

Bethany Swain, former CNN photojournalist, lecturer at the University of Maryland

Megan Cloherty, Producer, It's All Journalism

Welcome to It's All Journalism. I'm Megan Cloherty joined by fellow producer Mike O'Connell. Today we're going to be talking about visual storytelling with visual photojournalist Bethany Swain.

Over her 10 year career at CNN, Bethany covered everything from the Pope to Sarah Palin's run to NATO troops stationed in Afghanistan. She was the first woman to be named video photographer of the year in the Eyes of History Competition, sponsored by the White House News Photographers Association. Her work has also been recognized by the Best of Photojournalism Contest, the National Press Photographers Association and the Society of Professional Journalists. So it's fair to say she knows what she's doing. Welcome Bethany, thank you for joining us.

Bethany Swain, former CNN photojournalist & now lecturer at the University of Maryland.

Thank you. I'm excited to be here.

Megan Cloherty

We'll start at the beginning. What attracted you to visual storytelling?

Bethany Swain

I started when I was a kid. So it was something I learned when I was in middle school, really, when I had at that point the still camera mostly that when I brought it out, people would smile. If they saw a camera, it would make people smile and that's something I liked especially when I was growing up and just learning, going through those uncomfortable years of being in middle school.

And then, I started to expand into video as well as stills. And I ended up doing a documentary following my senior class of high school, from fifth grade through senior year. That was a lot of fun getting to talk to my classmates and be able to have that excuse to be like, "Oh, it didn't matter which table I sat at with the cool kids or the other kids, because I was running around taking pictures or shooting video."

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

That's interesting because that reminds me of people I knew in high school that their sort of entre into talking to other people was like being the yearbook photographer or something. They had a camera with them. They had a reason to be there. They had a reason to sort of get involved in the conversation. Maybe that's not an unusual story for photographers.

Megan Cloherty

Now you teach at the University of Maryland, multimedia skills and visual storytelling and obviously, I'm sure you go over this a lot. But, can you say definitively what makes a good visual story or does it just depend on a bunch of different factors?

Bethany Swain

There are a lot of different factors, but it is compelling, compelling visuals, compelling moments, having sound as well as having those beautiful visuals. So, when I go out and pick a story and teach my students how to pitch and how to find those good stories, it is not just about the facts, you know, because you can do that in a text piece if it's just a listing of, "Well, these are the facts of the day." Really going like, "How can I take that to another level? How can I take those stories and go beyond the headlines?" Which is something that I really like to be able to do.

I love breaking news, don't get me wrong. But being able to go beyond the headlines and being able to put a face on what's happening, especially being based in D.C. You know, we have the lawmakers that are making bills and talking about stuff and how can we put a face on that so it's not just talking heads?

Michael O'Connell

I think also with visuals you're able, I don't want to say it's easier, but maybe it easier to get some of that emotional element into a story pretty quickly that people are able to pick up those visual cues and the auditory cues that you're not going to get in a print platform.

Bethany Swain

For sure. And when you edit, that's what you look for. So, for a story that's a minute and a half, I might shoot an hour's worth of footage. So in there I'll go through and I'll pick out, "OK, if I'm going to have someone's attention for 90 seconds, what do I want to put in there? What are the best moments, the best sound to tell the story and keep their attention?" Cause this is a competitive business and I want people to stay. I want people to watch the story all the way to the end.

Michael O'Connell

So, when you go out and shoot an assignment, when are you actually composing? Are you composing when you arrive? Are you doing it as you're shooting? Is it when you're driving home?

Bethany Swain

It's before that. So it's before that. So, when I was at CNN and when I was in local news, before I go out and shoot a piece, especially a natural sound package, which I did usually by myself, and I needed someone to talk to, I do things better when I talk it out. So, on my way to an assignment, I have a couple of different people, depending on where I was in my career and who was available, who I could call, and we'd have these conversations. Like, "OK. I'm going. This is what I'm thinking. What could I be forget-

ting?" You know. And by talking out loud, I could realize, "OK, you're right. It didn't even occur to me that that is an element that I might not have asked about." And when you're working by yourself and you don't have that second set of eyes, that second set of hands, it's easier that you could miss things. So, yeah, I start my planning from the original story idea, but in that car ride to the assignment, I always, always would make those calls to my team. So they're used to it. So I'd tell them, "Hey, I'm going. Plan on having your phone on you at this time and we're going to have our chat."

Michael O'Connell

I had a chance to see you give a demonstration in Final Cut at a conference last year. And I remember one of the things, the assignment you were showing us was something you had done with a reporter. What was sort of the breakdown? Were you mostly out shooting stuff by yourself or were you doing assignments with a particular reporter?

Bethany Swain

It was a combination of things. When I was at CNN, during the course of a day or a week, we'd have a lot of different assignments. So the ones that I was most passionate about, were the ones that I got to follow through from beginning to the end. So a lot of times, those were the ones that I pitched and did myself as natural sound packages.

The one that I showed last year at the NPPA conference was a piece that I'd done with Brianna Keilar, which actually just placed in the WHNPA [White House News Photographers Association] competition over a couple of weekends ago. And, that was something that, just a random assignment, didn't know it was going to turn into a piece from when I got the assignment. And they said, "Hey, go and meet Brianna and you're going to do an interview." We got there and it turned out it was going to be a little bit more.

So, in that case, normally at CNN, I would've passed the footage off and one of our in-house editors would've edited it together. But that was something that Brianna and I talked about and she said, "Hey, I really want you to edit this." And I said, "I'd love to be able to finish it through." That way, I could be involved from the beginning and then the final product and have your flavor and the pacing that I was looking for when I shot it and really have that vision.

Michael O'Connell

It's nice that you sort of had the opportunity to not only to do stuff that you started and ended from an idea that you had, but that you also had that collaborative aspect, where, you know, sometimes having a reporter or somebody else, having that different perspective sort of informs something different in your work. At least, that's been my observation about my own work.

Bethany Swain

Absolutely and the last project that I did before I left CNN was with Lisa Sylvester, who was an anchor and a correspondent at CNN. We were trying to launch a family and

parenting beat and we did six pieces. We called it Family Solutions, and we got them on different platforms at CNN and then put together a half-hour show.

Working with Lisa and working with a reporter on a regular basis while we were doing that project, we got in a rhythm, we got a beat. I think it took our storytelling to another level. It was something that I was glad that I was able to do, because being in such a large operation as CNN is, the Washington bureau has over 400 employees at it, it wasn't every day that I was working with the same people. It was a lot of everyone helping out and filling the holes that needed to be plugged.

Michael O'Connell

One of the things that you mentioned, I think you said there were 100 photojournalists at CNN and you were one of five.

Bethany Swain

So, when I left, there used to be 115, then 18 months ago there was a round of layoffs and, at that point, when I left there was 5 percent. I was one of five women.

Megan Cloherty

My background's in video. I know when you have a really visual story, there's nothing more exciting —

Bethany Swain

Absolutely.

Megan Cloherty

— when you're shooting. But if you do not have a visual story, how do you teach that? How do you teach, for your students, you're given like a policy speech story or something where —

Michael O'Connell

What tricks do you have in your bag?

Megan Cloherty

Right. You're like, "Oh my goodness, what am I going to do?" I think that's when people really find the character and get creative. I think that's sort of the hard thing, right? And daily news doesn't always give you fires and cool things to shoot.

Bethany Swain

Right. And just because the story isn't visual doesn't mean that it's not important. So, we need to cover things that aren't going to be award-winning visual stories. So, what I try and focus on is the little victories and figure out, "OK, what can I do? How can I take whatever I've been passed and put on my plate and take it to the next level?" So, whether it is getting some extra natural sound, whether it is try and think of a creative

way to shoot the interview, you know, figuring out, "How can I go to that next level and add those elements in?" And me excited about the little victories, because, yeah, there are a lot of stories that don't take it to that level of something that you want to put on your resume or are really excited to post on Facebook for all your friends to make sure that you see. That doesn't mean those aren't stories that are worth telling.

Megan Cloherty

I think too it's harder to get creative when you're in that mode of shooting every day and you're just turning stuff out. You frame somebody up, medium shot, you're not thinking how to be creative on something. I kind of got in a rut when I was shooting. When I was working in Oregon, I shot for two years. That sounds like nothing to you, but you're every day and it's like, you know, knock out the interview and go on. How do you keep it creative? How do you keep thinking about how to advance your shot or to advance your story creatively?

Bethany Swain

That's one reason why I've been so active in the professional organizations. I'm on the board of the National Press Photographers Association. I try to go to a conference with them, at least one a year. And by taking a step back and, whether it is, they had a fantastic webinar last month that I hosted with some students at Maryland, and just taking those couple of hours and taking a break back from those deadlines, back from the rush and feeding the beast —

Megan Cloherty

Right

Bethany Swain

— we kind of refer to it, and be like, "Wow, yeah, that was beautiful, that was a different way of doing it," and talking with that.

And now with social media, that's kind of buzz words, but going to Facebook there's a group called Storytellers. And, in that group, they are photojournalists from across the country, but I'm sure some are international as well, who are posting their stories, posting their tips and trying to provide support and inspiration to each other. And so, any day I can go on, if I'm in a rut, I can go and I can watch something else that someone else did, give them feedback or just take that 90 seconds and kind of enjoy and be like, "Hey, I can do that. I can try and beg, borrow and steal their ideas and put some of mine up to share too."

Megan Cloherty

I'm just interested in, as your role as a teacher, what do you think are the biggest mistakes that students are making when they're shooting?

Michael O'Connell

Or even professionals.

Megan Cloherty

Yeah, professionals.

Bethany Swain

How much time do we have?

Megan Cloherty

I mean, there's the "no headroom" thing. I feel like a lot of times it's funny, because when you're, just from my experience, you can shoot something and you think it looks fine, and then you get back and you're like, "Wow. That doesn't work at all."

Bethany Swain

Yes. Absolutely. My students definitely have those moments where they're really happy, but Michael Jordan didn't learn to become a professional basketball player by like, "OK, let's shoot one hoop. Yeah, I got it. OK." It's practice. That's common across many fields. So, when students are just starting out or if it's someone who's entering video who's a still photographer before, some of the basics of, making sure that you roll long enough, so encourage students to count to 10. Because when you take a picture, click, you got it, you move on. You're not worried about editing for a certain amount of time later. So when you're first shooting video that something's that kind of common is that students are like, "OK, got that and moving onto the next shot and moving onto the next shot." And they're not holding it long enough.

Megan Cloherty

Ten seconds is a long time.

Bethany Swain

It is long time.

Megan Cloherty

I mean, five seconds you're like, "OK. I got it already." But you do need that extra time on the end.

Bethany Swain

Ten seconds or wait till the action ends. There was a story that Michael had talked about from last year that I did with Brianna, that was some lawmakers and VIPs that were reading to students on Capitol Hill. Holding that shot long enough till they turned the page, of getting that action, so that it's not just about counting to 10. But you know it's a children's book that sometime they're going to finish reading and they're going to turn the page. And waiting for that action, so that way when you go back and edit it, you have and put it together.

The other thing that students do is they're so focused on whatever they think was important in the frame that they kind of forget about everything else. So they might not notice, oh, that they framed the shot and there was an exit sign here and something's coming out of their head because they're so focused on what the most important thing is in that frame, that they're not paying attention to all four of the corners.

Michael O'Connell

I have limited experience in shooting video, but I have more experience shooting in photos. Certainly, when you get into a breaking news situation, you can be a little more forgiving about background if you're shooting something quickly. But I think that the more practice that you get, the more natural it comes to framing and just setting yourself up for that moment when you need to shoot something very quickly and grab something before it moves on and you don't have that moment again.

Bethany Swain

Absolutely. Practice is really important and the more you do it, the more comfortable you become. You can be paying attention to what's going on to what's going on behind you and not just paying attention to what's happening in your viewfinder. You can be missing other moments and other opportunities.

Michael O'Connell

Let's talk about some of the highlights of that you had at CNN. You followed Sarah Palin on the campaign trail. You were over in Afghanistan. What did you take away from those experiences?

Bethany Swain

I spent 22 days on the campaign trail with Sarah Palin.

Michael O'Connell

That must have been interesting.

Bethany Swain

It was fascinating. It was absolutely fascinating. It was my first time embedded on a national campaign like that. So, we were traveling wherever she went on the plane.

On the three weeks, I saw her talk five times without teleprompter. So they really, really kept a tight leash. And, we travelled on the plane, so she was in first class and they literally closed the curtain between first class and where we were sitting in the back. We had better access to her daughter, Piper, who I think was 7 at the time. So, she actually came back and talked to the press more than the governor did.

But, it was amazing to see the people that came out and the energy and excitement. I knew that I was going to be assigned to whoever the GOP VP candidate was. I had no idea it was going to be something so historic.

Michael O'Connell

My own experience with that particular campaign, I was in Northern Virginia and because Virginia was in play, all the candidates came through and so we were very fortunate when we were covering. We were a weekly newspaper. We got to see all the candidates. And it was very exciting. One of the challenges are when you cover something like that is that you want to tell the story of the moment, of what's going on, but there's a bigger story, the story you just described to us. That she's being kept from you. Were you able at all to tell that in any way?

Megan Cloherty

It's probably frustrating.

Bethany Swain

It was. It definitely was, because we saw the same speech three to five times a day. And part of our role, and I was working most of the time with a producer, Peter Hamby, was to figure out, "OK, what one line did she change in this speech from the last time we heard it?" Because that would be the news.

One of the things that I did on that trip was I got to know her campaign photographer, Shealah Craighead, because she was in the back with us and also being two of the few women who were traveling on that side of the curtain. And, I did a story on her. So, I was able to share some of the photos that she was taking. She's a very talented photographer and was able to hear her story, to get that out. So, it was a way I could do something besides just the campaign of ever single day, every single stop, of what was going on.

Michael O'Connell

I can imagine that if the speech isn't changing that much over a 20-day period, your editor is going to say, "Isn't this the same thing you sent me yesterday?" So then it becomes a matter of keeping your job by doing something else interesting. Now, in Afghanistan, how long were you there and what was it you were you covering?

Bethany Swain

So, I went to Afganistan in 2006 and it was still just one of those things, like the Palin campaign, that just kind of changed me a little bit. A couple of weeks before I went, I had hostile region training. It's something CNN requires of anyone they're going to send into a hostile region.

Michael O'Connell

Yeah, I've seen video of that. It's pretty fascinating.

Bethany Swain

Yeah. It's a week of training. We were in rural Georgia. And it's partly how you work with the military and part what do you do if there's a 911, basic medical skills. So, I had that

training and came back. And a couple of weeks later, Jamie McIntyre, he was the senior Pentagon correspondent at the time, was going on a trip with Gen. [James] Jones, who was the NATO commander. It had been planned for a little bit and Khalil Abdallah, one of my colleagues who was a photojournalist was going, and Jaime ended up getting another seat. So, he called the assignment desk and said, "Hey, I can take a third person. I need someone who's taken hostile region training, who can shoot and edit, and who can be my producer." And at the time, I was the only person at the D.C. bureau who was available who could meet those requirements.

So, we went. We flew into Brussels, and then we got on the plane and went into Afghanistan. We flew into Kabul. We went on a foot patrol through Kabul, which was fascinating. We went with, not with Gen. Jones on actual foot patrols, there was a general from the British military who was there who took us around.

And, while we were there, they actually, the region I went to doesn't have any running water, so their sewage goes right down the road. And I saw something that I wanted to take a picture of on the other side of the sewage that was going down the road and I actually fell in. And we had just got on the ground, so I was covered up to my knee for the entire rest of the day with what was, yeah, not running water.

But one thing that really had kind of opened up my eyes to that was, so I fell, I'm in this new country, it's my first time in a hostile region and people came in were rushing. I was like, "Gosh, what's going on?" They went and got buckets to where there water was. Again, it's not running water and then get a hose to help wash me off and clean me off. And I was really just kind of impressed with total language barrier. We weren't communicating with words, but they really wanted to help me.

Michael O'Connell

Was there much structure in what you were covering? Did they say, "Oh, we're going to go out here. You can talk to these people." Or were you pretty much, "I'm waking up and I'm not sure what I'm going to be doing today."

Bethany Swain

We were embedded with the general, so we went where he went. Sometimes he had meetings that we were not a part of. And one of those times we were in Jalalabad on a forward operating base and he was having some meetings that we weren't joining on. So, we got a tour from some of the soldiers and airmen who were on the ground. And they were showing us their barracks and we were just kind of looking around the base. And, we were up in one of the towers and we saw just outside the gates there were kids playing soccer. And one of them said, "Yeah, it's Friday. If you guys weren't here, we'd be having our weekly soccer game with the kids." And we were like, "Uh, OK, so you're giving us a tour, showing us where your toothbrushes are kept, rather than having your weekly soccer game that you have with the kids?"

Michael O'Connell

That's action.

Bethany Swain

So, we went and played soccer with them and, again, it was really eye-opening because they had kids of all ages that were playing, but it was just the boys. The girls were out there, but they were all on the sidelines. And so, they had this soccer game that they did trying to win the hearts and minds. So, each week they'd have their soccer Fridays.

Michael O'Connell

What was the experience then of being there as a working woman? How was the perception of you? Did you sort of feel that you were an object of interest or a walking lesson or something, a cultural lesson?

Bethany Swain

So, I traveled with the headscarf, with a hijab. I didn't end up need it while I was there. But I didn't know, because I was traveling with all men, even to the point where on the list in every place you went they checked you in, it said "Mr. Bethany Swain." So each place I went, they'd say, "Oh, Mr. Swain. We don't have you the list." I finally figured out, "No, it's under 'mister.'" That's just how much that they just are used to having men, that everything was default.

Michael O'Connell

"Yeah, where's your husband?"

Bethany Swain

But it was great. We went to Karzai's palace. So, we weren't fighting the Taliban on the trip, but it was a fascinating experience, getting actually to see women in burqas.

Michael O'Connell

What stories came out of that for you?

Bethany Swain

We did two stories on that soccer game with the soldiers. Jaime turned one. And while we were there, we were turning pieces each day for *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer* that were then repurposed for the rest of the network. Then, on the way back, I actually edited another piece from that soccer game on the plane ride back that went to a show that CNN had at the time called *This Week at War*.

We had challenges with doing pieces each day because to get them back, we were using the Internet, we were using the BGAN, which is a satellite phone. As I'm sure you can imagine, in 2006, an Internet connection in Afghanistan wasn't exactly fast. So, we would have to try and figure out how we could time things, so we could do some live shots. Jamie would do some live shots. You know, a significant time difference, I think it

was 7-1/2 hours time difference. So we did those stories. We had an interview with Gen. Jones. We were able to include that in our pieces as well.

Megan Cloherty

Were you able to be, obviously you said what you shot was dictated by the general's schedule. But, as far as what they wanted from you, was it sort of like, "Bring us a soccer game." Were you able to see what was going on and grab it, or was it more like you kind of have to deliver ...

Bethany Swain

We were limited of where we could go because of security and safety. We couldn't just feel like, "Hey, let's go check this out." Which we did with the soccer game. When we saw that we were, "Wait a minute, let's do this." And we thought this was an OK place to do that story. But in general, yeah, we were limited to where security could take us. But that didn't mean, we went on the foot patrol in Kabul and we went to the forward operating base and we went to Karzai's palace. Those were opportunities to tell stories that we were excited to tell.

Megan Cloherty

What did you learn from being a foreign correspondent for that amount of time? Obviously, asking how it's different seems like a stupid question.

Michael O'Connell

You're in a foreign country.

Megan Cloherty

Right. Your deadlines are different. Your physical stresses are different. But, if you were telling somebody who was going over there how the job is different, how would you explain it?

Bethany Swain

So, we essentially didn't eat or sleep for the week that we were there. So, I slept on the plane ride back. I was out cold. Because, we were with the general wherever he went, wherever our opportunities were and then, to turn the stories, we had to do it either when he was eating or he was sleeping. So, that was one thing that in the hotel that we stayed at it had, I brought power bars. We brought a couple of things but also had some Pringles and some chocolate bars. So, we kind of lived on Pringles and chocolate bars and power bars that we had that we had packed.

Michael O'Connell

The staples.

Bethany Swain

But the one nice thing is so, in the course of the week, that included going over to Brussels and while we were in Brussels we obviously were not limited to same kind of security restrictions that we had in Afghanistan. So, the night before we got on the plane to head over, Jaime took Khalil and I out for a fantastic dinner. So, we knew this could be our last meal with fresh fruits and vegetables and a fork and getting to have a drink, so we did go in having some good calories and lived on that until we got back on the plane.

Michael O'Connell

So, you left CNN recently and now you're full-time as a professor at the University of Maryland, teaching photojournalism, multimedia. What's your experience with the students? What is their level of interest and skill level when they come in there as to what they're trying to accomplish and what their expectations are?

Bethany Swain

I love teaching at the University of Maryland. I love teaching and being in the time that I've been there, I've taught a bunch of different classes at different levels. There's a range of students. There are a range of passions. But they are so excited about the tools, about the storytelling and about learning what they can do and how they can do it.

One of the things I got excited about is there's a project called [Stories Beneath the Shell](#) that some of my students started over winter break. I had them last semester, most of them, and they got together and said, "Hey, we want to be able to tell some stories that we don't think are being told." Maryland has a fantastic newspaper. I mean, they already had so many outlets, but they wanted to be able to do one on their own. So, they got together in a weekend and they launched a website. And they now have had a couple of dozen students that have been contributing. And this is stuff that wasn't available, that you couldn't have done before the technology became so accessible. They are now doing tech stories, multimedia stories, you know, videos on topics that they think wouldn't necessarily be covered otherwise. And they're underclassmen, these are sophomores. I can't wait to see where the project's going to go and what else other students who may be like, "Wait, if they can do that, we can do that too." And that's even outside the classroom.

Michael O'Connell

Is Maryland changing its focus? Are they turning out multi-platform journalists? Is that kind of where things are going there? We've had other conversations with people involved in education and the journalism schools are undergoing a massive change at this point, trying to prepare their students for what the realities of our industry is, which people who are in it don't understand everything that's going on.

Bethany Swain

So, the University of Maryland, the Philip Merrill College of Journalism, we have a new dean. She started in August, so she's still figuring here ways around, figuring out how can we take the school to the next level, because the skills that you needed five, 10, 15 years ago are very, very different.

One of the things that I talk about in all of my classes whenever I can is a list that Al Tompkins and Vicki Krueger from the Poynter Institute came up with, [25 Essential Skills for Today's Journalism Students](#). And I think that these skills that are on here, news judgment, reporting basics, news writing, storytelling, critical thinking, some of those are things that have been the same. And other things, mapping and geotagging, real time reporting, social media engagement, that's new. Even five years ago, they may not have been part of the conversation.

Megan Cloherty

Right.

Bethany Swain

And when I teach my classes, one thing that I always try to emphasize is the skills that I used from the start of my career at a local station in Burlington, Vt., that I'm still using today. So, not been focusing on the things that have constantly changed, but on the principles that using technology that we don't even know about yet, but that you'd still keep using.

Megan Cloherty

As far as technology goes, you have to ask the question of how the iPhone has changed what you do and how editors may think that an iPhone photo is going to work just as well as a professional photo. I mean, obviously, crowdsourcing is important, social media is important, it's changing what we do, it's making it better. But how does it change photojournalism?

Bethany Swain

When I left CNN, I turned in my BlackBerry and the first thing I did was I went out and got my own iPhone. So I have one now and it is a very fun tool and there are a lot of things you can do, and especially if you're just trying to get image up quickly for social media to let people know, "Hey, I'm here. This is what's going on."

One of the examples that I give in my classroom is you really need to know the platform and the outlet from where your assignment, where your task is going. Do you remember the Virginia Tech shooter? How there was that cellphone video that was horrible. We all watched it because it was such an amazing moment. The fact that it was captured that you forgave the fact that it wasn't on a tripod, it wasn't well composed, it was shaky and it was very, very grainy. But it was OK, because the fact that they were able to capture what was going on —

Michael O'Connell

Good enough.

Bethany Swain

Yeah, that it was "good enough." Now, for someone who spends a month's salary getting a 60-inch, HD television. They're not going to be OK if all their video looks like that. So people, our audience, they are wanting better images and you can't get all of that with an iPhone. But you can't blame your tools. You need to figure out, what can you afford, what do you have access to and do the best that you can within those limitations.

Michael O'Connell

With the way that digital photography has changed everything and this sort of perception that, "I can give a reporter a digital camera or they can use their iPhone to take some photos." I mean, where is the role then of the photojournalist at this point?

Bethany Swain

I think that it is in that 60-inch HD television.

Michael O'Connell

Are we moving in a direction where a lot of the skills and things that we expected from photojournalists is irrelevant or is needed at this point in the newsroom?

Bethany Swain

I would say the opposite. I would say they're even more important. So, when I first started taking pictures, I was in middle school, and I would shoot my roll of 24 and then I would mail it away and a week later I would get it. At that point, I would be like, "Oh, I guess I should've framed this differently or done something." Now you can get instant like, "Wow, I can do this better." And take another image and know what works and what doesn't. Everyone thinks that they can play a role and there's room for everybody.

So, it depends on what you're doing and what your outlet is. So, if you are filing for the Web, you don't have the time limitations that you did when you were in a broadcast station. So, you're not trying to fit everything into 30 seconds or a minute. You can tell a story for as long as it needs to be told. And by adding visuals, adding that element into places where it wasn't before. So, you might've been OK with just having a newspaper that was dropped on your doorstep that didn't have the sound with the stories. Now people want that. They want to be able to hear it. They want to be able to feel it and smell it. I think that when you have really powerful storytelling, you can kind of feed all of those emotions and add that into and really take the stories and your news to the next level.

Michael O'Connell

You mentioned sound. Tell us about the importance of sound in the visual media. What does it really bring to the storytelling process?

Bethany Swain

It's very important. One of my favorite ways of storytelling is natural sound packages. So, that sound comes to the very beginning of that. With really taking still photograph to the next level is adding audio, and as a video journalist, I'm shooting 30 still photo-

graphs a second. That's what video is. And by having that sound, it really makes it feel like that you're there. It takes advantage of more of your senses.

Michael O'Connell

Maybe this is a point for us to bring in, you've brought something with you, sort of as an example of is it nat sound or is it using sound to tell a story?

Bethany Swain

One of my favorite stories is something I did at Arlington National Cemetery. I loved covering stories there. And each year for Memorial Day, they put flags in front of all the headstones. It's something I've covered a couple of times. And one of times I went with the intention of trying to do a full story, the military that was there, the PIO [public information officer] would only let me talk to whoever the highest ranking officer was and the interview that I did with him was horrible. So, it was really —

Megan Cloherty

Dry?

Bethany Swain

Oh my gosh. It was very official and really like, "Yes, we're very honored to be here today. It is very moving to see this."

Michael O'Connell

Very, on message.

Bethany Swain

If you looked at the log, maybe it wouldn't be quite as bad, it was like, this is really moving and it's amazing to see all these flags that are put exactly a foot-length's away from the headstones so they all line up in a row. So, I was going back to my car, being like, "OK, I have some great images." The interview was not going to work and so, but at CNN, it's so competitive to get stories on and it was going to be OK and I was kind of disappointed. And I walked through Section 60, where they put people from Afghanistan and Iraq where they're buried. And I saw a family and they had a guitar, so I put my camera down and I asked them who they were and whether they wanted to share their story with me. And they said yes, and that was a couple of years ago and it was still one of my favorite pieces. [EDITORS NOTE: Audio from [Notes to Remember](#).]

Bethany Swain

I still get chills and I've seen this story hundreds of times.

Michael O'Connell

Yeah, it's pretty amazing. And just as a lesson in resourcefulness for a reporter, being in a tough situation and going that extra step and finding something.

Megan Cloherty

Let's talk about pacing. I think it's something that you don't realize unless you've edited and you have that moment at the end, where it fades out and you have a quiet moment. There's not sound there, but there doesn't have to be. Tell us about how you put this together and the guitar's perfectly, you know, put through the whole thing, but there were moments, there were editing choices in there where you brought it down or you brought it back up. Tell us about that.

Bethany Swain

The pacing is an important part with really taking the storytelling to the next level, because I could have cut this really, really fast. If you watch a lot of my stories, there's a really quick pacing to it because I like to change the shot up. I like to show you, if I'm only going to get your attention for 90 seconds, I want to show you everything that I can.

But this was something that didn't have that kind of pacing. You can't see it here, you know, but we're seeing the images of the family that he was there with his wife. You were seeing them putting the flags in. You were seeing that headstone. And, I thought each moment needed to breathe a little bit, you know, to be able to go with the music.

And I actually edited this piece when I shot it, the next day I was going to a wedding, so I sat in the back of my car and my husband drove. But I didn't want to pass it up. To me, this was too powerful of a story to be able to not be told. And it was 15 minutes that I spent with them and it still has this impact on me and I how that we're still kind of keeping their son's memory alive. I actually showed this at a conference and there were some members of the military that were in there and they knew him. And they were excited to see that he's still being remembered.

Megan Cloherty

I think that the interesting thing too is a lot of stories that we see about remembering soldiers and their sacrifice, you see pictures and you kind of go back into the people that they were and their lives. And this was just very, it was that moment at the grave and you had the detail shots. But again, a choice, you could've gone back and showed his picture over things or done fancy effects and had him fade in or whatever. Why did you choose to kind of stay in that moment with them?

Bethany Swain

Some is, that's just my style, so I like to be able to be there because I feel like my role is to capture that moment. Here it was. It was the weekend before Memorial Day weekend and this was what it was like in Section 60 for this family, because, especially working for CNN with an international audience, most people, they are not going to be able to see it. They're not going to know what it was like and what was going on there. And by adding in effects, I think that can take away sometimes, as well as, if your images are compelling enough, then you do not need to add in all the extra elements in order to make your story sing.

Michael O'Connell

I think the amazing thing is, and I think this is an excellent example of how you're telling a very big story with a very small thing and connecting with people on an emotional level. That's a role, I think, of all of us as journalists, it isn't always obvious with people who just think we go to meetings and write down facts, that we actually have to figure out a way to connect what's going on in the moment and with the people that we're observing and interviewing and connect that in meaningful ways. I think this is an excellent example of how sound and video can do that.

Megan Cloherty

I think too, when you start shooting, at least, when I started shooting, it's intimidating to walk up to people and ask them. It's easy to have a conversation and have them tell you that story face to face. I almost felt sometimes that I had to convince people that it was going to be OK if I took their picture or if I had video. And a lot of times too, you have to do it even if it is uncomfortable. Tell me about that. Obviously, you're teaching people how to do this, so I'm sure you've run up into this before, but how do you get over that hurdle, even if it's all in your head? How do you move past that?

Bethany Swain

That's one thing in my Intro to Multimedia class, in their very first class, one of their assignments is to go out and do something that's outside of their comfort zone and tweet me and tell me what it is.

You need to go beyond just what is the societal norms of, "OK, I'm just going to stay in the corner here and I'm going to sit in my seat." You know, and listen and be OK with getting up and asking those questions, because you can't get the answers unless you go in and ask them.

Again, it's a practice thing. Going in and just having that self-confidence to be like, "This is important and what I'm doing is valuable." So, by talking with people and getting them beyond just like, "No, I'm not the paparazzi." So, for the story at Arlington, I put my camera down and I went and asked them. And I knew it could go two different ways. Either they would want a private moment or they would want to share the story of their son. And I'm just glad that they wanted to open up and share that story.

Megan Cloherty

There are so many situations too where you may have said "No." And I've been like shocked that people said "Yes." You know, when you show up at someone's door if they've lost someone and you have to do it. You have to go and knock on the door. Sometimes people just want to share and it's surprising to me.

Michael O'Connell

And my experience is, and we used to run into this all the time when I was working at The Connection newspaper, which was a weekly, community newspaper. And we dealt a lot with the high school student who gets killed in a car accident and going interview-

ing the family and interviewing the friends. There are some people who are like, they say, "Oh, you're a reporter. You're just like a vulture." But I've found that the large majority of the people that we spoke to, spoke to us. They wanted to talk to us.

And if there was some hesitancy, the reporter would say something to the effect of, "All I want to do, I don't want to intrude. All I want to do is, your son, your daughter, this is the opportunity to tell their story." And I think a lot of parents, a lot of families react to that, that they realize this is their opportunity to do that.

And I also think that this is one of the really, really important roles that we have as journalists that doesn't get talked about a lot. Is that we can be, we're not vultures, we can be somebody who helps people through something. We can be a platform for them to, again, tell their child's story, to help them to grieve and to remember in their own way.

I had a reporter who, a similar situation, a girl who was killed a couple of weeks before graduation and he went to their house. The parents, clearly grieving, invited him in. They went up to their daughter's room and they were walking around their room and talking about things. She had a white board. She was one of these people who would write very powerful, inspirational things on it. The message that she had written last was still there and they talked about that. So, you could look at it one way, that we're sort of intruding on that, but we're actually, part of our job is to help people and to tell their stories and to take it to that emotional level.

Megan Cloherty

Have you ever had an interview where you feel like it's almost too emotional? It would be hard to get there, but have you ever had one where you kind of feel like you need to scale back a little bit?

Bethany Swain

Nothing that comes to mind. I've done a handful of stories trying to honor our fallen military and but it's always stuff that I'm proud to share.

Megan Cloherty

How do you shoot an emotional story differently?

Michael O'Connell

Or do you?

Megan Cloherty

I mean, it's hard when you're having that connection and you got to make sure that your sound's coming in and you've got to make sure your shot's — I mean, you do. And it's kind of hard. You almost get like pulled into the moment, at least I have. And then you realize that I'm not on bubble.

Michael O'Connell

Can you say that again? I didn't get that.

Megan Cloherty

When you're, this is all from a video standpoint, when you have a tripod, a lot of times there's a little bubble to make sure you're in the middle.

Bethany Swain

Make sure it's balanced.

Megan Cloherty

And if you're not, you're just a little bit off, it just throws the whole shot. But stuff like that can happen. How do you make sure you're doing it right when you're in that moment?

Bethany Swain

It's a practice, so I have shot so many stories that I am not needing to worry as much about the gear and it's much more natural, that I know what I need to be doing so I can focus on getting those moments, cause it is really important to be able to tell those stories and be able to make sure you don't miss anything because, absolutely, there are some times that I've cried. As a journalist, we're supposed to be objective. That doesn't mean that we can't have emotions and if something is legitimately sad, it might impact me. Making sure that we capture that so that we can let our audience have that same kind of experience. That's kind of what the goal is.

Michael O'Connell

That's a good barometer that you should always keep, that you have to remember that you're a human being. If something makes you sad, makes you feel a certain way, you need to be in touch with that, because that makes you be able to tell that story that much better.

Megan Cloherty

It's funny too because a lot of the guests that we've had in here, we've been talking about how much their jobs have changed, but in this interview, it's more about how much it's the same. No matter what you're using, you know, you still have emotional interviews. Your equipment's still going to mess up, whether it's an iPhone or if it's not an iPhone. Tell us, outside of whatever story you're covering, how do you think photojournalism has changed? Do you think there's more women? Do you think the technology ... tell me, you can kind of answer it however you want.

Bethany Swain

Sure. There isn't more women yet. CNN still has just, now that I'm not there any more, there were six women domestically and now there are five or there were five and now there's four.

Megan Cloherty

Why is that?

Bethany Swain

It's a good question. That's something that I'm hoping to look more into. Some of that is historical. So, there hasn't been a lot of hiring, so it's people who've had these positions have had them a long time. The title used to be cameraman. That was how much that it was something that was expected, that it was a man that did it. That's what they were called. It was was a cameraman. And, the equipment is heavy. When I'm 5-3 with my shoes on and people see me with it, it's very common out in the field I get a reaction of like, "Oh, can you handle it? Do you need help?" You know, surprise that someone of my size can be able to lug all this around, but it's like, "Yeah, I can because I want to."

I think that in journalism schools now, there are more women than men. Hopefully, the industry's going to change, because I think it brings some different aspects to my storytelling, to be able to go into a room and, when you're working with some of these men, who are big and who are overpowering, where just in their physical presence, they can be intimidating sometimes. I'm definitely not intimidating. I may think sometimes I can get people to feel more comfortable, whether it's from my shooting style or because that I am not physically overbearing.

Michael O'Connell

It's funny. I've heard people in the past sort of debate about female reporters versus male reporters, can you read a difference in their writing? Can you see a difference in the way you tell a story from the way a man tells a story?

Bethany Swain

I think there are too many variables to know, though, if there were more women out there that were doing it and telling these stories that can easily be compared to the men, there's a lot of things that are different of mine than my colleagues, but is it because of my background? Is it because of what my passions are?

Michael O'Connell

Or that you're 5-3 as opposed to 6-4.

Bethany Swain

Yeah, so there are a lot of things that I would not just blame the gender difference. There are just too many variables.

Megan Cloherty

As far as technology goes, I was just thinking about like apps, you know, Instagram, and is that changing anything you do? Do you use Flickr? As far as putting your stuff up online, what are you OK with as a professional and what are you kind of have disdain for? I know that some photographers are like, "Oh my gosh, if you put a filter on my stuff I'm going to kill you."

Bethany Swain

Right now, I'm kind of embracing all the things that are out there. I love Twitter. I love the fact that I can interact with my students and other journalists that way. I use it kind of as a platform to reach out and, yeah, I'm fine with Instagram and playing around with the images.

I think where the technology has really changed is what I kind of mentioned before with when I was in middle school and I would shoot film and would have to wait a week for the pictures to come back. Now you can share things instantly. Now I'm thinking, "Oh gosh, I didn't take a picture of me yet of me being here now and I surely should have." I tweeted I was coming.

Michael O'Connell

I know.

Bethany Swain

It's that kind of pressure of trying to make sure that I take advantage of all these outlets to let my students and my followers know, "Hey, I'm here. It's going great." You know, and to be able to keep them up on that and take advantage of it. But also, there are some terms of service that are sketchy with some of these different organizations.

Michael O'Connell

Who owns your work?

Bethany Swain

Yes. Who owns the work and I think it's more so much in stills than video, because it's much easier to take a still and transmit it and to manipulate it than with a video. The files are larger and just being used in different ways.

Michael O'Connell

To sort of wrap up our discussion here, what are your hopes for where photojournalism is going at this point? Where do you hope it'll be in five, 10 years?

Bethany Swain

I hope that there's a lot more diversity, though I hope that the statistics of how women photogs who are out there, that it's much closer than it is right now. I also hope that our audience continues to be engaged and that they appreciate the difference between something that is just snapped with an iPhone and something where someone has taken a lot of care to set up lights and use the really high-end cameras in shooting.

With the DSLRs, you can shoot video now with cameras that were traditionally done for stills. Just this week, one of my colleagues at the university, Josh Davidsburg, was having a presentation. We were talking about, we have discussions all the time. He loves the DSLRs. I think that there's so many audio challenges that, you know, we're still try-

ing to figure out what's worth it. But I know five years from now, that the DSLR cameras are going to figure out those audio challenges, so it's going to be much easier to bring down the cost to go in and shoot, not just with your iPhones, but with these professional quality video cameras.

You know, at CNN, our equipment, I'm sure if you put everything together in our vans or Explorers, it's probably \$200,000. And now you can get some of that same quality with equipment that's \$10,000.

Megan Cloherty

Exciting. It's more accessible.

Michael O'Connell

Yeah. Certainly the Internet, with mobile phones, everything, has created more access for people, more journalists and non-journalists to be able go out and tell stories. So, I think, we live in exciting times, at least I like to think so.

Well thank you very much Bethany Swain. This was a wonderful discussion. Thank you very much for coming in.

Bethany Swain

Thank you. I appreciate it.