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[00:00:26] **Speaker 1** Pete Souza, former white House photographer. Thank you for joining us on focus.

[00:00:29] **Speaker 2** Yeah, thanks for having me on.

[00:00:30] **Speaker 1** I got to start here. I kind of stumbled across your. And I say stumbled. I know about your work, knew about your work. And I saw, I think a picture that you were taken in Madison. And I was like, Pete Souza lives in Madison. So, like, what is your connection to Madison?

[00:00:49] **Speaker 2** Well, my connection is, our daughter was doing her residency here at UW, and when, when I left the white House, my wife came and visited her several times, and came to me one day and said, I want to move to Madison to be near Cali. And so that was it. So we bought a house here in Madison, and now, now we're following them again, to Illinois, because. Yeah, because they have moved and we've got a four year old and a one year old granddaughter. So we want to be, close to them in Illinois.

[00:01:34] **Speaker 1** And how long did you live here?

[00:01:36] **Speaker 2** So we lived here for, almost five years.

[00:01:39] **Speaker 1** Wow. And so, I was trying to make the connection because the picture I saw was a picture from the state capitol of a someone singing, and I thought I'd seen it in the Capitol Times, but I think I just saw it on your on your Instagram. So you still just kind of take your camera around and just shoot pictures for sure.

[00:01:55] **Speaker 2** Yeah. No, I, yeah, I often, go out and photograph, my main two subjects these days are those two granddaughters. But I'm also like, I photographed the eclipse on, Monday and Illinois. We weren't quite at 100% totality, but still, I, you know, made attempt to photograph.

[00:02:20] **Speaker 1** A better picture. An attempt from Pete Souza is probably going to be a pretty good photo.

[00:02:24] **Speaker 2** Good snap. Well, I, I tried, I experimented, and got a lot of reaction to the picture I posted on Instagram.

[00:02:33] **Speaker 1** Yeah. Now, a lot of people know your work from, being a white House, photographer, but you also work for, National Geographic for a little bit. Tell me a little bit about some of the photos you did for that.

[00:02:45] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I did, I think three book assignments and two for the magazine. So this would've been in the 90s. I did a photo essay on the big South Fork River and, Kentucky and Tennessee, and I did, an essay photo essay on the, Piedmont region of North Carolina. And both of those were published in the magazine. And I can't remember what year, like, I think the first one, 93 and the second 1 in 95. And then I did, two travel books for them, for National Geographic, and I did a, a, a photo essay on a hiking trail that was in a book on hiking trails.

[00:03:34] **Speaker 1** Yeah. What's your preference on whether being a white House photographer versus you, National geographic?

[00:03:40] **Speaker 2** Well, National Geographic is a completely different, you know. Just completely different. There are two, two different animals. I will say that the experience that I had at National Geographic really helped me, I think, when I became President Obama's photographer, because there's such an emphasis on light and color. When you're working for National Geographic and, and the way you compose a picture. And so I think I honed my craft, you know, a lot better with the experience from National Geographic, which I tried to carry through into the Obama White House.

[00:04:19] **Speaker 1** Yeah. I'd be curious to know what your thoughts are in terms of, what was cool about taking pictures in Wisconsin? What did you like? What did you see?

[00:04:29] **Speaker 2** Well, I lived three blocks from the Capitol. So the Capitol was often either in the background or the main subject in my, photo. Beautiful. But also, you know, you've got, on the isthmus, you've got a lake on either side. And so there's, you know, opportunities at each lake. Had the arboretum, I was in the arboretum a lot photographing, just, you know, the and the fact that the Capitol is kind of the center for big events, whether it be a protest or, you know, some sort of a rally. And so in terms of like news type situations, you know, I only had to walk three blocks and there I was. Yeah.

[00:05:17] **Speaker 1** So do you think we'll ever see a Madison? Photo book.

[00:05:21] **Speaker 2** Probably not by me, but I will say that I am hoping someday to do a retrospective photo book, you know, from throughout my career. And certainly there will be photographs from Madison. And in that book.

[00:05:35] **Speaker 1** I'd imagine you've seen a lot of our state capitals. What do you think of Madison's?

[00:05:38] **Speaker 2** Well, the state capitol in Madison is very similar to the one in D.C.. I mean, it's almost, you have to almost do a double take. They're so similar.

[00:05:50] **Speaker 1** I think that was by design. If I'm not. Yeah, yeah.

[00:05:52] **Speaker 2** The big difference is you can just walk into the state capitol here in Madison anytime you want. I mean, you know, when they're open, whereas, security in D.C. is a little different.

[00:06:04] **Speaker 1** Just a little bit.

[00:06:05] **Speaker 2** Right? Yeah.

[00:06:06] **Speaker 1** I love to hear, your journey in photography. Like, how did you know this was going to be the career for you? Like, at what age did that kick in?

[00:06:15] **Speaker 2** I mean, it didn't really kick in until I was 19 or 20. I took a photography class my junior year of college. I think the first print I made in the darkroom. This is back in the analog black and white days when you're having to develop your own film and then you go into the darkroom to make a print. And I think the first print that came up in the tray of developer, I was like, this is what I want to do. I mean, it was the whole thing was magic to me. It took me, you know, a good 4 or 5 years to get any good. But I kind of knew right away that this was what I wanted to do.

[00:06:53] **Speaker 1** And do you, how did you transition from those days of being in that lab, smelling all those chemicals, developing photos to the digital age? How did you how did you transition and how did you handle it?

[00:07:03] **Speaker 2** Well, I think it was quite the transition. I mean, I switched to mostly digital in 2000. That that was when I think Nikon came out with a digital camera, that the resolution was good enough, that, you could get a picture published in the newspaper with a digital camera. It was, you know, it was it was challenging at first in many ways, having to learn new technical skills and how to manage digital files and not film. But it was also, easier in many respects, and more immediate. Right. You could within minutes, have, of the photograph on your laptop and sending it to, you know, the home office, if you will. Whereas previously with with film, you'd have to obviously develop the film process to film, make a print or make a scan, and then eventually, you know, you, you then send that photo to the newspaper or the magazine. So it's, you know, it's it was a it was not a seamless transition, let's put it that way.

[00:08:21] **Speaker 1** I feel like when I was doing that early in my journalism career, that, that whole process was part of what made, you know, the photo. You know, I say better and just fine. And it was part of the thrill of doing it, too. But I don't know if you missed any of that at all or not.

[00:08:36] **Speaker 2** I miss it in some respects. But on the other hand, you know, I don't want to expose myself to, you know, those chemicals every day, and you're sticking your hands in the develop.

[00:08:47] **Speaker 1** Early 70s and 80s. That was no big deal.

[00:08:50] **Speaker 2** It's just, you know, to to to do that every day now would just not be a good thing, I don't think.

[00:08:56] **Speaker 1** Yeah. Let's take a look at some of your photos. We just have a few to look at here. So what's this one here?

[00:09:01] **Speaker 2** Yeah. So this, one of the things that I tried to do when I worked at the white House was, you know, I had one main subject, right? Barack Obama, that's my main subject. But there's so many things going on that you may not really, necessarily focus on, but I try to. So that one with the flag, it's at an event, and the wind was kind of blowing the flag that was the backdrop. And I noticed that there were these two guys trying to hold the flag up from blowing down. So I just thought it was kind of a cool shot.

[00:09:37] **Speaker 1** Was that under a bridge or something about, because the flag looks in my collection?

[00:09:42] **Speaker 2** Is this this was the backdrop at an event, and this was, these guys were on some sort of, a ledge. That was, I don't know if it was a crane that was holding up the flag. I just honestly don't remember.

[00:09:57] **Speaker 1** And do you anticipate something like that or you just kind of see it and then it happens. How do you how do you.

[00:10:01] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I mean, it's it's I think everything I do is either anticipation or recognition where you see something interesting visually going on and, you know, probably in this case, just waiting for those two hands to pop out like that.

[00:10:18] **Speaker 1** Let's look at the next one here. I see this one mad because the symmetry on this caught my eye.

[00:10:23] **Speaker 2** Yeah, so this I forget if this is either at the white House or at the Arlington National Cemetery. And the president's about to walk out very far. There's a lot of formality in the presidency, obviously. And you see, these two guys are about to open the door to let you know as the president is announced. I'd love the white gloves, too. So is part of it is just trying to show the formality of the presidency without showing the president.

[00:10:51] **Speaker 1** The formality probably helps you predict kind of what to expect.

[00:10:55] **Speaker 2** Sometimes. Sometimes? Yeah. Although, you know, Barack Obama is a pretty informal guy, but at certain events, it's the trappings of the presidency that are the, you know, the formal part.

[00:11:06] **Speaker 1** Yeah. And we should point out, you also were the white House photographer for Ronald Reagan.

[00:11:11] **Speaker 2** That's correct. Yeah.

[00:11:13] **Speaker 1** Let's go to the next photo here.

[00:11:16] **Speaker 2** Yeah. Again. So this you know, I talked about Barack Obama being an informal guy. And so it wasn't uncommon. I wouldn't say this happened all the time, but occasionally he'd be in a meeting with some of his aides in the Oval Office, and he'd just sit on the edge of the desk like this. This is the Resolute desk. And, you know, I had made many photographs of him sitting on the desk, but I was really struck by the placement of where his feet were dangling down. And you see the great seal on the desk? Yeah. And so this is the way I shot it. This is not a crop.

[00:11:49] **Speaker 1** Oh, it looks like a crop photo.

[00:11:50] **Speaker 2** It's not a crop photo. This is the way I actually shot it, because to me, it was just interesting. The juxtaposition of his feet, with the, you know, ornate structure of that wood from the HMS resolute and then the Great Seal.

[00:12:05] **Speaker 1** And I read it in the forward. And one of your books that he said, outside of his wife and his kids, he spent more time with you than anybody.

[00:12:17] **Speaker 2** I mean, well, that's definitely true.

[00:12:21] **Speaker 1** Do you only have a few moments, before things start to kind of be in there when he's doing things? Or how long do you have access in those spaces with the president to take those?

[00:12:30] **Speaker 2** Long as I want.

[00:12:31] **Speaker 1** Really.

[00:12:32] **Speaker 2** As long as I want. Now, the the only the caveat is when I am overseas and I'm having to deal with foreign governments and security, they may have a different outlook on whether I could be in the room the entire time or not. Right. And so oftentimes in some countries, I was restricted in how much access I had. But in Washington, no, I had I had complete total access.

[00:13:05] **Speaker 1** Wow. Now this photograph here looks like it's on Air Force One.

[00:13:10] **Speaker 2** This is on Air Force One. We were going to, some summit meeting in which, I don't remember if this was a perk. It was one of those meetings where at the formal dinner, they were going to have to all wear the same kind of, outfit. And they were showing him, previous, outfits that presidents had to wear at these dinners. And there was one in particular of Bill Clinton, I think it was wearing some outfit that just look, you know, hideous. But it wasn't because it was Bill Clinton. It was because all the heads of state had to wear the same hideous outfit, and they were just showing him a picture of that.

[00:13:57] **Speaker 1** I love the big smile there. What is it? Is there? Oh. oh, that's Air Force one.

[00:14:05] **Speaker 2** Yeah, this is Air Force One. Upon arrival at, dusk and Los Angeles, this was at the end of a long day. And this is. That's not the president in the doorway. This is one of the, Air Force One guys getting the stairway ready for the president to walk down. But I was just really struck by the lighting because it was dusk. So the the you saw those clouds and just the incandescent light aboard Air Force One gave that orange, color. And to me, it was just the contrast between that little orange, and the, you know, the dark blue sky just I thought was just a, you know, a nice graphic picture.

[00:14:53] **Speaker 1** Yeah. And I've had the pleasure of covering a few different presidents, and, and this was before the digital age, so I didn't have the greatest cameras and those sort of things to take pictures. But the one time that I did take a picture, the president was, on and I think it was, GW he was on, on a smaller airport and he was in a on a DC nine, I think, airplane. So it was a smaller airplane. So it's not as impressive as, as the big. 747 yeah. Yeah. So I was a little disappointed from that standpoint, but it was still Air Force One. What's the next over there? Now, this one caught my attention because of just the lighting. And like, I don't even know what that is a photograph of.

[00:15:31] **Speaker 2** But yeah, this is in, Saint Petersburg, Russia, another big summit meeting with a bunch of heads of state. And I think Russia and China would always spend a lot of money on lighting and effects. This is the they had a the Russians had this big laser show at the end of the dinner. And that's what this is, depicting in front of, you know, some some castle.

[00:16:03] **Speaker 1** Yeah. And I did a story with a white House photographer during the Clinton era, and her name was Shirl, and I cannot think of her name. She was.

[00:16:09] **Speaker 2** Sharon.

[00:16:10] **Speaker 1** Farmer. That's her. Yeah. I did a profile on her, and she explained that it now she under that wasn't under you because she wanted you to win it. So, she explained to me that, like, you guys are all assigned to different, like, the president, the vice president, the first lady. And I forget there might be a floating person, but like wherever the president or vice president goes that day, you guys end up going with them. And so if they leave the country for a week, you're gone for that week. Or is that is that how that works or.

[00:16:38] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I was the president's photographer, so I, I was with him 24 over seven.

[00:16:43] **Speaker 1** So you were assigned to him. Nobody else. Yeah. Nobody else had that role.

[00:16:47] **Speaker 2** And then we had somebody on my staff, did the same with the vice president and then somebody on my staff. We had people rotate with the first lady.

[00:16:58] **Speaker 1** That's a great photo out of the window there. Just.

[00:17:01] **Speaker 2** Yeah, just Air Force One coming in the land.

[00:17:05] **Speaker 1** And you've probably seen that photograph. Who knows how many times in your life just.

[00:17:09] **Speaker 2** Yeah, usually, though, the shadow is not quite that prominent. You know, it depends on time of day. And then also very unusual to have just before landing this kind of, wide open space where usually there's too many distracting elements. But just to have this field of grass just before we touch down.

[00:17:31] **Speaker 1** Does it ever get up?

[00:17:32] **Speaker 2** Does it ever get old?

[00:17:33] **Speaker 1** Yeah. To sing these.

[00:17:39] **Speaker 2** I mean, some of these photographs I've, I've, I've kind of forgotten about.

[00:17:43] **Speaker 1** Well, how many have you taken, you think over the years?

[00:17:45] **Speaker 2** Well, during the Obama administration, 1.9 million.

[00:17:48] **Speaker 1** So 1.9 million. Yeah. And who gets to count all those, I wonder?

[00:17:54] **Speaker 2** Well, the National Archives has the exact number. It's like 1.9, you know, 132 or. I don't know what it is, but yeah, the round number is 1.9 million.

[00:18:06] **Speaker 1** That's a lot of pictures. A lot of snaps now. Oh, this is Paul Ryan. This is, he's a Wisconsin.

[00:18:10] **Speaker 2** Paul Ryan when he was speaker of the House, or at least the leader of the House Republicans. This is before the ACA Affordable Care Act passed. And he had a meeting, bipartisan meeting at the player house in DC, to discuss, you know, the details of the Affordable Care Act. And this is at the conclusion of the meeting, and I'm just chatting with, Paul Ryan.

[00:18:39] **Speaker 1** Yeah. I wanted to shift a little bit and talk about the event that you took part in last night here at on University of Wisconsin's campus, sponsored by a few different organizations. And, I thought it was really interesting because, you showed the photographs, but then you had these other folks giving this perspective on their potential, meaning, all these things that you think about, thought about when you take your photographs.

[00:19:00] **Speaker 2** Most of the time, though, to be honest with you. But I think it's valuable to hear other people's perspective. Especially noted people like the on hill and and sheriff and again so I thought it was an interesting event for me to listen to their perspective on some of my photographs.

[00:19:18] **Speaker 1** What did you learn about your work that you didn't hadn't thought about? Maybe.

[00:19:22] **Speaker 2** I mean, I think I it's important for me to hear the how the photographs, resonate with, with people in the community at large, you know, so oftentimes it's things I don't really think about or, you know, maybe a little bit aware of. But to hear it articulated by those two prominent, historians, it was, I think, valuable for me to hear. Yeah.

[00:19:53] **Speaker 1** I thought it was interesting how they put a kind of a historical perspective on it.

[00:19:57] **Speaker 2** Yeah.

[00:19:58] **Speaker 1** You know, because when you're living it, you don't maybe always think about it. And we look back at these things years later and like, oh wow, that says something. Oh yeah. This is a really, really famous picture of. Oh.

[00:20:10] **Speaker 2** Yeah. So this, young kid was a nephew of, the, the you can kind of see the guy in the. Background with the blue tie. He worked for Denis McDonough, who was then the chief of staff. And this is his nephew, coming in. And, I think he was taken aback that the president of the United States was actually right in front of him. Like, you know, he was told we were going to go meet President Obama. But then when you actually walk in and this is the reaction that I saw oftentimes from people just overwhelmed at the presence of, you know, meeting, president United States.

[00:20:52] **Speaker 1** Yeah. Let's take a look at the next one here. Oh, this is very interesting.

[00:20:57] **Speaker 2** Again, this is I sort of me actually this this is a picture taken with my iPhone.

[00:21:02] **Speaker 1** Pete Souza uses an iPhone to take photos.

[00:21:04] **Speaker 2** I did for, for a while. The white House asked me to start an Instagram account, you know, official white House Instagram account. And so I tried to do mostly iPhone photos. Not never of the president, just of some, you know, scenes away from the presidency. And this is the day of the Easter egg roll and the Easter egg bunny was waiting to be introduced. The president was inside the Blue Room. Thus there was a Secret Service agent, you know, at the door. So just the juxtaposition of the Easter Bunny and the Secret Service agent I just thought was just it looks.

[00:21:42] **Speaker 1** Like a making of a horror movie to me. Oh, the president's men are almost.

[00:21:47] **Speaker 2** Yeah. This was at the, dedication of the George W Bush Presidential Library in Texas. Bush 41. So Bush's father was also there, but he had been wheeled out ahead of the other four because by then he was not he was confined to a wheelchair. And this is just before the four of these guys get introduced. And, it looks like either Clinton or Bush just told a joke. I forget who it was.

[00:22:18] **Speaker 1** Now, do you ever get overwhelmed, when you're looking through that lens in terms of what you're experiencing? I mean, all that power in one space like that?

[00:22:28] **Speaker 2** I mean, I think for me, part of it was the fact that I was a, you know, a seasoned guy. And in terms of, you know, I'd had a long career already up to that point, had seen a lot, had been in many different situations. So I didn't feel nervous or anxious, very often at all. I mean, I was totally comfortable and and, photographing whoever.

[00:22:56] **Speaker 1** Does that come from your chops, working those streets in Chicago for the newspaper there.

[00:23:02] **Speaker 2** I think it's all the experiences that I had throughout my career, to be honest with you. You know, not just, you know, I covered a couple of war zones and, had been in, in a lot of, you know, tense situations. This comparatively, it was, was, easier and safer than, you know, a lot of things I did in my career. So.

[00:23:24] **Speaker 1** Yeah, let's see the next one here.

[00:23:28] **Speaker 2** You know, again, this is just trying to expand my vision. This was in the cabinet room, waiting, waiting for President Obama to walk in. And this is traditionally everybody is standing until the president walks in, and they let him sit down first and everybody sits down. That's part of the formality of the presidency. And I just just saw all the hands on the chairs. And I thought it was just an interesting, you know, photograph that spoke to, you know, the office of the presidency, not about any particular president.

[00:24:03] **Speaker 1** You know, you mentioned that you get to sit in for as long as you kind of want to until certain situations come up. But, I imagine you were around a lot of classified situations.

[00:24:16] **Speaker 2** Oh, yeah. For sure. I mean, I had a top secret clearance, so I was allowed to be in any meeting that the president was in. I wouldn't, you know, I wouldn't get the, the memos, the top secret memos. But but it enabled me to be in the room where they were discussing, you know, top secret, information.

[00:24:38] **Speaker 1** You mentioned last night, too, that, you being there as a documentarian is part of what our democracy is about. And part of, just, you know, the, you know, the documentation of the presidency. How important is that, do you think?

[00:24:55] **Speaker 2** I mean, I think it's really important for history to to have somebody documenting, you know, what takes place inside a white House, you know, more more, you know, away from the event itself. But what's what's actually happening behind the scenes? I think that's an important part for history to have somebody making those kinds of pictures.

[00:25:16] **Speaker 1** Yeah. And we talk about you, shooting for Reagan is. Well, I think this is from.

[00:25:21] **Speaker 2** This is from the writing. And this is actually the old Air Force one. So this would have been the seven. What was that, A70 7 or 727. And this is coming back from a long trip, long overseas trip. And you can see everybody's sleeping except, the guy on the left who is Pat Buchanan, who for about a year was Reagan's communications director, I remember that. Yeah.

[00:25:45] **Speaker 1** And what was it like? What's the difference in terms of each. Another great shot of Air Force One. The difference in shooting the different presidents. Like what? How did that feel? And could you tell a difference, like, in terms of being around President Reagan versus being around President Obama? Like, they like their comfort is with you and that sort of thing.

[00:26:09] **Speaker 2** Well, I think there's so many differences. I mean, the the one similarity between Reagan and Obama is both of them were fairly even keeled, had a very even keeled disposition. Right. So it sometimes was, was difficult to, to see their emotion, visually. I don't know if that makes sense. I also, you know, with Reagan, Reagan was an older guy, very formal. And his mannerisms, you know, didn't ever take his suit coat off in the Oval Office. So he was formal in that kind of way. Whereas, you know, Barack Obama was much more informal than that was a younger guy, had a young family, you know, Reagan's family was all grown and they weren't around that much. So, you know, with Reagan, I shot all film with Obama. I shot all digital. Like, there's so many differences. I could probably write a whole book about the differences between, you know, photographing Reagan versus, versus versus Obama.

[00:27:21] **Speaker 1** I'd love to get your perspective on, what makes a good photograph.

[00:27:26] **Speaker 2** Well, I think it depends. I mean, ultimately, a good photograph is authentic and has a moment. There's like a moment in time that, can't be repeated. And it's it's one of those unexpected moments. Hopefully there's of hopefully it has some intimacy to it. Hopefully it has good composition, good lighting. There there are other you know, we showed that one picture of Air Force One in the fog. That's that's more trying to establish a, you know, a scene setting picture to show the entire scene. This is, leaving Seattle early, one of, one morning where it was foggy. And in this case, I backed way off because I wanted to show the motorcade near the plane and the number of people that were actually on the ground as Reagan was. I mean, as, Obama was waving goodbye to board the plane, and then I had to run fast. So they didn't leave without me, right?

[00:28:32] **Speaker 1** Oh, no. I missed my ride. I'd imagine you've taken photos of a lot of high profile, celebrity type folks.

[00:28:39] **Speaker 2** Yeah. I mean, some kid last night asked me. Ruthie's son asked me, you know what? What famous musicians did I photograph at the white House? And it's like, how can you like I. There's so many. I couldn't really. You know, I did say Springsteen and Paul McCartney and Beyonce and Jay-Z and things like that, but I'm a huge Springsteen fan. So he was this is actually the last week of the administration he was going to do, a one person concert, for just 80 people in the East Room. And I remember calling our social office saying, when Springsteen going to do the soundcheck because I wanted to go over there, and get this photograph of him doing the soundcheck, you know, with the empty room.

[00:29:29] **Speaker 1** Wow. And do you ever get overwhelmed from seeing somebody that you're a fan of like that?

[00:29:39] **Speaker 2** I was a little overwhelmed with with, you know, with Springsteen being there because, this was an unusual situation in that I was an invited guest, because there was a it was actually a concert for all of us that had been there all eight years and an hour plus one. And so there weren't that many people, but, you know, they said, no, you're a guest here. I guess I go, well, I'm also going to be taking photos. So I was able to choose my seat. And I chose a seat on the aisle so that I could at times watch the concert, but then easily also get up and move around and make some pictures.

[00:30:18] **Speaker 1** Couldn't help yourself.

[00:30:19] **Speaker 2** I couldn't help myself.

[00:30:21] **Speaker 1** I was going to ask you, pretty obvious. You have a personal friendship with, President Obama. How did you separate the friendship from the professionalism in terms of, you know, doing your job and that sort of thing? And how did that affect you?

[00:30:37] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I don't think it affected me. I mean, it was a professional friendship. I don't know if there's such a word, but I that's the way I refer to it. You know, I'm not one of those friends that gets invited over for dinner. You know, that's not the kind of friend I am. But at the same time, you know, every emotion that he experienced as president, I was in the room for. And in many ways, I experienced that with him, I think. So we have that kind of a bond that, you know, is different than any of his other friends had. The other thing is, if I didn't have that kind of friendship, that kind of relationship with him, I never would have been able to make many pictures, especially family photos. You know, I was in many ways, you know, part of the family in terms of documenting his, you know, his two daughters growing up. And, you know, if you really want to make those kinds of intimate pictures, you got to be, you know, have some kind of relationship with with the person that you're photographing.

[00:31:42] **Speaker 1** Did you ever feel like I shouldn't be here in this space, in this moment kind of thing?

[00:31:47] **Speaker 2** I mean, I think that's a very intuitive thing to think. And so I tried to put myself just in the shoes of, you know, a fellow human being who's having a private one on one conversation with one of his daughters saying, okay, let me get a couple pictures, and then I'm going to back away and let let them have their conversation. They don't need me to be here. So I aired on the side of getting the picture. But I also tried to, as I said, put myself in his shoes just as a fellow human being, saying, okay, maybe this is the time to let him have some privacy with his, you know, with his daughter.

[00:32:29] **Speaker 1** Yeah. This photo caught my attention because of the lines in it. What's going on here?

[00:32:35] **Speaker 2** Yeah. So this was a secret trip to Iraq. We were leaving Europe, and unbeknownst to, pretty much everybody other than this group of people, the plane was headed to Baghdad. We had the national security adviser on the far left, the head of the Secret Service on the right, and communication with their counterparts that were already on the ground in Baghdad trying to make a determination. Is it safe to land? This is while the war was still going on, and. Very tense on whether we were going to be able to land safely or not.

[00:33:19] **Speaker 1** Wow. Let's see the next one here.

[00:33:22] **Speaker 2** And this would have been my camera. This is 2009 or 2010. But this is at West Point when President Obama had made a decision on how many troops to keep in Afghanistan and was going to present, this decision. To the cadets at West Point first, and you know, these these are these are guys that would, eventually graduate from West Point, US Military Academy and possibly be headed to Afghanistan.

[00:33:56] **Speaker 1** Yeah. Now, this caught my eye because I remember President Obama, saying to Jerry Seinfeld when he did, communities in cars getting coffee that he missed driving, driving. And, and I know he's not drive.

[00:34:09] **Speaker 2** He's not driving in this picture.

[00:34:10] **Speaker 1** I know that, but.

[00:34:12] **Speaker 2** A this is I can't if there's a Ford or a GM plant and, those are all UAW workers in the background and somebody, they had a couple of cars set up near the stage and somebody suggested, hey, why don't you get in the car, you know? So he got in the car, and then I shot this through the passenger window of everybody trying to, like, shake his hand through the window or, and somebody had said something to him that made him laugh. Yeah, he did drive a couple times. I've got pictures of him. One day, Robert Gibbs brought his new, hybrid car to the white House. And, and President Obama said, let's take it for a spin. And he drove kind of around the the South Lawn. And I remember the Secret Service was radio radioing to the gates. Whatever you do, don't let this car outside the white House, you know. So Obama just did a couple of laps around the South Lawn.

[00:35:11] **Speaker 1** I remember seeing that also in that episode, Seinfeld.

[00:35:13] **Speaker 2** He also drove the Corvette that that Seinfeld brought. And I'm trying to think, oh, there was another time we went to Secret Service. The training facility out in Beltsville, Maryland, and, and they let him drive out there, too.

[00:35:32] **Speaker 1** Now, this picture was cool. And I'm surprised.

[00:35:34] **Speaker 2** You pulled this one up.

[00:35:35] **Speaker 1** Well, it cut the the spacing, caught it, and then I read the back story, and that caught me, too.

[00:35:41] **Speaker 2** Yeah. So this is this is the day of the bin laden raid. Believe it or not. And we were walking. I'm trying to remember, at what point during the day this was. But the white House was very quiet that day because towards where it had been closed. And, so there was nobody at the white House other than this national security aides. So it's very unusual for the white House to be that quiet. Usually you would, you know, there'd be people walking along the colonnade so a duck would not land on the steps like that. And I just thought it was such an unusual picture that I made a couple of frames of this.

[00:36:18] **Speaker 1** I feel like you couldn't. You could wait 100 years, and that would never happen again.

[00:36:21] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I know. I don't know how the duck got there.

[00:36:25] **Speaker 1** This is, probably.

[00:36:26] **Speaker 2** Does that same day believe it?

[00:36:28] **Speaker 1** Or was this the same day?

[00:36:29] **Speaker 2** That's the same day? Yeah.

[00:36:31] **Speaker 1** Wow. And this would have been when, Seal team was making the raid on bin Laden's.

[00:36:37] **Speaker 2** Yes. So. May 1st, 2011. Late afternoon, probably between 330 and 415. You've got the most powerful people in the executive branch of our government decision makers in that room. But for those 40 minutes, they were, there was nothing they could do to affect the outcome. Right. It was completely up to those guys on the ground.

[00:37:05] **Speaker 1** When you're framing this photograph, are you thinking, I'm going to take a photograph that shows how power powerless they are? Or is that something you kind of notice kind of afterwards, as you see all the little bits and pieces that you captured here?

[00:37:19] **Speaker 2** I mean, I guess I, it was an inherently thinking that thought at the time, what I was thinking is. What's what's what's the mood that I see in front of me? What's and trying to trying to capture that. And in a single frame.

[00:37:37] **Speaker 1** And in that mood last for a period of time. Or is that just a moment in that space?

[00:37:44] **Speaker 2** No. That that that mood lasted for the I think the entire 40 minutes we were in that room. And so when I'm going through my photographs trying to choose the best one, obviously, photography in many ways is subjective medium, right. But it was, I think initially myself and a photo editor, we zeroed in on maybe four frames from the 40 minutes in this room, and we just try to compare one to another. Tries like, which do you think is the best? And this just seemed to work the best the way everybody's faces, sort of expressed what I felt. I think what they all felt.

[00:38:30] **Speaker 1** Yeah. Next photo here. I think this gets into the transition. What was that like for you in terms of not, not just a different president coming in, but for your, you know, position to kind of.

[00:38:46] **Speaker 2** Well, I mean, I think the, the, I was, concerned that the country had voted this guy in, you know, I didn't feel he understood, what it meant to respect the office of the presidency. And so I've got to kind of put those feelings aside, but I'm also a human being, and so, I, you know, I tried to, as best I could, take the high road as President Obama had taken by inviting him to the white House two days after the election, because he wanted to try to like, you know, calm people down as best he could. But it was very unsettling feeling for me that this is the guy that was going to succeed Barack Obama. And this we didn't make this picture public. But I thought it was a good picture to include in my book as, you know, not having to necessarily show his face. You know who that is? Just by looking at him?

[00:40:00] **Speaker 1** What? She peeking? What?

[00:40:01] **Speaker 2** So this is, just, there's a little hallway, off the Oval Office that leads into the private dining room. The private dining room is what you see in the back room. And to the left is like what's called the presidential study. Okay, which President Obama hardly ever used that little room. So it had mostly mementos in there. There was a little desk with a computer. But it was mostly pictures of the family on the wall. And it was a picture of Thurgood Marshall on the wall. And he was just giving, President Obama's actually inside the study, and he's just showing, the president elect, you know, the study, the dining room. And so this is on their little tour.

[00:40:48] **Speaker 1** So President Obama is actually doing the tour.

[00:40:50] **Speaker 2** Yeah. Wow. Yeah.

[00:40:54] **Speaker 1** And what's this one here?

[00:40:55] **Speaker 2** And then this is on January 20th, 2017. Inside the helicopter, just before President Obama and Michelle boarded the helicopter, and he's saying goodbye to, to now, President Trump. This would have been right after the swearing in ceremony.

[00:41:15] **Speaker 1** Wow. So do you miss the action now that you've, been away from it for a while? Do you miss the action of that job?

[00:41:24] **Speaker 2** I don't know. I was worn out after eight years in many ways, both physically and I think emotionally. So I don't miss. I don't miss what.

[00:41:34] **Speaker 1** Happened to you taking pictures of that you'd like to take pictures of? What?

[00:41:37] **Speaker 2** Haven't I taking.

[00:41:38] **Speaker 1** Pictures? Yeah. Anything.

[00:41:41] **Speaker 2** Let's see. I really want to photograph Bruce Springsteen in Europe. Like I photographed in many, many of his shows, including a couple of last year, I guess three last year. But but but I hear the the shows in Europe are completely different. I'd also like to photograph, I don't know, I, I my, my main subject these days are, are a four year old and a one year old and my two granddaughters. And then we have a cabin in northern Michigan, and I've been doing some artsy nature photos at the cabin that I'm hoping, to do a little book from. Eventually. Yeah. So I'm just going to continue. New on those projects.

[00:42:29] **Speaker 1** Have you ever messed up a photograph? Missed it.

[00:42:32] **Speaker 2** Never. Feet all the time. I mean. That's. I mean, I think that in many ways that especially when you're starting out in photography, that's how you learn. It is messing up. I messed up as much as anybody, especially when I was starting out. And I think that that's what makes you better is to learn from your mistakes.

[00:42:58] **Speaker 1** Yeah. Last question here. Your advice to any aspiring photographer out there, what do they need to focus on? What should they be doing?

[00:43:06] **Speaker 2** Well, first of all, what kind of photographer do you want to be? Because the the world of photography has so many genres to it. I think I think you got to decide what kind of photographer you want to be, whether, you know, whether it's journalism, whether it's art, you know, whether it's some music photographer. You've got to you've got to make. You gotta you gotta follow your passion within photography to figure out, you know, who, who, what kind of photographer are you going to be? And then just, make pictures every day. You can't, like, pick up a camera once a week and be a great photographer. You've just got to do it every day. I mean, it's very similar to writing, right? You need to write every day if you want to be a really good writer. Same with photography. You've just got to get out there and make pictures. Henri Cartier-Bresson, the great French photographer who captured so many, decisive moments. He once said that his worst photographs were his first 10,000. And I think that's that's pretty good advice. You know, learn, learn, as I said, learn from your mistakes. Get them out of the way early and just get out there every day and photograph every day.

[00:44:30] **Speaker 1** I know I said last question, but I had to get this in. You talked last night about, the selfie and, what President Obama kind of thought of that in terms of how people would, you know, things. You know, he they talked about the history of how, you know, people used to take pictures of presidents, and then all of a sudden they started to do the selfies where they'd have to be in the frame. Can you touch on that just a little bit in terms of how you felt that it impacted, you know, watching.

[00:44:56] **Speaker 2** You know, it made for some interesting pictures for me, right, to see this kind of change taking place. And it really is. It's traced to exactly when the majority of people got a smartphone, you know, because at first smartphones are so expensive that it not everybody could afford them. Now everybody has a smartphone. Everybody like almost everybody. And so that is something that is just, a part of who we are now as Americans. And for whatever reason, there there's a need for each of us to have to do a selfie. And any time we're in the presence of, you know, a celebrity or a friend or, you know, if you go out to dinner with somebody, you got to do a selfie with them. That's just what we've become as a society. And I think it's it was humorous to me at times, to watch this transition take place because it happened during the Obama administration go, you know, I showed those pictures early on in 2009, 2010 where he's along a rope line after an event, people excited to meet him. And you don't see people trying to take a selfie. They're like trying to shake his hand, trying to meet him. And then as the years went by, 2012, 2013, 2014, everybody's out there with their cell phone trying to get a selfie with him instead of shaking his hand and look him in the eye. So for me, it was an interesting, interesting transition to watch that take place and try to try to document that. But like, if you're the president, United States and all of a sudden people are like turned away from you to take a picture with their selfie. I mean, just take a picture with their iPhone. And not lucky. That's got to be, you know, just a difficult situation to be in, I think.

[00:46:43] **Speaker 1** Yeah. I've always said that your, your selfie is not going to be as important and memorable as my moment, you know, dealing with that person and dealing with that moment. Pete Souza I appreciate you going over time with us. Thank you for joining us on InFocus.

[00:46:56] **Speaker 2** Thanks for having me.

[00:46:57] **Speaker 1** Appreciate you so much. Yep.