

>> From the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

>> This is Roberta Shaffer at the Library of Congress. Late September will mark the 12th year that curious and concerned citizens of all ages will gather in Washington to celebrate the written word at the Library of Congress National Book Festival. The festival which is free and open to the public will be two days this year, Saturday, September 22nd and Sunday, September 23rd. The festival will take place between 9th and 14th Streets on the National Mall rain or shine. The hours will be from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Saturday the 22nd, and from noon to 5:30 p.m. on Sunday the 23rd. For details please visit our website www.loc.gov/bookfest as one word. And now it is my pleasure to introduce you to one of our esteemed authors who will present this year at the book festival, Walter Isaacson. He's written a compelling biography about Steve Jobs. Thank you so much for joining us this morning.

>> It's great to be with you.

>> Thank you. You've written about a lot of people who are great leaders. Where does Steve Jobs fit in terms of his leadership?

>> You know, this is not a how to book on how to be a great leader because Steve is kind of a mixed bag in that regard. He's hard to deal with, he's impetuous, sometimes can be really rough on people. On the other hand he's inspiring, a genius, gets people to do the types of things that they didn't know they were capable of doing. So I don't think you should ever read a biography and just say this is a recipe for how to be a great leader. You should look at the person and say I should be more like that and a little bit less like that.

>> Okay. I wanted to know what was your initial reaction when Steve Jobs approached you about being his authorized or in this case invited biographer? Did you know him before?

>> I knew Steve since 1984 when he first came to Time Magazine to show off the original McIntosh. And off and on over the years we had discussed his new products, especially when I was at Time Magazine or CNN. When I went to the Aspen Institute he called and we took a walk, and he said why don't you do my biography. I had just done Ben Franklin, I was about to complete Albert Einstein. And so my first reaction was, oh you know, Franklin, Einstein and then you. You think you're the next in that sequence. But I told him I would do it, but why don't we wait 10 or 20 years until he retired. And then I realized he was ill. And the more we talked about it the more it seemed like an extraordinary opportunity to get very up close to a person who had transformed our times. And he was very open about it. I realized that you don't usually get an opportunity as a writer or a biographer to get that intimate and that close with somebody this important.

>> Okay, well, that's very interesting. Now, this morning's news is filled with reports about Apple being the largest company ever in U.S. history exceeding Exxon and Microsoft. And I know you mentioned in the biography that Al Gore had said Steve Jobs was better at being the

underdog than the humble giant. What do you think about that in light of the success?

>> I think that what you have here is the American creation myth writ large, somebody who starts a company in his parents' garage with his friend from down the block and ends up making it the most valuable company on the planet. Steve was very good at being the underdog as Gore said, Al Gore is on his board. But Steve was also good at staying ahead of the game even when you were on top. In other words when he had the iPod and it made Apple a great consumer products company he didn't rest on his laurels. He said what would happen if people put music on cell phones? That would hurt the iPod, so let's get ahead of the game and he creates the iPhone.

>> Now, does Steve Jobs then prove the Einstein adage that imagination is more important than knowledge?

>> Yeah, I mean Steve Jobs was not the smartest computer technician in Silicon Valley in the 70s and 80s. He was not a great engineer, not a great coder, but he could imagine and envision things. And I think that's the mark of true genius. To understand that beauty should be connected to technology, to have an intuitive feel for what people will want and what will emotionally connect to them that's what sets Steve Jobs and Apple apart from other computer companies and other people who are technologists.

>> When you were with Steve and writing the biography were there any surprises that really took you sort of aback about him?

>> One of them was that he was very emotional. There would be times I'd look up and he'd be crying even if he was just reciting from memory some ad copy like here's to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the round pegs in the square holes. And he would say that, you know, that really emotionally connected to him, and I'd see tears coming down his cheek. I think that was a key to understanding the intensity of Steve Jobs' personality was that he was an emotional person, understood other people's emotions very well, and knew how to connect emotionally both with people around him, people he worked with but also consumers around the world.

>> And, Walter, since we're talking about emotion and everything I want to just shift the conversation a little bit to you. And I wondered how as a biographer, and you've written fabulous biographies, do you remain objective about your subject? And in the case of Steve Jobs his sort of spell is infamous and famous. How do you separate yourself from the subject of a biography? And then if I can say in this particular case because you also both knew at the time that he had this very, very serious and terminal disease.

>> I think that you do get emotionally, or I get emotionally attached to my subject, and I tend to like them. I liked Steve Jobs. He kept telling me please be honest, be brutally honest. One of the things that set Steve Jobs apart, made him seem unkind at times, was that he was always brutally honest with people. And he told me he did not want this to feel

like an in house biography. He wanted me to show the full picture of him. So especially last year when he was very ill and looked like he may not make it I had deep sympathy for him, enormous respect for him, and I tried to put his various character traits that might not have been totally attractive to people I tried to put these in context to say, yes, but he drove people crazy but he drove them to do things they didn't think they could do, and that's why he was such a genius. So what you do when you feel an emotional connection like that is in my case try to explain away some of the rough edges of the character you're writing about and put them into context.

>> I want to switch or stay on this sort of you as the writer. Can you tell me how you decide about whom you'll write a biography, or how do you decide who you would like to make the subject of your biography? And do you have anybody you can share with me as who's next up in line?

>> When I do a biography topic I try to make a point. There's usually a theme I have. It started back when Evan Thomas and myself when we were much younger wrote a book called The Wise Men. And we wanted to talk about American foreign policy and how the people who conducted that foreign policy transcended partisan issues. After that I wanted to continue the idea to the Vietnam period and so did a biography of Henry Kissinger. As I was doing Kissinger I was learning about realism in American foreign policy, and that led me to want to study Benjamin Franklin. And doing Benjamin Franklin I realized what a great scientist he was so it made me want to do a scientist next. So usually one book leads to another.

>> And is there anybody who now Steve Jobs' biography has inspired you to pursue or are interested in?

>> One of the things I wanted to try to do with Steve Jobs is show the connection between creativity, innovation, imagination on the one hand and technology and engineering on the other. And so I want to continue that in the book I'm working on now by looking at the creative and innovative people who made the digital revolution starting with Ada Byron Lovelace who wrote the first computer algorithm for Charles Babbage's analytical engine who were able to sort of apply poetry to micro processors if you know what I mean.

>> You've spoken about your confidence in the future of the physical book, and I wonder if you could just comment on that.

>> Yeah, I think paper is a good technology. It's a great storage medium. It's good for the transmission of information. Certainly electronic books are wonderful in their own way. But if we'd been getting only electronic books for the last 400 years and somebody said, hey, I can put this on paper and deliver it to your doorstep and you can read it on the bus or in the backyard you'd say, well, paper is a convenient technology as well. Maybe it will replace the internet some day.

>> And then finally you have spoken often about your earlier exposure to legendary Louisiana writer Walker Percy. Are there other writers or people that have influenced your professional writing life?

>> I like great narrative nonfiction writers, obviously David McCullough, Doris Kearns Goodwin, people like that. Early on Anthony Lukas I read all of his books because he was able to take grand social issues such as the Boston desegregation in the schools and turn them into narratives about people. I really admire those who can write narratives about people that tell us about the big issues of our time. And I've always tried to do that through biography. But, of course, people from Halberstam to Tony Lukas to Nicholas Limen [phonetic] who have done it in great ways through narrative history.

>> Thank you. Well, thank you so much, Walter Isaacson, for talking with us this morning. We look forward to seeing you at the Library of Congress National Book Festival on Saturday morning, September 22nd at 10 a.m. in the history and biography pavilion where Walter will be opening up that pavilion and the book festival. Thank you so much.

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