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WHITE HOUSE NEWS PHOTOGRAPHERS ASSOCIATION® LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD WINNER

My father, Dr. Gilbert Batten, introduced me to photography. I took photos of the first moon landing on the television set with his Nikkormat 35. Those moments were the preamble to my becoming a cameraman.

During my junior high and high school years I attended an arts program. I acted and played drums in a band, and I was the videographer, using a bulky reel-to-reel, black-and-white Sony deck. After graduating from high school, I attended American University and majored in broadcasting and film.

I worked as a page at WRC-TV, the home of NBC's "Meet the Press" and "The Huntley/Brinkley Report." I delivered mail, pulled copy and gave tours. I can still see those early cameramen, in their polyester coats and ties that did not match, walking about with their cameras and sound gear. That is what I wanted to do, though with a better clothing selection.

I started work in the studio running camera. Transitioning to the outside, into the field, was not easy to do so, I lied. When the desk needed a sound person to work with Shelly Fielman at the White House, I said I could do the job. We arrived on site and I told Shelly that it was my first time working the gear. He stopped, looked at me and swallowed hard. But I was a quick learner and I never went back to that studio again.

Doing sound in the field was a rite of passage. I had to earn the right to place that beast on my shoulder. I was fortunate to come up during a time when the look of the image really meant something. Having professionals mentor me in the art of shooting proved to be a valuable asset. The numerous cameras and format types have made it fun.

Starting out I was eager to do any and every type of shooting. This led me to working with one of the best producers, Ray Farkas, who helped nurture my photographic eye. One story that stands out was about bridge-crossing phobias. There I was on the Bay Bridge, a six-mile suspension bridge. The only problem was that I suffered with the same problem. I worked through it.



Before the show "Cops" premiered, producers were doing drug-related stories that involved raiding drug dens. NBC would send my partner and me all over the country because other crews would not do what we did — chase after bounty hunters and spend the night on Coast Guard cutters stopping tankers for inspection. Daily news-gathering gave way to shooting for the "mags," the on-air magazine shows with extended story lines. Shooting the restoration of the Enola Gay and traveling the world for the network are the things that photo dreams are made of.

I have always been a lover of western boots. That was the look of a cameraman back in the day. I had as many as 15 pairs. I would travel with them always. While running to get in place during the Jesse Jackson campaign, I stepped into a hole and went down. The candidate's limousine took me to the hospital and the ER doctors wanted to cut my boots off. I said no way — and I still have those boots.

I've been an eyewitness to history, covering the Gulf wars, Capitol Hill and political conventions. NBC bureau chief Tim Russert dangled the proverbial carrot in my face by offering me the position of senior White House photographer for NBC News covering the president of the United States.

Being part of an interview in the private quarters of President George W. Bush, I was taken aback when I was told to put little white booties over my new boots. He looked at mine and retrieved a pair of his special presidential boots. They had the seal of Texas on them. Jokester that I am, I took them from his hands and said thanks. He called security.

I have the memories of over 40 years in this business — and a few scars. Through it all my lovely wife, Rita, and sons Anthony and James supported me. Their understanding and patience got me through the many hours, days, weeks and even months of separation. I thank NBC for keeping me busy, and the White House News Photographers Association for bestowing on me the Lifetime Achievement Award.