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The Axe Files - Ep. 174: Gayle King

Released September 25, 2017

David Axelrod: [00:00:00] Gayle King, it's so great to see you again. I see you in the mornings but-

Gayle King: [00:00:05] I remember you, David Axelrod. Listen, I was flattered you asked me to do it. So I'm glad that we could finally sit down face to face.

David Axelrod: [00:00:12] Yes. So, you know, the world is full of these stories about people who fight their way up from hardscrabble roots and everything. So I want you to tell me about the mean streets of Chevy Chase.

Gayle King: [00:00:26] I know, isn't that something? Yeah, it's very tough in Chevy Chase. Well, I think first we have to go to the mean streets of Ankara, Turkey for me, because you know.

David Axelrod: [00:00:33] Yes, I want to talk about that as well.

Gayle King: [00:00:37] I actually envy people who can say "I was born and raised in" and fill in the blank, because I don't have that. We moved around when I was a kid, so I don't have hometown, homegrown roots and I envy people that have that because it anchors you. But, you know, I was raised- my formative years were in Ankara, Turkey from first grade to sixth grade. And at the time.

David Axelrod: [00:00:58] Your dad was an electrical engineer.

Gayle King: [00:00:59] He was a electrical engineer who worked for the government, and we were sent to Turkey. People say "Gayle, your dad was not an electrical engineer." I go, "what was he?" "Oh, he was clearly in the CIA." People tell me this. And I said "No, I was never told that." "Well, you wouldn't be told that. You wouldn't be." But it's interesting, David. When he died, I was going through some of his things, and I found a card that said E. Scott King- his name was Scott King- E. Scott King, pass to go to the White House, to the west gate, or something. And, by then, you know, I don't even know if my mother knew it. People said, you didn't have a black man who was in Ankara, Turkey in the 60s who- he had a room that we couldn't go in. He was a Ham- Ham was his- listen to this. Ham was his hobby, I was told. And he had a room that we could not go in. And he would be there all hours of the night. Doo doo doo doo doo doo. We were not allowed to touch anything. We were.

David Axelrod: [00:01:57] This really raises some suspicions.

Gayle King: [00:02:00] I know. Now that I'm older, I'm starting to think about it for the first time, but I'm telling you, growing up.

David Axelrod: [00:02:05] You didn't see him talking into his shoe, did you?

Gayle King: [00:02:12] No, never his shoe. His pen. I mean, I think about it now, and I've sort of asked people, "do you think that he could have been?" And people say, "oh yeah he definitely was." But I have never known that, and still don't know that. I was always told he was an

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electrical engineer and we were sent to Turkey and we were there from first grade to sixth grade.

David Axelrod: [00:02:26] And what was that experience like?

Gayle King: [00:02:29] Well, you know, when you're a kid, you just go where your parents go. And so, I don't have this- oh we lived in, you know, blasé, like you're smoking a cigarette, oh I lived in Ankara, Turkey. I have very clear memories of going to Paris, going to Athens. I remember touring the Acropolis. It was very hot. Saying to my parents "why can't we go back to the hotel and go swimming as opposed to looking at these rocks?" And my dad said "one day you're going to appreciate this. This is very important, what we're doing." Now, I pull out my pictures of me in sixth grade going "this is me in the Acropolis." See, very well traveled child.

David Axelrod: [00:03:04] What did you learn about the world? I mean, not just the sightseeing, but what, I mean did you have exposure to Turkey when you were there?

Gayle King: [00:03:11] Oh yeah, you know, all of my friends were Turkish. I'll meet someone and I'll say- they'll say they're Turkish and I'll go, "Merhaba Nasilsiniz?" and they go "oh, you speak-" That means "hello, how are you" in Turkish. And I say I lived in [unclear]. And I say, "that's all I know- my address and hello, how are you." But I can remember, you know, playing with Turkish friends. I had some American friends, too. I could speak it when I was a little kid. I can't speak it now. And, you know, just the cultures are very different. You know, the Muslim religion was very different to me. You know, I can remember going to a Turkish friend's house for breakfast and they have you know bread and tea and don't have eggs and bacon and pancakes, and I remember having 15 pieces of bread. And I remember the mother talking to the daughter, "well she eats quite a lot?" And I'm thinking "this is all we're having? Just this toast and tea?" So it was very different cultures. But I loved it. I loved it.

David Axelrod: [00:04:07] And when you watch the news from Turkey now- because this is a very fraught time in Turkey- does it, do your memories go back to that time? And how do you process what you see?

Gayle King: [00:04:17] I don't, because, you know, my life was going to school, playing with friends. And so, I didn't have any historical perspective. I didn't really even become interested in world events until I was maybe in college. I remember, as a kid, we had to watch the news and I remember saying to my dad "it's so boring." He would say "again, you should always know what's going on in the world- always.

David Axelrod: [00:04:40] Walter Cronkite?

Gayle King: [00:04:41] Yes. Coming back to Turkey, coming back from Turkey, I did a lot of reading, because we didn't have television, so I was very smitten with TV and we had to sit as a family and have dinner tonight- dinner together and watch the news. And, there again, I would say "it's boring" and he goes 'you should always know what's going on in the world.'" So, one of my big regrets, my dad died when I was in college, at a very early age, 46, that he didn't get a chance to see this. But, on some level, I think he's seeing it.

David Axelrod: [00:05:09] I have the same thing- my dad died when I was 19.

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Gayle King: [00:05:11] 19. I know, we were young David.

David Axelrod: [00:05:14] Yes. And so it's sad, you know, to think that he never got to meet my kids, my, now my grandkids. He was older; he would have been like a hundred and something now, so he probably wouldn't have met the great grandkids. But, but, but that is sad.

Gayle King: [00:05:29] But you do miss a little bit of that, for him to have seen, and what you've accomplished, and what you've done. Everybody wants that.

David Axelrod: [00:05:35] Yeah. Well, you know, I'm sure you have a little of this. I just always hope that there's a little bit of him in me, you know what I mean.

Gayle King: [00:05:43] Yeah.

David Axelrod: [00:05:43] But, you know, I'm interested in your experiences because, you know, and I actually I related to the guy I worked for, Barack Obama, who grew up; spent some time in Indonesia. How does- how does it change your- I know you didn't study world events, but you were immersed in a different culture and you were aware that there was a world beyond America. How did that change your thinking and how does it affect your thinking now?

Gayle King: [00:06:18] Well I think it makes you a lot more tolerant about things. You know I'm very open to all different kinds of cultures and ideas. And I'm used to seeing and being around people that don't look like me. I'm used to, you know, fitting into, I think, all different kinds of situations. And so, I marvel when I meet people who say "I didn't see- I never even met a black person till I was in college," or a black person that says "I didn't spend much time around white people." So, you know, so I just think it gives me a different perspective about life in general.

David Axelrod: [00:06:50] And it wasn't just your experience in Turkey, but as I alluded to earlier, you grew up in some pretty tony places. And my guess-

Gayle King: [00:06:58] Yes, Tony would be the word.

David Axelrod: [00:07:01] Tony.

Gayle King: [00:07:01] But I didn't know they were Tony then. I didn't. I can remember coming home, saying to my mom, because I got teased in seventh grade, we lived in Menlo Park, you know in Atherton, I grew up in a house that had a pool and, you know, so I had been a very privileged kid and I remember the black kids didn't like me. They called me Oreo cookie. Ansara. Nobody wanted to hang out with me. And I can remember getting a D- because I couldn't bring myself to get an F- I can remember deliberately flunking a test to get bad grades. My dad said "why did you do that? I know you know this material." And I said "because the kids don't like me, and I thought, you know, if I got a bad grade, they would like me better" and he said, "well, do they?" I go, "Well no." You know, they're still calling me Oreo- Oreo cookie- black on the outside, white on the inside- and Ansara. And he said "you should never ever try to change who you are to get people to like you." So I was always, I was teased by the black community and I remember thinking "hmm, what can I do to fit in?" I'd invite them over to come over and go swimming as a way to get in their good graces. So, you know, those kind of things

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really- I don't want to say scar you- but I do think about that. I do think about that. And now I feel it's silly to try to change your life or change your personality; dim your light to fit into anybody ever.

David Axelrod: [00:08:22] It's- it's also, it's difficult because we live in times in which we seem to be more siloed. And social media has something to do that. The economy has something to do with that. But, you know, it- and I think it showed up in this last election because people who voted for Hillary Clinton were stunned that Donald Trump could win, and I have a place in rural Michigan and the people there all had Trump signs in their yards. They couldn't- they had no; they thought it was crazy that Trump wouldn't win, you know.

Gayle King: [00:08:56] Well, I mean, I think a lot of people felt that, but I think- I'll hit that in a second- but I think one of the reasons why Barack Obama resonated with me in his speech in 2004 when he said the part about being educated and reading a book.

David Axelrod: [00:09:09] Yes. That was a powerful moment-

Gayle King: [00:09:09] I know, I thought, oh my god, he's talking about me! I mean and I've never ever forgotten that.

David Axelrod: [00:09:16] So we have to get past the slander that says a black child reading a book is acting white.

Gayle King: [00:09:22] Yes. Yes. Because I'd say, what does acting white mean? Or, you speak proper English. What does that mean? Shouldn't we all be speaking proper English? But, what's so interesting about the election of Donald Trump- I remember that night so clearly because we had a meeting at 5:30 where it said you know the numbers are coming in; this is going to be an early night in TV news. We'll be able to call the election by 11:00, which- because the polls, as you know, close on the West Coast at 8:00.

David Axelrod: [00:09:49] Right.

Gayle King: [00:09:49] So, you can't call an election before everything's closed. So we'll be able to call this by 11:00 and we'll probably have an early night and we'll go home by midnight. Well, as you know, that didn't happen and we were here till three or four. So I think everybody was sort of stunned.

David Axelrod: [00:10:03] Although it became pretty apparent pretty quickly that it wasn't going to work out the way the analysts, including me, said it was going to turn out and I think part of it was that there was misleading data out there. Part of it was just frankly the elite filter. I mean, because nobody in Manhattan or downtown Chicago considered the possibility.

Gayle King: [00:10:32] Or David, what do you think about this? Do you think that people told the truth in the polls?

David Axelrod: [00:10:38] Well, I think there's an element of that. I think there's an element of that. It's also- but, you know, there's also something to do with turnout models and, you know, you base it on the last election. And if they change that throws the whole, the whole model off.

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But, you know, you mentioned Obama and your identification with with him. I remember when I was working for him when he was just running for the U.S. Senate- he was a state senator- and he was not really a front tier candidate when he started and he went down to southern Illinois closer to Little Rock than Chicago. And this kid who was traveling with him called me and said "hey, we just had a great session in this VFW hall down here" and I said- and I was surprised. And that night I talked to Obama and I said, "I heard you had a good day." He said, "so why you sound so surprised?" I said, "well, you know, a black guy named Barack Obama in deep Southern Illinois. I thought it might be-"

Gayle King: [00:11:34] Its different.

David Axelrod: [00:11:35] "-challenging for you." And he was, he was actually taken aback. He said "no, you know, I go in there and I talk about my grandfather who fought in Patton's Army and my grandmother who was a Rosie the Riveter in World War II and we have a good time." And at that moment I realized this guy felt comfortable in any room he walked into. There was no audience that he didn't feel comfortable- he could go into the inner city; into the suburbs; into these rural communities. And at a time when the country was so riven, that was a real gift. It was absolutely a consequence- now, obviously, he came from a a family that was mixed so.

Gayle King: [00:12:21] So it was not foreign to him. You know, I remember, when I first heard about him I couldn't remember if his name was Barack Obama or Obama Barack. I remember calling someone, saying "what was the name of that guy you were telling me about? That guy in Chicago? Is it Barack Obama or Obama Barack?" Now, it's funny to even think that. Because we have to say both names were unusual. But that's what I think about the president of the United States. It should be somebody- black or white- who can relate to everybody. That's why, you know, when you say the president of the United States of America, it really should mean that. And you should feel that your president, whether you voted for him or not, is connected to you. I have great, great, great respect for the office of the presidency, regardless of who's in the White House at the time. I have great respect for that office.

David Axelrod: [00:13:04] I sat in the office next to the president and you have greater respect when you are there and you see what comes to that desk hour after hour- a lot of which is never known, but it's so complex. President Obama always used to say "nothing comes here if it's easy- if its easy someone else deals with it. Only the tough ones come here." And it is- it is remarkable, but it does beg the question when you say it should be someone who speaks to the whole country whether you think that Donald Trump is doing that?

Gayle King: [00:13:35] Well, you know, there again I go back to when he was first elected and they went to the White House and Barack Obama said I'm going to give him the benefit of the doubt. And I think that we all should support him because we want him to be president of the United States and we want him to succeed. That's the thing- we all want the president of the United States to succeed. And I think depending on where you stand you could say either it's working out very well or it's not. I do feel that the country is very divided and that concerns me; that concerns me. Do we place the blame at him? I don't know if that's necessarily the case but I do think that we are very divided. And I'm very afraid about that.

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David Axelrod: [00:14:17] So you're in an interesting position because you see Americans every morning. You deliver the news. You talk to newsmakers from left to right. There's a certain expectation of you that you should be fair and objective and I think you do a good job.

Gayle King: [00:14:35] It's not hard to me to be fair and objective. We're also human beings.

[00:14:39] Yes, but you also have views.

Gayle King: [00:14:41] Yes. We're also human beings

David Axelrod: [00:14:42] So is that hard for you? You strike me as someone who is without guile. And one of the reasons that you- I mean I think news is like a little bit like politics in that authenticity is the most valued thing you can have and you have that.

Gayle King: [00:15:05] I agree.

David Axelrod: [00:15:05] You have that in part because you seem willing to say whatever's on your mind.

Gayle King: [00:15:10] And that gets me into trouble David Axelrod.

David Axelrod: [00:15:11] I know, I'm trying to get you into trouble.

Gayle King: [00:15:14] That gets me into trouble. Because, you know, what I've been told is "people don't want to hear your opinion. You are here to deliver the news."

David Axelrod: [00:15:21] That may be true on the news but not on the Axe Files.

Gayle King: [00:15:25] Yeah but there are some times that something will happen whether it's politics, whether it's human nature, whether it's just something that I find egregious, whether it's, you know, a police shooting that I see, you know, where something just happens that you go, God, I just can't ignore the fact that that just happened. And, you know, I try to be very judicious because I know that people don't tune in to hear my opinion. I really do think that we do a good job on that. You know, in terms of delivering the news- that you can deliver a news broadcast and not take it to silly school but you can have fun too. But you're right. You're raising something that I think is very important, because sometimes it is very difficult not to say "can you believe what we just saw? Or, why did they say that? Or, what are they doing?" That's very difficult.

David Axelrod: [00:16:08] Well, I've heard you challenge politicians.

Gayle King: [00:16:11] It's not challenging; it's just inquiry.

David Axelrod: [00:16:13] No, no I understand. But, it's disarming in that you say the stuff that I think people are thinking. I will not mention the politician, because I don't want to impugn anyone here, but there was a politician who was on your show, not long ago. And that politician said something and it was so patently political that anybody who was watching you would know that and you said "OK, I'm going to ask the same question and I want you to answer this time in not political speak."

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Gayle King: [00:16:43] Well, you know I think- I think it's hard sometimes to interview politicians, because they come with a list of talking points.

David Axelrod: [00:16:52] I used to write those.

Gayle King: [00:16:52] Oh yeah, did you? Well you're very annoying.

David Axelrod: [00:16:58] I've been told that. Including, by my clients when I gave them talking points.

Gayle King: [00:17:02] You're very annoying, David Axelrod. Because, what you want is to have a real, true conversation with someone. And I'm never trying to do a gotcha or "you said this and how come you're now saying this," because I also believe everyone has a right to change their mind, but sometimes people do have to; you do have to point out thing, but I always strive to get like a real, genuine breakthrough moment with a politician and most of them are so skilled, they have an agenda. You can ask a question with a politician and they will give you a totally different answer because they're so ready to stick to the talking points.

David Axelrod: [00:17:34] No, no, believe me, you know, this whole thing.

Gayle King: [00:17:36] You wrote the talking points.

David Axelrod: [00:17:36] Yeah, although I will say that the person who is- the person who- Obama was probably one of the most resistant to them and you know the fact of the matter is, I was generally, you know, we would talk about what we wanted to get across and he would get it; get it across in his own way and generally more effectively than any talking points would allow. Sometimes a little over long; that was a battle we had for ten years.

Gayle King: [00:18:08] I've heard him described as a long talker, with all due respect.

David Axelrod: [00:18:11] And once you become president, it's even harder to tell someone, "you know, sir, the seven minute answers probably aren't-" He didn't- his thing was "I always want to give them a complete answer.

Gayle King: [00:18:26] Well, that he did.

David Axelrod: [00:18:27] Yes. But, getting back to your life, you you didn't set out- as you said, you weren't even focused on current events until you were older and you didn't study- you went to University of Maryland, you didn't study journalism.

Gayle King: [00:18:44] You know what, David, I've always liked listening to people's problems, so I thought I'd be a great child psychologist, or a psychologist. Even today. I love listening to people's problems and giving unsolicited advice. I did it the other day on an airplane. A guy was sitting there talking to me about his girlfriend and that she was going to be meeting his family for the first time and he was a little nervous about that, blah blah blah. So I followed up to check with him to see how'd that go? Did they like her?

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David Axelrod: [00:19:10] And did they?

Gayle King: [00:19:10] They did, they did.

David Axelrod: [00:19:10] Oh good. So, you gave good advice.

Gayle King: [00:19:13] Yeah, she was a different culture than she was and he was worried about that: he was Jewish, she was not.

David Axelrod: [00:19:19] Yeah.

Gayle King: [00:19:20] So, I love- I've always liked people, always. I've always been a Chatty Cathy kid; have always enjoyed interacting with people. So, I thought I'd be great in psychology, which I majored in. Or, then I thought I'd go to law school, because I also thought, argue my case in front of a jury? Wouldn't I be good at that, Zane? Zane is shaking his head. He's the engineer.

David Axelrod: [00:19:39] Yeah. Zane's our engineer.

Gayle King: [00:19:43] Zane's our engineer. He's shaking his head; yes, I'd be good at that; so presenting your case. But I was working part time at a- I got a part time job as a production assistant; entry level position at a TV station and I walked in there and I was hooked by what I saw.

David Axelrod: [00:19:57] Why did you go? Why did you get the job in the first place?

Gayle King: [00:19:59] Well, because I was working at a camera station which was next door to the CBS station, which was WTOP at the time. And all the muckety mucks used to come in to get their film, you know, back then when you'd say, "do you want matte or glossy? Double prints or not?" I was that girl behind the counter. So I was filling out the forms and one of them happened to be a high level executive who said, "Have you ever thought about TV? You have such a pleasant way and you have a beautiful voice." I go, "I do? I never thought anything about my voice.

David Axelrod: [00:20:29] Nobody said matte or glossy like you.

Gayle King: [00:20:31] That's right. Very impressive with that. Or 4 by 6 or 5 by 7! So, he said "you know, we have an entry level position. Would you be interested?" And I did something that you never do when someone's handing you a gift: "Do I have to work weekends?" He goes "well, Gayle, no, you have to work nights, can you swing that?" And so, I really took it- and he was being very sarcastic because when someone's offering you a gift you don't; you don't challenge the- you know what you say, David: "thank you.

David Axelrod: [00:21:00] Yes. Unless you're 19 or 20 years old. And then you don't know what to do.

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Gayle King: [00:21:06] That's exactly right. You're 19 or 20; you go "oh, I don't really care about TV; so what do I have to lose?" And then I got in the newsroom and I was hooked. I just thought, breaking news story-

David Axelrod: [00:21:15] So tell me about that- you know, I relate to that as well because I was a journalist; you know I started at the Chicago Tribune and spent my formative years there and it was such an exciting place. I was on night for a few years. But the newsroom was just, it's like it never slept. Everything was, you know, anything that was happening, you were right in the middle of it. Good way to know a city too.

Gayle King: [00:21:43] You have a front row seat! Front row seat. And imagine when there's breaking news. Imagine when there's breaking news. So, I became hooked. And you look at the newspapers today, with the New York Post. I mean, not New York Post, The Washington Post. I'm saying that because the New York Post is in front of me. I was talking about the Emmys the other day. I was very into the Emmys. You look at the The Washington Post and The New York Times and they are killing it. And I just think it's so important to have a working press. And it is our job to challenge; we are truth seekers, is really what we are. The heart of what we do-

David Axelrod: [00:22:14] Though there more than a few people who doubt that.

Gayle King: [00:22:18] I know, I know. But I'm talking about the really good ones, the really good ones who really love this job: we really are truth seekers.

David Axelrod: [00:22:25] You know, I'll tell you something. I think the Times, the Post, you know, the Journal, USA Today, there are- and I know you read all of these papers- they are doing a great job. It is concerning what's happening to just local newspapers around the country who are really struggling. I know Dean Baquet, the editor of The Times, spoke to this recently- that's where the- you know, in Chicago, the papers are struggling. Some cities, their papers have basically folded, they'll have a digital presence. It's a tough business.

Gayle King: [00:22:58] Well as long as there's people who are- you know, one day we're all going to die off, I realize that- but, people my age; I still love picking up a paper. I still like the feel of it. I still like the smell of it.

David Axelrod: [00:23:11] I'm with you.

Gayle King: [00:23:11] I still like turning a page. But, David, pretty soon, we won't be here anymore.

David Axelrod: [00:23:14] Well, you know, my kids, who are grown- they're about the same age as yours- they never read newspapers.

Gayle King: [00:23:22] I know; mine don't either.

David Axelrod: [00:23:23] I used to- in the 2008 Obama campaign, I used to read newspapers incessantly and rip stuff out and put it in a folder. And these kids would look at me like what are you doing?

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Gayle King: [00:23:33] Go sit down dinosaur man.

David Axelrod: [00:23:35] Exactly, exactly. And I'd have this big stack and I'd be fumbling through them. And it was; I did feel like a dinosaur.

Gayle King: [00:23:43] Yes it is; it's very- it is very disconcerting. But there's still something we can do.

David Axelrod: [00:23:48] Content- content lives. It's just a question of how people can make money doing it. So, you decided you were going to have a career in journalism. You went to Baltimore?

Gayle King: [00:23:58] So I went to Baltimore. You know, it's amazing what creative writing can do on your resume, without lying. So I took that as, you know, I was an entry level position. I would write the copy. I would organize the slides; you know, back in the day, if you were talking about City Hall, I was the one that pulled the slide that said City Hall; I was the one that typed in the chyron for the names. You know, the president of the United States is the only one that doesn't get a chyron.

David Axelrod: [00:24:25] Chyrons are the lower third type.

Gayle King: [00:24:28] Yeah, where you see their name. Like it would say David Axelrod or Gayle King or Zane. Zane, what's your last name?

Zane Maxwell: [00:24:34] Maxwell.

Gayle King: [00:24:34] It would say Zane Maxwell, engineer.

David Axelrod: [00:24:34] We've done 180 of these and this is the best that Zane has ever had because no one has ever paid attention to him before.

Gayle King: [00:24:44] Well, I know you can't do this without a crew, David Axelrod.

David Axelrod: [00:24:47] I know. He's indispensable.

Gayle King: [00:24:51] So, we can't do this without Zane.

[00:24:53] But you know what else he's thinking? He's thinking that I should say we need to take a short break and we'll be right back with Gayle King.

Gayle King: [00:25:04] Oh okay, alright.

David Axelrod: [00:25:05] So you were saying you organized your- you were in charge of the chyron, the stuff that you need for the visual presentation.

Gayle King: [00:25:11] Yeah, the visual. That's what I did. And, and don't forget.

David Axelrod: [00:25:17] This was in Baltimore?

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Gayle King: [00:25:18] This was in Baltimore. And don't forget, you know running the prompter, you know, so, back in the day before it wasn't all in the computer, you had somebody who's physically putting in the scripts on a conveyor belt like I Love Lucy and turning the prompter. So that was my job and a couple of times I ran it backwards accidentally for the anchor. That's never good. Or the things sped up when I didn't want it to. Also never good. But so I did. It was a very entry level position.

David Axelrod: [00:25:45] Have people done that to you subsequently?

Gayle King: [00:25:45] A couple of times.

David Axelrod: [00:25:47] And are you more tolerant because you were a foot soldier?

Gayle King: [00:25:50] I actually am; I actually am. It takes a lot, David, actually, to get me mad. Because I think that we're all grown ups. Nobody intends to screw up.

David Axelrod: [00:26:00] Some more than others.

Gayle King: [00:26:00] Some more than others. Nobody intends to screw up. So I very seldom really get angry. But when I do get angry it really is like "oh she's really mad. So I'm very happy-

David Axelrod: [00:26:11] So, it has impact.

Gayle King: [00:26:14] It does, as opposed to someone who's always screaming and hollering and pissed off all the time. I was never that. That's just not the nature of my personality in general.

David Axelrod: [00:26:21] So one of the prominent anchors in Baltimore was someone who became a good friend of yours.

Gayle King: [00:26:29] Yeah, that's how Oprah and I first met at the station in Baltimore. We were both 21 and 22. We were young and black and single. And I was- there was a big storm in Baltimore- which speaks to who she is because in a newsroom hierarchy, the production assistant is down here low to the table, and the anchor is way up here over my head.

David Axelrod: [00:26:50] She was an anchor at 22?

Gayle King: [00:26:51] I know.

David Axelrod: [00:26:52] Man, that's something.

Gayle King: [00:26:53] Well, she had started at 19 in Nashville and then she was brought to Baltimore. It didn't last long- her job there. Then, that's how they took her off the news and put her on daytime TV, which, as we see has worked out for her.

David Axelrod: [00:27:06] Turned out to be OK.

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Gayle King: [00:27:07] Yeah, its worked out OK. But, I mean, she heard that I was stranded and said "why don't you spend the night at my house?" And I didn't really know her well but I ended up spending the night there and we ended up talking all night long and realized we had very like minded philosophies and liked and disliked the same people. So, you know I told that story years ago and it's somebody- the headline was "The Night I Slept at Oprah's House and Wore Her Panties." And now, when you take that out of context, it sounds weird because I did wear some clothes; I did borrow clothes. But that's how we became friends and we've been friends ever since.

David Axelrod: [00:27:43] Yeah, I mean famously, you've been friends. You've done a lot of things together. You started a magazine together that you continue to work on to this day.

Gayle King: [00:27:52] I'm still- that's my other job. So I have CBS This Morning and then I go over to O the Oprah Magazine and so it really is two full time jobs and they say, you know, it's always bad to work with friends. And I think both of us never really worried about that, because at the end of the day, it's called O the Oprah Magazine, not G the Gayle Magazine. So, at the end of the day, you know she always has final word. And so that was never going to be an issue for me. And still isn't.

David Axelrod: [00:28:17] You know, what's interesting to me about your relationship is, for a very long time, your identity for a lot of people- not in Hartford Connecticut where you were an anchor for 18 years and I want to ask you about that- was, well she's-

Gayle King: [00:28:36] Oprah's friend.

David Axelrod: [00:28:36] -Oprah's sidekick. And you were.

Gayle King: [00:28:39] I would say Oprah's best friend. Sidekick makes it sound like a comedy duo. But I was known as Oprah's best friend, no question about that.

David Axelrod: [00:28:46] And so much so that she wanted you to come and take over her show.

Gayle King: [00:28:51] When she was going to get- when she was leaving. You know, people would say, if I would meet somebody and they'd say "Hey Gayle," I just assumed they were from Connecticut. "Oh, are you from Connecticut?" "No, I'm from Detroit." I said, "You're from Detroit? Then how do you know me?" "Oh, because your Oprah's best friend. I saw you on the Oprah show." So that was always like, oh OK. To me, my identity was anchoring the news in Hartford Connecticut and I think its kinda funny.

David Axelrod: [00:29:19] And, so now. I mean Oprah's still Oprah.

Gayle King: [00:29:24] And I'm still known to a lot of people as her best friend.

David Axelrod: [00:29:27] Except you, now- now millions of Americans see you every morning.

Gayle King: [00:29:32] Yes they do.

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David Axelrod: [00:29:32] And you've got- you really have your own identity. There are lots of people who watch the Morning News who have no idea about Oprah.

Gayle King: [00:29:40] That's true.

David Axelrod: [00:29:41] So I guess my question to you: is is that liberating in some ways? I mean, was there- did you feel like you've recaptured your own identity here?

Gayle King: [00:29:51] Well, you know, what's interesting is, I never felt I lost my identity. I always, I always saw myself honestly shining in her light, not in her shadow. So, I take- you know. I'm proud that I'm her best friend. I think, listen, I think it's cool to be her best friend. I have never seen a downside to be the best friend of Oprah Winfrey. In fact, if you're trying to get in somewhere and you can't get in, I'm thinking, God I wish I had an Oprah T-shirt on right now. Jar somebody's memory. So, I have never, I've never shied away from that.

David Axelrod: [00:30:22] But now you can drop your own name.

Gayle King: [00:30:26] Yes, I drop Charlie Rose's name. "You know, I anchor the news with Charlie Rose." But now that I'm on CBS, a lot of people know me in a different light and you know, it's funny, when I first started on this show, people thought oh she got that job because she's Oprah's friend and then people saw me and went, "whoa, how did you learn how to do that so fast." Well, I've been doing it for really over 20 years and people were surprised that I even had a job, David. They thought, you, you've actually had a job. Yes. I've been working a very long time. So that was always-

David Axelrod: [00:30:57] That's interesting that it didn't- that, that's healthy.

Gayle King: [00:31:02] Well, because, you know why, it's you know why: because I always liked my life. You know, I would go to her house and it's wonderful, as you might imagine. You know, she's always made a gazillion dollars in comparison to me. You know, I was making 12; she was making 22. And I remember thinking, God what if you made.

David Axelrod: [00:31:21] Thousand, not million.

Gayle King: [00:31:23] Yeah. Yes. Never been million. Twelve thousand. And now- and I'd say "wow, what if when you turn 30, you make 30,000." So, and at that time, I was married; I had kids and I would come home and their stuff would be all over the place after leaving Oprah's very posh place. And I would come home and I would just be so happy that I was home. So, I never coveted anything that she had. And I think, when you're happy with your own life, you can feel that. So, that's why it's never been an issue for me to feel lesser than, or god, I wish people knew who I was, because I was always happy doing what I was doing where I was doing it.

David Axelrod: [00:32:01] One question about Oprah and then I want to talk about Gayle King. You've been resistant to- you've said in the past that you don't like to think in terms of brands, especially journalism.

Gayle King: [00:32:15] Oh, I hate that word.

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David Axelrod: [00:32:15] Yeah, I do too.

Gayle King: [00:32:16] I hate it.

David Axelrod: [00:32:16] I do too. I used to- I used to resist it for public, you know, figures and I was in charge of sort of, I guess, developing brands but I didn't want to think; I don't think of people in public office as commodities that, you know.

David Axelrod: [00:32:30] Why don't we like it because I don't like it and now I see these young people-

David Axelrod: [00:32:32] Because it sounds manufactured; it sounds synthetic.

Gayle King: [00:32:32] It does! I just- it sounds very extra, as the kids of today say. And I see these young people- Zane, you know that word, extra. And I see these young people saying "oh, well that's not good for my brand" and I go "brand? Who are you? People don't even know who the hell you are and you're talking about oh, that's not good for my brand; I can't do that" so I'm very resistant to people saying "well what is your brand?"

David Axelrod: [00:32:58] But, there probably are few more distinctive brands in American society and media than Oprah. I mean, she has a brand.

Gayle King: [00:33:09] She's been resistant to it. But now, I think she has to acknowledge she has a brand. Yeah.

David Axelrod: [00:33:13] I mean so much so-

Gayle King: [00:33:14] But I don't think her brand has anything to do with my brand, whatever that is.

David Axelrod: [00:33:19] No, no. I mean, I think you've- like I said, I think one of the things that is interesting to me is you've got your own thing now, very distinct, although I think some of the things that make her attractive to people also make you attractive to people and that is the ability to talk to people in a genuine way. So. Did you learn stuff from her? Did she learn stuff from you?

Gayle King: [00:33:46] Well I think that we're both very similar. I mean, we just had- we were talking the other day about something and we said a phrase at the exact same time when we were referring to something. So, you know there are times that, when we were younger, people would say "I can't tell you guys apart, if you're on the telephone" because people would say, your inflections are the same; you all speak a lot together. And I'd say, "she's stealing my line! I said that." So we're-

David Axelrod: [00:34:14] Its comforting to have a friendship like that.

Gayle King: [00:34:16] Well, you know what I realized, David, the older I get: a lot of women don't have a best friend! And I just assumed everybody had a best friend, or had somebody that they're close to. And I'm seeing now a lot of people don't have it, or they have friends that they

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don't trust. Or, they have friends that aren't really friends and are not wishing the best for them. I mean, I think Oprah and I both feel we were always honest with each other. I've never had a time where I said something or she said something that I thought she's saying it to be mean, even if I disagreed, I never thought it was something that she was saying because it was hurtful. And I think she feels the same about me. And that you can totally trust- it's good to have somebody you can totally trust. That's why, you know, people- I've been approached many times about writing a book- you'll like this- and I go, "what's my book about?" "Well, you know, you went to school in Turkey. And, you were married and divorced." And, I said, "OK, and?" "Well, maybe you could write something about friendship." What happened to my very interesting life? So, and I also feel that when you've been in the inner circle, I don't like seeing people in the inner circle write books that portrays what happened in the inner circle and I think when people approach me- although the other day, somebody asked me if I wanted to write a book about parenting- but, normally, they want to talk about friendship and what that was like and bumps. And I would just never do that.

David Axelrod: [00:35:42] You know, I wrote a book a few years ago that was an autobiography called Believer and you were kind enough to have me; I mean you were great-

Gayle King: [00:35:51] We had you and your book on the show.

David Axelrod: [00:35:52] You did and you actually read it. Which you do, I know you do that-

Gayle King: [00:35:54] Oh, I do. Yes.

David Axelrod: [00:35:54] -because I've seen you interview other authors. But when I went to pitch the book to publishers- and I talked to maybe eight of them- you know, some of them were, "Well, what can you tell me about Obama.

Gayle King: [00:36:12] Yes.

David Axelrod: [00:36:13] And, I said, "this isn't- that's not what this book is about. And if that's what you want, that's not"- the publisher that I ultimately went with was someone who said, you know there are gonna be hundreds of books about Obama; we're interested in your story and they were very faithful to that. But, I understand that.

Gayle King: [00:36:32] And they want you to just- and when they say, "what can you tell us about Obama?" or "what you can tell us about Oprah?", it's really about the dirt. They don't want to hear any of the good stuff because-

David Axelrod: [00:36:43] What are the ten bullets that can drive the news?

Gayle King: [00:36:47] Right.

David Axelrod: [00:36:47] No, there's no doubt about it. And, I think there were people who were frustrated when I wrote my book that there weren't- you know, I wasn't dimming out people and so.

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Gayle King: [00:36:57] Well, you a story to tell because really you had a front row seat and you can talk about it and it doesn't have to have negativity about it; you can talk about what you went through.

David Axelrod: [00:37:06] You have a- but you have a story too. When I called you and asked you to do this, you said why, why, what am I going to talk about? I'm not that interesting.

Gayle King: [00:37:12] What are we talking about? Yes.

David Axelrod: [00:37:13] So you mentioned parenting.

Gayle King: [00:37:16] Yeah.

David Axelrod: [00:37:17] And you've got two grown children now.

Gayle King: [00:37:19] Yeah, they're potty trained and employed. They're 30 and 31. And they're awesome.

David Axelrod: [00:37:25] You were fully engaged in your career in journalism when you were raising them and you got divorced when they were young.

Gayle King: [00:37:33] Yeah. They were young; they were little guys. They were four and five. And, you know, you read all these stories about kids of divorce are all screwed up or it's going to be very difficult. I was very fortunate, if you can be fortunate in a divorce, because divorce is very painful. And nobody I know wants a divorce, in most cases. But I was very fortunate in that, when I got a divorce, I didn't have to move. You know, so many women have to either move out of the house that they were in, or they're left with nothing. You know, he moved, and I didn't miss a beat. We still stayed in a really lovely home. They still went to the same school. So, their lives weren't uprooted and neither was mine, in terms of, you know, I now don't no longer have income coming in. So, knock on wood, I'm very grateful to that. And so mine isn't the typical story of, you know, your life is turned upside down. Other than a personal level- that was turned upside down. But, in terms of security, emotional security and financial security. And, for Kirby and Will too, we didn't have to go through that.

David Axelrod: [00:38:37] And, in terms of your own time, as a single parent, how did you organize yourself in such a way as to- because this is the struggle that a lot of parents go through. Now you had resources, as you point out, so that helps.

Gayle King: [00:38:52] Yes, I did. I did.

David Axelrod: [00:38:53] But resources aren't a substitute for the other the other elements of parenting.

Gayle King: [00:38:57] No, because I wanted to be very engaged in their lives and I was. You know, there was an article, you know, somebody said something about helicopter parenting and I called Kirby and Will and I said "did you guys think I was a helicopter pilot?" and Will said, "well, what did Kirby say?" And I said, "I'm asking you." He said "what did Kirby say?" And when I called Kirby, Kirby said, "I hear choppers." So, I never thought of myself that way, but I was

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very engaged and very involved and I think that that's a good thing. I wanted them to know that, you know, what they thought- I wasn't a parent that wanted to be best friends with their kids. I think parents make a big mistake with that. We are not equals; we are not peers. And this is not a democracy. I want to hear your opinion and your opinion matters to me, but at the end of the day, I'm going to make the call. I would call it "mommy decisions" when they would say, "why can't I? That's wrong." I said, "Well, I heard your opinion" and sometimes I could be swayed, but I was very- I don't think I was strict, but I had very definite do's and don'ts. And I think kids ultimately, David, they don't, you don't think they do, but they really do want structure. When Will was maybe 11, 12, you know, he had asked to go to a friend's house. I said, "Will, you can't go, I just don't think that that's good." Then his friends came in, said, "please, Miss King, can he go? Can he go?" And I said "no," and I looked at Will and I said, "Will, do you really want to go?" And he goes, "yeah, I really want to go" and I said, "alright, you can go, but you have to be home by X amount of time." They left the room and Will came running back and said, "why did you say yes?" I go, "You told me you wanted to go." "Well, I never thought you'd say yes." He told his friends, "come and ask my mom." He goes, "I never thought you'd say yes. Why did you say yes? I don't want to go!" And I cracked up and then I realized, they really do want the structure of that. Because I thought, maybe I am being too tough, maybe OK- and he was 13- maybe I should loosen the reins a little bit. And then it was; it was quite a lesson to me to realize they do want the structure. They really do.

David Axelrod: [00:40:56] We're going to take another short break and we'll be right back with the Axe Files.

Gayle King: [00:41:00] On the Axe Files.

David Axelrod: [00:41:09] Let's talk about your current project, the CBS Morning News, because people sort of- first of all, it was a new concept. I mean, first of all, Charlie Rose. Everybody; everybody knows Charlie as the guy at the table having lengthy conversation.

Gayle King: [00:41:24] In a dark room.

David Axelrod: [00:41:24] In a tent, essentially. He's like Gadhafi. You know, he's got his little black tent and you have to go and see him in it.

Gayle King: [00:41:35] Yes. And he's; he's used to being alone, too, David. So, he's used to being alone; he's an only child. And so, what you know about him is that he plays nicely with others and he's very generous. But just think about that pairing for a second; in the beginning, it was me, Charlie and Erica Hill. And people would say, you know, Charlie Rose and Gayle King, how is that possibly going to work? So, as a matter of fact, Oprah said to me, "that's the worst idea I ever heard. But if they offer it to you, you should take it. But, its the worst idea I've ever heard, it's never going to work, blah blah blah"

David Axelrod: [00:42:07] And let me ask you a question, at the beginning, were you- am I imagining this or were you not on in the first half hour-

Gayle King: [00:42:15] No, you're not imagining it. I was- you didn't see me. You didn't see my smiling face till 8 o'clock. But I was told that in the beginning; I was told that. So it's not like I felt snubbed. I was told by Chris Licht, who you know, "this is what we're going to do.

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David Axelrod: [00:42:29] He was executive producer. He is now with Stephen Colbert; doing pretty well over there.

Gayle King: [00:42:32] Look at Chris Licht's record, by the way. Because he started Morning Joe, and people thought what's that going to be about? Then he started CBS This Morning: he's the reason why I'm here. Because I used to do Morning Joe from time to time, so I said, "I would have loved to be in the room when you proposed my name. Did you hear crickets? What happened when you said, 'you know what would be good? Gayle King?'" But it was proposed that we're going to do two hours: Charlie would drive the first hour and you would drive the second. And the first hour would be hard news. The second hour would be hard news and we would add other things; pop culture related things, politics. It would be more diverse. So, that was the original game plan. And then, you know, gradually they started adding me at 7:30 and then they added me at 8:00 and then, and now we have the team, me, Norah and Charlie.

David Axelrod: [00:43:15] Was Charlie resistant to having you there at the beginning and doing hard news?

Gayle King: [00:43:19] If he was, I never heard about it. If he was, I never heard that. And, in fact, I think that he was actually encouraging it, to be honest with you. I think that, you know, he was hearing very good things in the streets about, you know, I love the chemistry between the two of them; we want to see more of her. I think that from the very beginning and I didn't know him well, you know, he went to do Duke, favorite son Will went to Duke, so I would see him at Dukey events and I knew, of course, that he was Charlie Rose and I'd see him at, you know, social things but I didn't really know know him the way I know him today. But I think, it's funny, when they came to me, David, and they said "you know, we're doing something new." And I said, "Who would the co-anchor be?" They said, "well, we can't tell you, because we want to find out; gauge your interest." I said, "well, I can't tell you if I'm interested if I don't know who the co-anchor. Am I interested in news? Yes. Am I interested in morning TV? No, not really because the hours are so shitty; getting up that early isn't for me. So, it'd have to be something really great. So they finally told me that it was Charlie Rose. And I go, "does he know you're talking to me?" That was my first reaction. Well, you know how this business works, they wouldn't have approached me if he hadn't signed off on it.

David Axelrod: [00:44:27] Your second should have been, "how the hell is he going to get up at 3:00 in the morning?"

Gayle King: [00:44:31] Well, he has adjusted because we know that Charlie is a night owl. But, you know, he's also a consummate professional. We're both very curious and, knock on wood, so far, so good. It's worked out okay.

David Axelrod: [00:44:44] Yeah, well, you brought in Norah O'Donnell.

Gayle King: [00:44:45] Yeah, so she came maybe eight months in; they decided they wanted to make a change. And she came and you know, I really don't remember a time, when it wasn't the three of us, to be honest with you. I don't really remember that.

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David Axelrod: [00:44:59] Well that's sort of when they finalized the chemistry. It's interesting, you know, people don't- I don't think people- they may, if they think about it, get to this, but casting on these things is incredibly important. People want to believe that people want to believe that there is a relationship between the folks who they wake up and watch every morning and that they don't hate each other; that they enjoy each other's company, because you don't enjoy their company if you don't feel they're enjoying each other's company.

Gayle King: [00:45:33] It makes it uncomfortable for people to watch a morning crew that they don't think gets along. And nobody wants to be made to feel uncomfortable in the morning. You know, so you look at some of the other stations.

David Axelrod: [00:45:49] So, it happened at The Today Show.

Gayle King: [00:45:50] Well, yeah, I mean, I think they're going through it now with, you know, Megyn Kelly's new show is starting soon. There was just an article this morning about how people are saying, "oh, what's going to happen; what's it going to be like." I like her very much and I'm cheering her on. But, already, you have people that are drinking big old glasses of haterade and I just think that there is enough in this morning morning tableau, if you will, that there's enough for everybody. But chemistry is an imperfect science and you can pick people that look really good on paper and then you put them together and you go, "what the hell, that just isn't working." We didn't have that; we really blended very, very quickly, I have to say.

David Axelrod: [00:46:28] The other inspiration that David Rhodes, the president of CBS News, and Chris Licht had was that there was an opening for a harder news show and that sort of ran counter to the philosophy of morning television- you saw Good Morning America going in a different direction, Today trying to compete with them. And you guys tried to take a different piece of real estate and you have.

Gayle King: [00:46:52] Well, you know the thing was the news in the morning aren't just hollow words and our mantra was that, you know, we were going to deliver hard news and that we were going to do a newscast and that it would be professional and it would be smart. And I think we've delivered on that. But the beauty is, there's something for everybody in morning TV. But every day, somebody says to me, I used to watch X and now I watch you guys, because I like what you're doing.

David Axelrod: [00:47:17] You guys are up like 45 percent since you started it.

Gayle King: [00:47:20] We haven't been number one, David, since and I know you'll know this- Zane, you won't- Captain Kangaroo.

David Axelrod: [00:47:25] Ah, yes.

Gayle King: [00:47:25] Zane, do you know Captain Kangaroo? Zane is shaking his head no.

David Axelrod: [00:47:28] We've got to get- Zane, you're going to have to get Mike from now on. If we're going to be weave you in, you have- people can't see you nodding and shaking your head.

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Gayle King: [00:47:37] Well, he's very cute and we should take a picture of him and put it on the website.

David Axelrod: [00:47:40] Captain Kangaroo was out of our youth; was a morning show- they were number one.

Gayle King: [00:47:47] They were number one. So, CBS hasn't been number one since Captain Kangaroo. And so they've tried- there have been many iterations of the morning news, but this is the first time, David, that they can see a noticeable shift in the numbers.

David Axelrod: [00:48:01] What you need is Mr. Green Genes, remember him? He was part of Captain Kangaroo.

Gayle King: [00:48:02] Of course, I remember him. Zane does not.

David Axelrod: [00:48:02] No, we can stipulate that. Who are the the most interesting people- thousands of people have passed through there- who are the most interesting folks that you-

Gayle King: [00:48:20] Well, I've always liked Michelle Obama. We had Michelle Obama early in our- when we came on and she agreed to do an interview and it came just at the same time as Jody Cantor's book and I kept thinking, she's going to cancel, she's going to cancel, she's going to cancel, and she didn't.

David Axelrod: [00:48:34] A reporter for The New York Times wrote a book.

Gayle King: [00:48:36] Yeah, a reporter for The New York Times had written a book about the Obamas and Michelle Obama in particular. But, I think, you know, it's not celebrity driven- quite often, the stories, I love the.

David Axelrod: [00:48:46] Stop for a second- because the Obamas, you're friends with them-

Gayle King: [00:48:49] Yes, I would say that. Yes.

David Axelrod: [00:48:53] And you've been on trips, vacations-

Gayle King: [00:48:58] I plead guilty, hello, my name is Gayle. What's your point, David Axelrod?

David Axelrod: [00:49:03] Well, it's a question, it's not- does that create problems for you? Do people- does it make your bosses nervous that you're socializing with the people you're covering?

Gayle King: [00:49:16] I think it makes them nervous when- because you do socialize with people that you're covering. I mean, you know, I socialize with a lot of people that I'm covering. I think it makes him nervous when its the president of the United States. But, you know, I know a lot of political figures. I know a lot of actors and actresses.

David Axelrod: [00:49:35] Does make it hard for you to do your job-

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Gayle King: [00:49:39] No.

David Axelrod: [00:49:39] When you- your friends are under attack. I mean, I can speak to it, they're friends of mine as well, obviously. Does it- does it create in your mind a difficult situation because you're angry?

Gayle King: [00:49:55] Well, I don't know, you also have to remember that you have a job and there are some hard questions that sometimes need to be asked. And I never felt that being friends meant that you couldn't bring up topics that may be uncomfortable. I never felt that. And I don't think they did either. I don't think they did either. You would know the answer to that. But I never felt that they did and I think when you're president of the United States, you know, there is a certain scrutiny that is- there's no getting away from the scrutiny and you're under the microscope. And if I'm anchoring the news that day and there are some questions that have to be asked, I never did shy away from that. You know, I always- you never like it when your friends are going through something difficult. I will say that. Regardless of what they do, you never you never like to see that.

David Axelrod: [00:50:44] So, I interrupted you and you and you were talking about other people who you've interviewed who you found really fascinating.

Gayle King: [00:50:52] Well, I mean, I like what we did, you know, the other day, on the news, following the flooding in Houston. That reporter who just- her name is Brandy Smith- she was the only one- her station was flooded out- she was the only one who was broadcasting on the air through Facebook and she and her crew ended up rescuing a guy and you saw it in real time. I mean, I was fascinated by this young woman, that she had the presence of mind to do that. And then at the end.

David Axelrod: [00:51:19] That's coming from an old news anchor; local news anchor so you must have related to her.

Gayle King: [00:51:25] I know. I love local news. I do, I still love local news. But she had the presence of mind to flag down someone to get this guy out of his truck and pull him out. She literally did save his life while it's all happening live on TV. And there are some people that you can see, well they're having a TV moment. This is all for the cameras. That was not- there was something- and you feel this when you see people- that was not what was happening with this girl. She was genuinely concerned and when it was all over she said, "Can I just give you a hug?" Because she was she was so amped up and her adrenaline was going about what had happened. That was just very, very sweet to me. I mean, I will remember a story like that longer than somebody who may have been the most important interview of the day, just because I was touched by her humanity.

David Axelrod: [00:52:11] The world is full of great stories.

Gayle King: [00:52:12] There are, David, and they come out in times like this.

David Axelrod: [00:52:16] There are also- other things come out in times like this too. I happened to watch your interview with the president- I think she's the president of the Red

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Cross- during the hurricane. Questions about how the Red Cross is using resources that they are given during these difficult.

Gayle King: [00:52:33] Because where do they go? I hear all these complaints about, you give money to Red Cross, does it really go to the hurricane Harvey? Or is it going to subsidize other things that the Red Cross are doing? Operating expenses or other catastrophes? When you give, you want to know, I'm giving to the Harvey people. That's where I want my money to go. And so, I did think that was a fair question and I was surprised that she didn't know the answer to-

David Axelrod: [00:52:57] And you pursued it.

Gayle King: [00:52:58] -how much money have you raised. Yeah, but, I wasn't trying to make her uncomfortable or.

David Axelrod: [00:53:03] No, she had talking points and she could not get past her talking points. That was- you could take; you could have taken that tape and taught a class on crisis communications and said this is exactly how you should not answer.

Gayle King: [00:53:20] Or just be ready because, as you know, they weren't hard questions; they were just relevant questions about how the Red Cross was handling Hurricane Harvey.

David Axelrod: [00:53:28] Let me ask you, Hillary Clinton- her book just came out.

Gayle King: [00:53:31] Yeah, she did Sunday Morning. We tried to get her. Yeah, I was bummed.

David Axelrod: [00:53:34] I didn't mean to touch on a sensitive nerve there about bookings.

Gayle King: [00:53:40] Its very sore. I feel no bitterness.

David Axelrod: [00:53:44] But if you, if you did have her, what would you have asked her?

Gayle King: [00:53:47] I wanna know how she really felt. I mean, you know, there are so many times- you know, the fact that she didn't win was shocking to many people. And now I feel that she's getting, getting a lot of negativity because people feel she's whining. Maya Angelou used to always say, you know, never whine because it lets them know there's a victim in the neighborhood. But, I really do want to know when she realized that there was a problem in the campaign. And what does she think that problem was and what's her responsibility to that problem. I mean, I think the fact that, you know, that Bernie Sanders could get so close to Hillary Clinton and stir up division in the Democratic Party should have been a big sign that, you know, we are not united; that the Democratic Party was not united as a party. And I think that, you know, it sort of splintered and I think.

David Axelrod: [00:54:45] I think there was a reliance- there was an overreliance on the notion that Trump was so objectionable to Democrats, that whatever their differences, that they would-

Gayle King: [00:54:53] That the Democrats didn't have to worry-

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David Axelrod: [00:54:53] A lot of them stayed home, you know.

Gayle King: [00:54:56] Well, now, you know, listen-

David Axelrod: [00:54:58] She did win by three million votes nationally.

Gayle King: [00:55:01] She did; she won the popular vote. I think that's a better conversation, you know, because I think that when you win; when you have more votes at the end of the day, I think you should have won whatever the race is-

David Axelrod: [00:55:11] Yeah, well that's not what the Constitution says.

Gayle King: [00:55:13] I realize, but I'm thinking maybe we should have a conversation about that.

David Axelrod: [00:55:17] Well, she's starting that conversation.

Gayle King: [00:55:20] But, I don't think that- you know, I feel, myself- I voted for Democrats and I voted for Republicans. I am not from the school that because you're a Democrat, you don't have a good idea, or because you're a Republican, you don't have a good idea. I really do feel that there are good ideas in both parties.

David Axelrod: [00:55:36] On Hillary, the reason I raise it is because you're a great student of people. And, what was your observation of her as an interview subject and as a candidate? Not as an author looking back, but as a candidate in real time? Because my sense was part of her problem- you probably know her or met her socially. Part of the problem was that she was very reserved and she very much stuck to talking points and that was too apparent.

Gayle King: [00:56:06] Yeah. I can't say that I know her, know her. But, everybody wants to feel they're seeing the real you.

David Axelrod: [00:56:12] Especially, when you're running for president of the United States. Nobody ever says, "gee, I wish Donald Trump would speak his mind." Sometimes they say, "I wish he wouldn't speak his mind."

Gayle King: [00:56:20] You always know. But, you know, Chelsea- her favorite daughter- went to Stanford and Kirby- my favorite daughter- also went to Stanford and we were having a conversation and she said, "don't you know when you go to Bed, Bath and Beyond and you're pushing the cart?" I mean, it was such a small thing, but it was so true. And, I thought, gosh, if people saw that about her. She goes, "I remember pushing that cart and just crying because Chelsea was leaving." You know, when people can see that about you, and it's not fake and it's not phony. That was not a phony thing she was saying. That was a mother whose daughter was going off to college for the first time and you just have that "ugh" in your gut when you know that they're leaving home and I thought, boy, I wish people could see more of that about her.

David Axelrod: [00:57:01] I want to point out for our listeners that that is an authentic New York City siren outside of the CBS Broadcast center.

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Gayle King: [00:57:08] And that is a unique horn right outside.

David Axelrod: [00:57:09] We are not adding the sound effects- that is actual, authentic sound effects.

Gayle King: [00:57:14] That's New York!

David Axelrod: [00:57:15] Gayle King it is great to be with you. Nobody ever would say you are inauthentic.

Gayle King: [00:57:23] No, nobody would- no. Nobody would say that. That's good!

David Axelrod: [00:57:24] That's a gift. That is a real gift.

Gayle King: [00:57:29] I'm not even trying to be a gift. I don't know how to do anything else, honestly. I thank you. I thank you for coming here today. Thank you too, Zane! Zane said you're welcome.

David Axelrod: [00:57:40] That was fun!

Gayle King: [00:57:41] Yeah, that was!