

## [Transcript] Dateline NBC / Talking Dateline: 65 Seconds

Hi, everybody, I'm Josh Mankiewicz and I'm here with NBC News correspondent Blaine Alexander.  
Hello.

Hello.

Hello.

So glad to be here.

And we're talking Dateline.

Now, the episode that we're going to be talking about is called 65 Seconds.

And it's Blaine's episode.

And if you didn't see it on TV or if you haven't listened to the podcast, it's in the podcast list right below this one.

So go listen to it or watch it and then come back here.

First of all, welcome to Dateline.

This was your first episode and I hope there are many, many more.

Thank you so much.

It is very good to be here in the Dateline world, to be sitting here and talking to you about this.

It was quite an experience.

I really enjoyed the process.

So I'm glad to be part of it.

Thank you.

Now, a little bit of background for people who only watch Dateline.

Blaine's a correspondent in the NBC News Atlanta Bureau.

Parenthetically, I used to be a correspondent in the ABC News Atlanta Bureau.

But that was before Blaine was born.

And it was an interesting time when I was there.

We were all very excited about fire, which had recently been invented.

Anyway, but Blaine is a correspondent right now in the NBC Atlanta Bureau and has just finished covering the story of the Trump indictments and somehow found time to shoehorn in this episode, 65 seconds.

So tell me how working for Dateline is different than your other job.

Well, Josh, one, thank you for the best introduction ever.

And I have to say literally the first Dateline voice person expert that I had on the phone was you.

So I had a great mentor from the very beginning.

And I think that really just kind of set the tone for this entire process.

One, to answer your question, how is it different from being a normal news correspondent?

It's a whole different world.

I think that, you know, when I'm filing something for NBC Nightly News or Today Show or MSNBC, I'm rushing all the time.

I'm moving all the time.

I have quick interviews that sometimes last 12 minutes.

If it's 12 minutes, that's a long interview.

So to come into Dateline and be able to really dive into something, really read up about a person, read up about a subject or a situation, in this case, of course, Heidi Furkis, and

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really spend hours talking to somebody was an experience that I'd never had.

And I think one of the things that surprised me most is just how much I was able to learn about an individual that I never got the privilege of meeting.

That is the thing that to me, you know, because I did sort of daily news for a long time before I came to Dateline.

Just be able to spend like a couple of months on a story, you know, and hours in interview with people.

It's not easy.

It's a lot of work because you have to be, as you say, you have to be completely prepared.

But it is, for reporters, a real luxury because most people are knocking them out quickly.

Yeah.

It was like the privilege of time.

Yeah.

Yeah.

And the privilege of time is something that a lot of journalists don't get, both, you know, print TV, probably digital too, because everybody's publishing all the time.

And that's the great thing about this.

And the other thing about that's, you know, rewarding about Dateline is that, you know, we're, to some extent, sort of captive of the trial schedules.

So even if we want to go in September, but they just moved the trial and it's not going to be until November, that's the more time built in for us to learn more about the story, because we're generally not going to go until it's over because the audience wants to know what happened.

And I think that was what was so interesting to me.

I'm so used to covering things in real time.

So there are a lot of hanging chads, if you will.

You don't know how something's going to end up.

You don't know what's going to happen at the end.

But to be able to, again, really kind of jump into this and immerse myself in not only, you know, the person that we're talking about, but her friends, her family, even just the community around at the time, like learning really everything that I could about what her life was like during that time was a privilege.

Like I said, it's a privilege that we don't typically get as journalists.

And I think it makes for certainly a richer and more impactful story.

That collection of friends that you interviewed, tell me about them, because you didn't assemble that group.

Those people were already together on this with a common belief.

Yeah.

So you're talking about the friends of Nick Furkis, Heidi's husband.

This friend of Nick's kind of assembled these other people, kind of brought them together and they were all united in the belief that Nick is innocent, that Nick is still innocent today.

They came together and said that they wanted to talk about this.

What's interesting, though, is that it took several hours of background conversations

to really kind of say, OK, do we trust you?

Do we want to tell our story in this way?

So it took a lot of work just to get them to sit down.

But I think it was very unusual that we had this group of friends who came together because they were all, you know, wanting to proclaim what they believe was Nick's innocence.

Yeah.

I thought that was great.

And one by one, you sort of got through all of them.

Because I was looking at the big group shot and I'm thinking, like, that person hasn't talked yet.

And then I'm like, that person hasn't talked yet, but then eventually they all did.

Josh, we talked for, I can't remember the time, but it was well over two hours that we sat down and we talked.

So everyone certainly had a chance to have their say, as you know, we can only use a fraction, really, of these lengthy interviews that we do.

But I do think that we got a sense of where everybody was coming from.

Everybody got at least a sample or kind of like the greatest hits of what they were trying to get across in this story.

This is something that Dennis always says, but I'm going to repeat it here, which is that the real stars of the day line are the people you do not see on television.

They're the producers, associate producers, you know, the bookers, the day of air people.

Well, when you asked me, how is this different, Josh, from doing normal news?

I mean, we've got obviously we've got a great team across NBC, but the level of detail and just the level of support and how many people really jump into making these one hour and two hour episodes great is stunning.

It really, really is stunning.

I've never been part of a team like this in all the years that I've been in TV news and I've worked in a lot of places.

Talk to me a little bit about that marriage, because also quoting, quoting Dennis, it's not the murder, it's the marriage.

That's the thing we're looking at a day line because look, we could, you know, we could find bloodier crimes.

We could find, you know, we could do only serial killers, but we know we're doing stories like this one, which are, which are as much about the sort of family dynamic as they are the actual crime.

So you have this marriage in which apparently one person is up to something, at least in terms of the family finances and the other Heidi like has no idea.

Is that what you think?

I mean, that's certainly how it came across in this.

And I think that we have to remember the ages that we're talking about too, because you and I can sit here and say, there's no way that you wouldn't know that your house is being foreclosed upon.

There's no way that you wouldn't know, for instance, that, you know, what, what's going on with your checks bouncing or ask different questions.

But Heidi was 20 when she married Nick, right?

So when you kind of transport yourself back to when you were 20 years old, I think that in talking with her brother, talking with her sister-in-law, talking with her best friend and people who knew her, she was incredibly trusting to the point of, yeah, she really believed that Nick kind of had things under control, but also you don't know what you don't know.

And so when I talked with Krista, one thing that stood out to me about that conversation, was she said, yeah, today with, with, you know, the benefit of a decade plus under my belt, I would have asked different questions, you know, when she said that she was out with Heidi and her, you know, card would not work or things like that.

And Heidi said, okay, we had identity theft.

She's like, yeah, now with the benefit of wisdom, I certainly would have asked different questions.

But back then we were young.

We didn't really know how things worked.

Now if you talk with, of course, Nick's defense attorneys, Nick's friends, they say, okay, there's still no way that you wouldn't know that you wouldn't have seen letters, you wouldn't have seen things like that.

So that's, you know, their counterpoint to that.

But when you think about the age, just the not knowing does make more sense when you put into that context.

You're talking about Nick's defense, one of the, one of the familiar faces that I saw in this story was Joe Friedberg, the defense attorney who was, who represented a guy in a story that I did about a murder on Halloween in which everybody, all the suspects were wearing Halloween costumes.

So they're like the suspects, a classic date line story.

Yes.

Like the suspects were like, you know, the lion, the Riddler, the gambler, the cowboy.

He was a defense attorney in that case and one in a quiddle in that case.

So I definitely recognized him right away.

We'll talk about a couple of things in the story.

Yeah. First of all, having the voice of the victim in a story is something that we don't get very often, but it's incredibly powerful.

And it was in this one.

You know, being new to date line, I knew that right off the bat, that being able to hear from the victim is rare.

And in so many ways, telling the story, it was, I don't know if eerie is the right word, but it was certainly almost very interesting, very poetic and notable that when you hear that 911 call, those are her last words on this earth.

Like that those are her kind of final words.

And certainly as the prosecution went back when about building their case, that was in many ways what kind of led to Nick being convicted.

And so it's kind of like that was kind of like the clue that she left to point to the conviction.

In these stories, any date line viewer knows and says to me all the time on social or in

person, it's always the husband or it's usually the husband or the boyfriend.  
Right. So, you know, when you're doing one of these stories, you start or I do anyway with the idea that, OK, well, they're going to suspect the spouse right away.  
The audience is they already believe that whoever it is, it's probably, you know, someone close to them or the spouse because they've watched a lot of date line.  
And of course, that's also true in a lot of homicides.  
It's somebody that the victim knows.  
So I thought you did a very good, a very good job in this sort of leading us around enough corners that I originally I thought to myself, man, I hope this isn't Nick.  
I really hope this isn't Nick. Right.  
And I thought that worked great.  
And I thought the sketch works great, particularly in that you don't see the sketch for a while. You just see them making it, which I thought was great.  
That was so key. So as a longtime date line viewer, right?  
This is my first date line story, but I've watched it for a heck of a long time.  
And yes, I'm the same way as an audience member as a viewer.  
It's kind of like, OK, is it the husband, is it the person who's closest to this person?  
That sketch, that Michael Pie episode, I guess you could kind of call it, was so fascinating to me.  
When you talk about just kind of the details of the story that this was, really, it was just kind of one of the standout turns because there were so many pieces of it that just made it almost unbelievable.  
I mean, you look at the guy, you look at the sketch and you're like, oh, that that's the man even sitting with him all these years later.  
When I handed it to him, he said, no, that's that's absolutely me.  
Like that that absolutely looks like me.  
That's that's great because you completely expect him to say, that isn't me. And you're going to think that you're the audience.  
You're going to think, no, that's you.  
And he just admitted it.  
He said, that's me.  
That's his hands down me.  
But the fact that he was in jail or in prison, rather, during that time, honestly saved him.  
I think we could have gone so much deeper with that because had he not been incarcerated at the time, oh, he would have absolutely been convicted.  
Period. I mean, that man will be still sitting in prison today.  
If he hadn't been locked up, that was going to be Nick's get out of jail free card, because that is I mean, he is the perfect alternate suspect.  
If you're if what you're doing is looking to deflect suspicion.  
I mean, you'd never have been able to get police and prosecutors to look away from him. He was perfect, except he couldn't have done it.  
And I think in all these interviews, what was so interesting to me, Josh, is that like we pressed on that when we talked with Nick's friends,

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when I talked with his defense attorneys, I said, if Michael's Michael Pie's face was plastered all over the news at the time, did he kind of hatch this plan to say, OK, here's the guy, here's the sketch? And they kept coming back and saying, no, this was him saying, this is the best we can do. This wasn't him, you know, saying signs he'll deliver. This was the guy when he presented the sketch, according to his attorneys. It was more so, and this is what I can remember. This is kind of the best shot we've got. And so that also kind of added just another layer to this when you talk about the fact that sketch was identical to Michael Pie. That was great. And the other great booking you had in this was Rachel, because you sort of see that coming and then there she is. And you're like, oh, we're going to learn a lot more about this. I mean, that's a great like twist right in the middle of it. So, you know, one thing that I've learned in this is that so much of who sits down with us in Dateline comes down to trust because you've got a number of Dateline episodes going at one time. Like we do a number of these. But for the people who are involved, this is arguably, you know, without question, the biggest incident of their lives. And so to sit down and kind of almost spill and spend three hours talking about this, it takes a lot of trust. So these were hours of conversations that went into getting those people to ultimately say, OK, we trust you. We're going to sit down with you. Same with, you know, Heidi's Heidi's family members, her brother and her sister in law. And so, yes, when we ultimately got Rachel to agree to sit down with us and share her story, that was monumental because she shared something with Heidi that no one else on this planet shared being that she was also married to Nick Furkis and she could talk about him as a husband. She could talk about their life together. She could talk about these things that that she found. And so I really think that was crucial in just understanding the complexities of the story in this relationship. You've touched on something interesting here, which is true in almost every Dateline story, which is, you know, a lot of times we spend a lot of time trying to get people to speak with us. Sometimes we're successful, sometimes we're not. Yes, this is a, you know, this is a life defining event for so many people. And for a lot of them, like, there's their life before this happened and then there's their life since this happened. And getting people to talk about this is not always easy.

Sometimes people just don't want to do it.  
And they're they're afraid of how they're going to be portrayed.  
Or in a lot of cases, what they're afraid of is how their loved one,  
the person who's gone, how that person is going to be portrayed.  
And so there is a lot of discussion that goes on between us and the person  
we interview, long before that person ever sits down in the chair.  
And those discussions, as they did with you and and and Rachel in this case,  
can frequently take a really long time.  
Or that their motives may be questioned, right?  
You talked about the other things, the other doubts that they have.  
Like everybody sees these episodes.  
I mean, these these episodes live on and on.  
And people will see them years from now and may say, hey, why did you decide to talk?  
What were you hoping to get out of it?  
Right? Like if there is that sort of fear as well.  
So I think that's why in many ways, all of these these pre-conversations  
and the hours of work that takes to get people to talk to us really helps us  
further get to know them and better be able to tell their story.  
Yeah. And it helps you in the interview, too, because you're you're much more  
comfortable with them when you're sitting across them, if you've already spent  
some time talking to them.  
You know, one of the things that I I see in a lot of stories,  
particularly when I'm interviewing parents of of somebody who's accused.  
But in this case, I think true of that group of friends is that you're talking  
to people who essentially whether they realize it or not, they have two agendas.  
One is I'm convinced that this person I'm talking about is not guilty.  
But the other agenda is I'm also convinced that I couldn't have been wrong  
about this person all those years.  
I mean, parents don't want to admit they raised a monster.  
Friends don't want to admit that they're friends with somebody  
who could have committed murder and they never perceived that.  
And that's something you you run into all the time in this channel.  
And absolutely to your point, when I talked with Nick's friends,  
I asked them toward the end of the interview, I said,  
would you ever allow yourself to imagine a world in which you believe he's guilty?  
And his best friend said to me, it would have been easier.  
I wish I could get there.  
That would be easier for me to believe that than to believe that, you know,  
this person who I believe is my best friend is is locked up wrongly, wrongly accused.  
Right. And so it was really interesting to just kind of get into that mindset of,  
I wish I could get there.  
Like that would be easier, just this internal struggle of trying to come to terms with this.  
Now, let's I'll talk about the title.  
You know, the one part of the story that correspondents like Blaine and I



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and Keith and Dennis and Andrea don't play a real role in is the title of the episode that's written by others, people in New York. And sometimes I suggest something and every now and then they say, OK, but usually like it's something of their own. And they're they they don't listen to me. Parenthetical, they should listen to me a lot more. We all should, Josh. Yeah, thank you. But 65 seconds, I had one a few years ago called 11 minutes. So I think that you currently are in the lead for the title that represents the shortest period of time, the shortest amount of time. Just over a minute, I will I'll take that title. I appreciate that. That's a good that's a good banner to have. It's so funny to your point about how these titles are almost a mystery. I don't know if this is giving away too much of the keys to the to the sauce here, but you actually broke the news of that title to me before we started this podcast. Well, sure, we always have a working title that is that is not the one that appears on the air. But I think it's very cool because I and I'm sure you feel this way, too. Sometimes it feels like you're too close to a story, like, you know, the ins and outs, you know, the details, you know, so much the granular. And so it's good for somebody to they're working in New York, just kind of take a look at it, read through the scripts and say, ah, here's what stood out to me. Here's the title to have someone who's not as intimately involved, come up with a title for it. This story took you a while to do and all these stories take a while to do. The difference between you and me is that I was not covering an another gigantic national breaking story in the middle of this. And you were because you were all over that Trump indictment and you were NBC's like lead person on that. And I was watching your coverage of that, which, by the way, was great. I'm thinking like that would be really hard was to do that story. And then also like keeping the details of this murder in your head, because I don't do that kind of daily coverage. You do. I appreciate that. Thank you. It was unlike anything that I've ever done. It was very much almost kind of dividing myself in half because I wanted to maintain focus on the episode and keep, you know, reading and researching and learning more while all of these court filings were coming in.



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And, you know, we were dealing with the former president as well.  
I think that it's interesting, though,  
because it speaks to how different Dateline is and the Dateline world is  
while I was dealing with intense deadlines  
and just running and rushing all over the place.  
Yeah. And the story is changing in so many ways, like incrementally.  
And you have to be up on all those changes  
because they're being reported everywhere.  
A fun behind the scenes, if you want to talk behind the scenes.  
I was in Minneapolis for a shoot.  
Another I went there maybe three or four times to shoot.  
I was there for one of our interviews.  
I just left one.  
We were getting ready to head to another and something broke, a filing broke.  
And so they wanted me to confirm it.  
So I literally had to pull over on the side of the road.  
I'm working two phones texting my people here in Atlanta,  
texting a couple of sources to confirm this information.  
This is right before nightly news time.  
And so Laura Jarrett, shout out to her, our senior legal correspondent,  
called me along with the senior like, what can we report?  
So I'm dictating to her as she's writing her script.  
As I'm looking at my GPS and being like, I'm going to be up.  
I'm five minutes late. Whoops, I'm 10 minutes late.  
I'm, you know, all of this is happening in real time.  
So then I put that out of my mind, finish that and then go to the go to this interview.  
So it literally is having two different brains working simultaneously.  
That's what real reporters do.  
So hats off to you.  
That's great. Thank you.  
And mind you, can I say, you know, in terms of getting prepared for these interviews,  
that's one of the things that you told me, Josh, before I started this,  
of just how, you know, how difficult these interviews can be sometimes  
when you talk about sitting down and really just getting into deep  
conversations with somebody for two and a half, three hours,  
that can take a lot out of you, especially when they get to be emotional.  
So, you know, you giving me the tip of preparing and just kind of getting myself,  
you know, together, getting rested up really, really helps and made some of those days possible.  
Good. Well, thank you. I hope it did help.  
Well, thank you. Thank you.  
I loved it. I absolutely loved that.  
I love the process. I loved the people.  
I love the team.  
And honestly, I'm going to say this.

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I loved almost feeling like I got to know so many people that I interviewed during this process as well.  
That was really kind of a striking thing.  
And so I enjoyed this entire thing, Josh. I really did.  
That that's one of the great things about Dayline is the people that you meet when you're doing the stories.  
And I'm still in touch with a lot of people from previous stories.  
This episode is called 65 Seconds.  
The one that that I referenced earlier is the night before Halloween.  
If you want to listen to that one, which features the same defense attorney and a and also a crazed story.  
Blaine Alexander, thank you so much for joining us here.  
It was an absolute pleasure, Josh.  
Thank you for having me.  
We have been talking Dayline and and there'll be more of these more to come.