

**Washington Post**  
**Ed Kosner Interview**

Ed Kosner: Let's try this.

Will Hobson: Can you hear me now?

Ed Kosner: Yeah.

Will Hobson: Okay. All right. Good. I can hear you fine. Do you mind if I put a tape recorder on?

Ed Kosner: No, that's all right.

Will Hobson: So, you took over *New York* magazine in 1980?

Ed Kosner: In 1980, yes.

Will Hobson: And were you working at *The Post* before that or was it *Newsweek* before that?

Ed Kosner: No. I was at *Newsweek* for 16 years.

Will Hobson: Before you went to *New York* mag?

Ed Kosner: Yes.

Will Hobson: And what capacity at *Newsweek*?

Ed Kosner: I was the editor among other things.

Will Hobson: And when were you at the *New York Post*?

Ed Kosner: From 1958 to '63.

Will Hobson: As a reporter, as an editor?

Ed Kosner: A re-write and a desk editor. Series writer.

Will Hobson: So, yeah. As I was asking, when was the first time that you heard the name Donald Trump? You think it was the Commodore deal?

Ed Kosner: Well, I lived in my New York all my life so I obviously heard his name but I think he first came into some prominence when he redid the Commodore.

Will Hobson: I guess one of the questions I'm trying to answer is outside of -- I understand Trump would obviously get covered by news organizations when he did something like announce the Commodore-Grand Hyatt deal or announce the Trump Tower project, but do you remember how, in those early years, how he got himself covered or how he became newsworthy for reasons other than his real estate deals?

Ed Kosner: Well, he became more conspicuous when he took over the casinos in Atlantic City and he staged a whole bunch of Mike Tyson fights in the '80s and he used to fly people down to Atlantic City in his helicopter. And he'd have various people from the media and actors, people around New York, and he'd take people down to the fights and then he'd bring them back because the fights usually lasted about two minutes and 30 seconds, Tyson knocked everybody out. So, he got more attention with that and with the Trump Tower.

Will Hobson: And did you ever -- I assume *New York* magazine had the Intelligencer going -- I assume, like other gossip columnists that they would field phone calls from Donald pitching them stuff or leaking various things. Did you ever hear about that?

Ed Kosner: Oh, yes.

Will Hobson: What are the kind of things that Trump would call and offer like as a tip?

Ed Kosner: I really don't remember but if you wrote something he didn't like, he'd send a snotty letter on that very thick Trump stationary.

Will Hobson: Right. I've heard about that.

Ed Kosner: With the gold monogram or whatever.

Will Hobson: Do you remember if those letters were handwritten or typed?

Ed Kosner: Handwritten.

Will Hobson: Because he still does that. He still sends those handwritten letters out.

Ed Kosner: Yes, he does.

Will Hobson: And did he have any contemporaries or were there any other people -- you know, what's interesting about Trump is he's a real estate developer. Were there any other real estate developers covered as a personality like he was back in the '80s?

Ed Kosner: Not quite the same way. I mean, Harry Helmsley and his wife, Leona -- you remember them, do you?

Will Hobson: I do.

Ed Kosner: They got a lot of it. She got a lot of attention. But for the most part most of the real estate guys didn't want a lot of attention.

Will Hobson: Right. To your knowledge, did -- I guess a better way to ask the question would be, you know I've talked to a few folks who said Trump had a relationship with Howard Rubenstein, he's had publicists over the years. But then other folks say, "You know, I feel like Trump basically was his own publicist."

Ed Kosner: Well, I think he probably had Howard to do some stuff for him. But he certainly --

Will Hobson: Like what do you think Howard actually did for him?

Ed Kosner: Well, Howard would facilitate coverage or try to iron out little wrinkles. Howard was a very effective PR guy. I mean, he's still alive. I don't know if he's still working. His son, I think, has a business. But he was a very sophisticated guy and knew everybody and he would do some stuff for Donald, I guess. But Donald would pick up the phone. And Trump certainly didn't have to generate coverage. The coverage mostly came to him. He didn't have to send out press releases.

Will Hobson: I guess one thing I kind of need to explain to readers in other cities, like for example in Washington, D.C, would be why in New York in the 1980s the comings and goings of

a real estate developer were news, why Donald's romantic dalliances would be front page news in the *New York Post* and *New York Daily News*. Can you just talk a little bit about the media climate in New York at that time?

Ed Kosner: No, I don't think it was the media climate. I think it was Trump. I mean, for the same reason that he's up until now dominated the coverage of the campaign. He was good copy. I mean, why does the CNN or Fox News cover his flying press conference for 40 minutes while he's monologuing a few weeks ago? You know, people were interested in him and still are although in a different way now.

Will Hobson: Who do you think he learned this media strategy from?

Ed Kosner: I don't think he learned this from anybody. I think it's instinctive.

Will Hobson: Did you ever have any personal dealings with Donald on the job?

Ed Kosner: Did I?

Will Hobson: Yes.

Ed Kosner: Oh, yes. My wife, who is a writer named Julie Baumgold, B-A-U-M-G-O-L-D, Julie was one of our top writers at New York and she did many stories about Donald and he was a guest at dinner at our house once. We went to his wedding with Marla Maples, and my wife had the best line about the wedding.

She said, "There wasn't a wet eye in the house." And she did a wonderful cover story on Trump when he was in his financial problems in, what was it, '91, '92?

Will Hobson: It started in '90 but then it went down from there.

Ed Kosner: Yeah. And we were kind of doing a story about his comeback because he was promoting the idea that he was coming back, and Julie found the banker -- I think it was Citibank. I'm not sure who it was but we have a colleague who was looking into his business dealings, he could probably tell you. And there was a woman at the bank who was in charge of the wind out of Trump's affairs because you remember he had a tremendous amount of debt, a lot of it was personally guaranteed, and Trump was touting us on his big comeback and Julie found this woman banker who for some reason, maybe she was annoyed at Trump, decided to tell us what was really going on, and she said, "You know, he's on an allowance," which was true.

Will Hobson: The \$400,000 a month [sounds like]?

Ed Kosner: Whatever it was. But they made him sell the plane and the yacht and divest himself of a lot of things and get rid of his interest from various properties and then they put him on an allowance, the notion being that they would have a better chance at recouping if he was still in business than if they let him go under. So, we printed that and that was the

first time that that had been printed. And Trump was furious as you might expect and called up and blustered and blah-blah, and I said, "Donald, you know it's true and I know it's true. So, stop." And he wrote nasty letters and stuff. But it was true.

Will Hobson: The question I want to ask is when you covered Trump in a way he didn't like, how he would exact retribution? Obviously, he'd call up, he'd scream and bitch and [cross-talking].

Ed Kosner: Oh, he'd also write letters. He'd write letters in insulting the appearance of the writers. We had an architectural critic named Carter Wiseman, W-I-S-E-M-A-N, who's very, very good and he wrote something negative maybe about Trump Tower or something else, and Trump wrote a letter about how he was a loser in a corduroy suit and that kind of stuff. The same kind of stuff that he says about his political opponents and the writers he doesn't like now. The same playbook.

Will Hobson: And where are those -- would he get those letters published like in *Page Six* or --

Ed Kosner: Well, I don't know. We didn't publish that. They were usually personal letters.

Will Hobson: Right.

Ed Kosner: In a sense, "How could you do this to me? You're a bunch of losers." But nobody took it very seriously.

I mean, he was a figure of derision. Real New Yorkers thought he was a joke and still do.

Will Hobson: But he was popular in the outer boroughs, right?

Ed Kosner: Oh, yes. I think the outer boroughs -- well, he comes from Queens and I think if you want to call them "outer borough people" have a natural affinity for him. When we would go to the boxing matches in Atlantic City, he would lead everybody, his party, his guests, through the casino to the arena. He walks through this big, long casino, giant room, with the tables going and the machines pinging and the jackpots jingling and all that stuff, and here are all these working people standing around the crap tables and the roulette tables literally putting their money in his pocket, that's what they were doing.

And he was selling the art of the deal in kiosks all around the casino. There were little places where you could buy the books. So, the people were not only putting their hard-earned money in his pocket, they were buying his book for \$25 or whatever. And as we walked through the casino, they would all cheer him, "Way to go, Donald," "You're the man, Donald," "Go, Donald. You're it." And these were all what you call outer borough people although some of them were from New Jersey, I'm



sure. So, they had a natural affinity for him. They've always liked him.

Will Hobson: Why do you think that is? The American dream stuff?

Ed Kosner: Well, I think they thought he was a regular guy, not a snooty guy. And you know, New Yorkers are very attuned to accents and he had an outer borough accent. I mean, even though he went to Penn and all the rest of it, he sounded like a guy who grew up in Queens, which is what he did and I think people recognize that in him. They didn't think he was a snooty guy. They thought he was a regular guy who's made a lot of money.

Will Hobson: Which in truth -- so I guess here is one of the core questions you're trying to answer about Trump then, is it an act? Because his father is worth \$100 million when Donald goes in the business. He comes from a wealthy guy, a wealthy, politically connected guy who can put him in a room with the mayor, so --

Ed Kosner: Yeah. But it's not old New York money.

Will Hobson: Right.

Ed Kosner: It's new outer borough money.

Will Hobson: How old is old New York money?

Ed Kosner: Well, I'm talking about Rockefeller money.

Will Hobson: Right. That makes sense.

Ed Kosner: Brooke Astor's money that she got from her husband. Manhattan, old Manhattan money.

Will Hobson: Right. All right. When I think about Trump and his big media feuds, folks to whom --

Ed Kosner: But you started asking your question about what his authenticity, I didn't quite --

Will Hobson: Right. Did you have any more say on that subject?

Ed Kosner: Well, I mean, in the sense that he's authentic in that he's always been what he is. And he's no different campaigning for president than he was around New York at that time. His vocabulary is the same. His manner is the same. His tics are the same. So, his campaign isn't an act and I don't think the other thing was an act either.

Will Hobson: When I think about the big -- I'm thinking about folks for whom Trump used the media against them, the two names that come to mind as I talk to folks are obviously Ivana from the late '80s, Ed Koch in the early '80s.

Ed Kosner: When he went against them you mean?

Will Hobson: Yeah. We're talking about like basically Trump's media feuds and incidents in which he was able to plant stories and mobilize media coverage to his advantage. Are there anecdotes that come to mind?

Ed Kosner: No, I don't really think so. And I don't think it was much to his advantage anyway. People didn't take him seriously. So, if he was feuding with Ed Koch, it was entertaining but it's not like if he got better coverage, he got some advantage with his feud with Koch. It was all a sideshow.

Will Hobson: Did he ever personally call you to lobby for coverage or pitch a story?

Ed Kosner: Probably. I don't directly remember but I'm sure he did.

Will Hobson: And do you have any memories of just him calling your newsroom and pitching a certain story?

Ed Kosner: I don't have any direct memory of any of that but I'd be surprised if it didn't happen.

Will Hobson: In the New York media circle, were there particular publications or media figures who were viewed as sort of Trump-friendly, Trump's kind of people?

Ed Kosner: Well, I think you could talk to Liz Smith. Have you?

Will Hobson: I've reached out to her.

Ed Kosner: Yeah. Barbara Walters is another one who is a chum of his, I think. But Liz Smith was the one who -- yeah, I think she did *Best Sex I Ever Had* and stuff. I think she had the divorce, first.

Will Hobson: Right. All right.

Ed Kosner: You really ought to talk to her. She'd have some good stuff for you. Because she knew what he was.

Will Hobson: Yeah. She was pretty tight and she's written about him.

Ed Kosner: Yeah, she's written about him a lot.

Will Hobson: A few chapters of one of her books about him.

Ed Kosner: You could try Barbara Walters. She'll probably talk.

Will Hobson: All right.

Ed Kosner: Okay?

Will Hobson: Well, as I talk about Donald Trump, are there any other anecdotes about him that come to mind that we haven't discussed or anything else you think I should --

Ed Kosner: No, I think I've scraped the bottom of my barrel.

Will Hobson: Yeah. We're out there. I think we're all scraping the bottom of a number of barrels across the country and the New York area at this moment.

Ed Kosner: So, what you're doing is a series of stories about him or are you having a team working on?

Will Hobson: I think the idea is sort of a deep biographical examination of Donald from then and there's a lot of stuff out there that to you folks in the New York media is old hat but to voters of the general American population is

news. Like, I mean, there's a story today in *POLITICO* about Donald's relationship with Roy Cohn that everyone in New York is aware of but to folks outside the five boroughs might not know that was one of his --

Ed Kosner: Yes. Well, your colleague wanted to talk all about Roy Cohn.

Will Hobson: Yeah.

Ed Kosner: He's still working on that?

Will Hobson: I think he's with Bob O'Hara.

Ed Kosner: Yeah.

Will Hobson: Yeah. He's working on a few things related to Trump. Well, thanks for your time, Ed. I greatly appreciate it.

Ed Kosner: All right. Bye bye. Good luck.

Will Hobson: Thanks so much. Have a good one.

Ed Kosner: Take care.

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