



PHOTO BY ANDY NELSON



# Gordon Swenson

## 2006 WHNPA Lifetime Achievement Award

**G**ordon Swenson has spent nearly a lifetime behind the scenes as the go-to guy of television news — and more than a few hours in front of the camera as a fun-loving fall guy.

He has worked for nearly all of the major television news shows, building a resume that makes for a hearty serving of alphabet soup — WTTG, ABC, CBS, NBC, TVN and GAS Productions.

On the way to his current position as editor/producer for ABC News' *Nightline*, Gordon has worked with some of the biggest names in journalism, from Walter Cronkite to Ted Koppel. Over the years, Gordon has witnessed the end of news film, the beginning and end of videotape, and the dawn of digital editing.

Gordon started in broadcasting at Duke University in 1957. His first paying job in journalism came at WTTG-TV in Washington.

Then there was that time he spent in front of the camera. Because of his connections in television and advertising, Gordon was persuaded to become a stunt man. And why not? With more than 400 parachute jumps under his belt — and having survived two parachute malfunctions — he remembers thinking, "You're young, and you don't think you can die."

Gordon's most memorable stunt-man moment was for a side job he did in 1965 for a Ford Motor Co. commercial. After a 7,000-foot free-fall, he parachuted into a dealership, then drove off in a new Mustang convertible.

Try *that*, Ted Koppel.

There have been many unforgettable assignments behind the camera. Gordon spent 50 nonstop hours cutting a complicated five-camera film shoot from two continents for an interview with India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi for a special one-hour edition of *Meet the Press*. For several months during the Watergate scandal, he used his expertise as an "engineering liaison" to help nine foreign networks edit and feed their news stories from WTTG-TV. To cover the O.J. Simpson trial, Gordon commuted for nearly a year to Los Angeles, where he had what he called "wondrous digs — and gained

40 pounds." And there was the time Gordon watched Willard Scott walk through the halls of WRC carrying his toupee by one hair "like it was a dead rat."

When hostages were taken at the U.S. Embassy in Iran in 1979, ABC launched "America Held Hostage" as a nightly update. Gordon edited for what was to become *Nightline* from the very beginning and has never left.

For his travels with *Nightline*, Gordon was in Jerusalem during the 40th anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel. At the famous *Nightline* town meeting in the Jerusalem Theater, Ted Koppel had to straddle a 3-foot symbolic wall to separate the Palestinians from the Israelis in order for the program to go on.

Gordon traveled to Moscow for a couple of weeks for the presidential election that put Vladimir Putin in office. He lived two blocks from Red Square and helped to edit six shows during a historic moment in Russian history.

Numerous awards honor Gordon's work for film, tape and digital editing, and they come from, among others, the White House News Photographers Association and the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences. He has earned the Exceptional Merit Media Award from the National Women's Political Caucus and Radcliffe College; The Casey Medal for Meritorious Journalism from the University of Maryland College of Journalism; and the PASS award.

His sense of artistry, his integrity and his dedication to accuracy have earned him the respect of producers, journalists and his fellow editors. They know Gordon as a professional, a gentleman and a perfectionist. His family would say he is the world's best husband, father and grandfather.

Gordon simply says he has had the opportunity to edit history. "I just love to tell stories," he says. "If the truth be known, I'd do this for free."

*The White House News Photographers Association is proud to select Gordon Swenson to receive the 2006 Lifetime Achievement Award.*