears and you don't rely on the machine to do it for you.

SUSAN MORRISON: One of the things that characterizes all of your work, and in a similar way that we've been talking about Hemingway's correspondence, is it's always funny. You know? It always makes you laugh. There's always a kind of a fresh humorous take. And obviously everybody that you interview is not Robin Williams, although you've written about him several times. So what is it? And not everybody can be a great

talker. What is it that you as a reporter do to elicit this kind of talk from people that is so revealing and entertaining and worth putting down on a page?

LILLIAN ROSS: Well, I don't think there's any magic to it. I think any one of you can use your own ears, your own eyes, your own senses and your own independent, individual way of thinking and feeling to decide what you care to hear or see. I think it's kind of a simple way of going about the work.

SUSAN MORRISON: Now, of all the people that you've written about, who would you say is the best talker?

LILLIAN ROSS: Well, they've all been great talkers. Hemingway remains at the top of the list because he was always original, always inventive, always independent in what he thought and felt. And I love that. By the way, one of my other principles has been, for many, many years, never to write about anybody I dislike. I don't want to do that. You know? There is worthy journalism written by people who hate this one or that one for various reasons. If I ever wrote about Hitler, which I didn't, I certainly hated him. And then it would show up. But I never wrote that kind of journalism, never really engaged. Although I did write about Adlai Stevenson, who was a wonderful talker and a wonderful writer and a wonderful man of principle. But in choosing to write and to be a reporter, life is too short to waste on being with people you don't like. It's much more interesting and much more fun to write about the people who do interest you and the people you do like. Is any of this interesting to you?

SUSAN MORRISON: Now, Lillian, I have just one final question to ask you, and then I'm hoping people from the audience will have questions for you. What advice would you give a young writer starting out today?

LILLIAN ROSS: Today, it's very difficult. I'm not so good on giving advice to other people. And to the young people I wouldn't know how to begin because life is different in the 21st Century from the way it was in the 20th Century. Also, all of the technological advances have had a profound impact on the way people work and write and all. I just don't know. I could answer a specific question and give my opinion. But when it comes to advice, it's difficult to give you the principles that are fresh and different from the way they've been that I've tried to follow, in any event.

SUSAN MORRISON: Okay. Okay. I wanted to leave some room for questions.

QUESTION: I'm so interested to hear that Hemingway encouraged, maybe liked Scott Fitzgerald. Because I was very struck -- was it in *The Moveable Feast*? I don't remember -- but Scott Fitzgerald was so vulnerable and so self-questioning. And there was a very mean episode that now is foggy in my memory. So can you comment on … They were very different personalities.

LILLIAN ROSS: Oh, yes.

SUSAN MORRISON: Did you know Fitzgerald ever?

LILLIAN ROSS: No. I knew his daughter, Scottie, who was a wonderfully talented and appealing girl. She was a reporter, one of the first women, first four women who went to work for *The New Yorker* because Harold Ross didn't like women. And, finally, with World War II having eviscerated the ranks and all, he finally did hire them. And Scottie was there. Her life, her actual life with her mother and with her father was a pretty sad one.

I just know what Hemingway told me and said and felt about Fitzgerald. You know? He admired him and he loved the writing. But he did have opinions and advice. It may not

have worked. I'm not expert on the subject, but it may not have worked as I imagine it. Because a writer as powerful as Hemingway would need to say things the way, and talk about writing the way, he would do it instead of being able to be at one with the writer, which a marvelous editor (Susan is one that we have at *The New Yorker*) is able to do with a writer. So it's different. I just don't know.

QUESTION: I was very happy to hear you say that Joe Mitchell is one of your heroes, because he is one of mine as well, as are you. And I'm so glad that you're here today. But I wonder whether you have any ideas or opinions about why Joe Mitchell stopped writing after *Joe Gould*?

LILLIAN ROSS: I don't have any opinions of that kind. He was secretive and he kept files, and he kept his work to himself to a very, very great extent. Apparently he reached a point that he felt that he couldn't go on with doing the work the way he wanted to do it. But there is no why. Nobody else, as I say, can know. Just as when people say, "Why did Hemingway kill himself?" well, you just don't know what happened in the middle of the night. And he had been ill. And he had been in pain. And he was wandering around. He had trouble sleeping. There were guns in the house, and they were loaded. Well, you don't know what somebody might do in an impulse or anything like that. But basically he was a man who loved life and he loved good writing. And I was very fortunate to have him impart the results of his talents to me.

SUSAN MORRISON: In the early '90s, before I went to *The New Yorker*, I was the editor of *The New York Observer*. And Joe Mitchell had an office at *The New Yorker* then. And I used to call him up and chat with him maybe once a week, because I just thought, maybe if, you know, it was worth a try to see if he would want to write a little something for us. And he talked about it and he was very sweet about it. He never did. But what he used to do is, every time I was on the phone with him, he would sing a few sea shanties to me, which I really treasure. I wish I had him on tape. It was really special.

QUESTION: Just a comment on the Indian talk. You know, Hemingway spent every summer up in northern Michigan at Lake Walloon and encountered Indians, the Ojibwes and probably other tribes. And as you were talking about the Indian talk, the thought just occurred to me that, I wonder if, in some way, he incorporated what he heard from the Indians eventually into his writing, in his style of writing.

LILLIAN ROSS: Sure.

QUESTION: And rather than it being the other way around, that his exposure to the Indians in some way affected his style and eventually resulted in that short staccato style.

SUSAN MORRISON: I think you've got a Masters thesis there.

LILLIAN ROSS: I don't know. But I think that's a very keen observation because he loved Indians, and he responded to them. And apparently they responded to him. So in a way, it was kind of a form of Indian Hemingway-ese. But it was also a relaxed way of just kind of kidding around on paper.

QUESTION: I have two questions. You write so many profiles on directors and movie stars. Were you friends with Pauline Kael? And my second question is is there someone you wished you had interviewed, and you did not?

LILLIAN ROSS: No and no. I think she rather resented my intrusion there in that area. But our paths really didn't cross. So the answer is no. And I don't know – when I see a baby in the parks, I often feel, "Gee, I wish I could interview that baby."

SUSAN MORRISON: And one thing that I can add about this is the whole world of interviewing famous people, whether it's politicians or movie stars or painters or bull

fighters, is so different now from what it was like fifty years ago. You know back then -- and part of it is Lillian's great charm -- I'm sure we could get someone on the phone and get them to agree to see you, and you could write about them. And these days, yes, it's easier to get your phone call returned from *The New Yorker*, but you have to … It's hard to talk to anybody without going through these layers of handlers and publicists and personal assistants and managers. It's really a changed world.

LILLIAN ROSS: Oh, yes.

SUSAN MORRISON: I think that you could … Doors were open. You could really interview almost anybody you wanted to, right?

LILLIAN ROSS: Sure. And, also, television and computers have taken over to a very great extent, too. You know, you have Charlie Rose doing very, very high level interviews on television these days. And Oprah, even though I don't watch her, I think does it too.

QUESTION: Ms. Ross, I would like you to elaborate a little bit more on some of these you touched before, your *modus operandi*. Interviewing is such a highly refined skill of which you are a master. And you must have either a telegraphic memory or you're a great speed writer, because not only do you evoke amazing responses from the people, but you notice the argyle socks. You notice the color of the eyes. You notice Hemingway pulling out the flask and taking nips many, many times. So my question is are you a speed writer or do you have a telegraphic memory?

LILLIAN ROSS: I'm not a speed writer and I don't have telegraphic memory. But I do remember what I want to remember when a person talks.

SUSAN MORRISON: Well, and you write shorthand. And Lillian has these notebooks full of shorthand …

LILLIAN ROSS: **…** nobody else can read.

SUSAN MORRISON: I mean, she has this elaborate, cuneiform kind of translating thing with the fact checkers. But it's all there. I mean, she's a great note-taker. It's not as if it's just …

LILLIAN ROSS: Yeah, you can write down keywords. And if somebody said something special, that keyword will invoke the rhythm and the actual quote. But it's rarely, if ever, that a tape recorded statement is useful in doing a certain kind of reporting.

QUESTION: In one of his letters to you, Hemingway explains that Santiago, the protagonist from *The Old Man and the Sea*, was born in the Canary Islands, which is something that's kind of concealed in the text. I was wondering if there are any other details that he might have said to you in one of your conversations about Santiago or about one of his other famous characters.

LILLIAN ROSS: Not to me, no. But I'm sure from your question that you're a keen reader and found something worth looking into. But no, he never did. And as I've said many times, I hated bull fighting, and yet I wrote about the bull fighter from Brooklyn. That's how I met Hemingway because he helped me and he told me, "You are the least equipped person to write about bull fighting in the world." But it's a little difficult to try to explain. When you go out to report and describe somebody, all you really have to do is listen, not to yourself, not to what you want to hear, but just listen carefully. And the person will give you what it is you need in order to write your story.

Also, you begin to have an idea of what the story is. That's why I found so many years ago that casting non-factual material into fictional forms was fascinating to do and produced wonderful results. But you have to also have a story in mind for what a person is. Just from your one question about Santiago, one immediately wants to know, well, what is the story of this young man who wants to know this? You know, because everybody has a story after all.

SUSAN MORRISON: I'm often counseling young writers who are trying to write "Talk of the Town" pieces, who are just starting out, to read Lillian's "Talk" stories because much in the way that Hemingway's impact is about compression and selection and what's not on the page, it's all about what's left out. It's almost like negative space. What Lillian will do is walk into a big party and walk into a big room. And instead of giving you kind of a newspaper story overview of what was going on in that room, she will find a character and give you a little story that's like a little movie, or a story with characters and dialogue and a beginning and a middle and an end. And that's what I'm always telling people to do, you know? Don't try to get it all down. Find that Santiago guy and tell his story. Exactly so.

QUESTION: I re-read your profile, Hemingway, this afternoon with great pleasure, I must say. I'm interested in your hieroglyphic notebook. I take it you were making notes at the time when you're present with people. Then what happens at night? You go home and try to do a bit with it? Or you …

LILLIAN ROSS: I should but like everybody else, I'm lazy. It takes time. But I have thousands of these little notebooks. I have three by five notebooks that I've used for years. And I have thousands of them. And when I open some of the older ones, I can't read what I wrote in them. But as I say, as you're working you can write down keywords and they will -- those keywords -- help you remember what the exact sentence was, or should have been.

QUESTION: Well, I'm terribly interested in that. When I edited Hemingway's Spanish Civil War dispatches, I was delighted to see that he had field notes, these little one-word, two-word, three-word sentences, which he then transformed into a dispatch the next day.

LILLIAN ROSS: That is fascinating. When did you do that?

QUESTION: 1988, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil War. I'll tell you more about it later.

LILLIAN ROSS: Okay.

QUESTION: Like most of the people in this room, I've read a number of biographies of Hemingway. But I always come back to yours, because it makes him seem so alive and so vivid. And when I read it, I feel like I'm really in his presence. And I just had a couple of quick questions. In your introduction, you say, "I sent a galley proof of it to the Hemingways, and they returned it marked with corrections. In an accompanying letter, Hemingway said that he found the profile funny and good and that he had suggested only one deletion." I don't know if you're at liberty to say what that deletion is or if you even remember it after all these years.

LILLIAN ROSS: I've forgotten. It just might have been something about his mother. I'm not sure. I know he made one correction about her age. And, I don't know. I can't really remember what the deletion was. But thank you very much for your comment. One couldn't ask for a better one because that's what I love to do, just to put it down in a little story.

SUSAN MORRISON: Well, thank you very much. [applause]
END