

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH SIGNE WILKINSON

Interviewed by Ford Risley

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Signe Wilkinson Interview

Risley: Okay, we're going to start. It's June 28, 2022, and I'm here in Philadelphia interviewing Signe Wilkinson. We'll just kind of start at the beginning. Tell me when and where you were born and a little bit about your family.

Wilkinson: I was born in Wichita Falls, Texas, as you would imagine. But after moving around a lot, I mostly grew up outside Philly. I went to public high school there and vowed never to move back. But having a BA in English with no other discernible skills, I came back.

Risley: Where did you go to school?

Wilkinson: At a college [laughter].

Risley: Okay. Can you tell me the name of the college?

Wilkinson: Ehh . . . I don't want to embarrass them. But I did all sorts of jobs, part-time work. One of them was for a local newspaper, the *Daily Local News*, in West Chester. I covered township supervisor meetings and school board meetings.

Risley: As a reporter?

Wilkinson: Yes, but just at night, you know. They paid \$10 a story. My editor was Dave Barry.

Risley: Wow.

Wilkinson: Before he was Dave Barry. The joke was, you make your money on your mileage expenses. You wouldn't believe how far I had to drive to go to these meetings. Anyway, so I started doing drawings at meetings. I was interested in the subjects that they were working on, which was always like, somebody who has big plans for a development on a cornfield, traffic issues. Just bread-and-butter issues of what people are actually concerned about, and I was concerned about.

Development, I think, is the reason we have so many problems with the environment because, you know, it's not just gas. We develop so that we must have gas, and we pave everything. And there go the birds, there goes the wildlife, there goes the oxygen. Well, anyway, that's my soapbox. But that was forty years ago that I was seeing it, you know. And Chester County, back then I thought it was getting developed. But right now, it's just being rolled over.

Risley: Can we back up just a little bit. So, had you always liked to draw? I mean, is that something you did as a kid? In high school?

Wilkinson: Yes. When I was at Girl Scout camp, I had a friend named Susan, whose last name I don't remember anymore. But she lived a couple of towns west, toward you. And we would make magazines and send them back and forth to each other in the US mail, which is how you had to do things. But I never had confidence in my drawing. I never had good art training in high school. I never considered myself an artist.

But when I was at the *Daily Local News*, I started doing drawings on the side of my notes. Dave Barry, the very lax editor - he's a really brilliant guy - started using some of the little drawings. They had a Friday column called, "Chester West." And just seeing your work on newsprint, as you know, it's thrilling. It's very thrilling. And so, my drawings just got bigger and then they became editorial cartoons. The one I really remember was on Limerick [Pennsylvania]. When Limerick was just getting the nuclear power plant here. And I had people coming up to the Delaware River with their pails, which were all shaped like the cooling towers on a nuclear power plant. So, yeah.

Risley: And what years are we talking about here?

Wilkinson: It was early 70s. Well, like '74 or so.

Risley: Okay. And so, these little sketches that you had started doing turned into editorial cartoons?

Wilkinson: Yes. The top editor - a really nice guy - was okay with it, until I did one on something about the church and abortion. That was a hot topic. So, he heard about it because the Catholic Church in West Chester was big and very powerful. At any rate, my sail was set. I moved into Philadelphia to go to art school and learn how to be a better artist. I enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts and worked at the Academy of Natural Sciences.

Risley: What did you learn in art school that helped you in terms of editorial cartooning?

Wilkinson: Well, compensation and color, not that we had color [in cartoons] then. Everything was all black and white. But just refining your drafting skills and having people who are much farther along to help you. I should have stayed longer. But it was one of these serendipitous things. Painting a tuba one day, I started chatting with the woman next to me, who turned out to be Kitty Caparella, who is still a very dear friend. She was a reporter at the *Philadelphia Daily News* and we started chatting. Sometime later, she took me to an art opening for Tony Auth, who was the great cartoonist at the [*Philadelphia Inquirer*] at the time. He was like, who is this twit? But, you know, everybody was all around him, everybody! And I was like pulling on his sleeve. I started going into the paper and offering to do illustrations. I think was \$35 for a sketch for the op-ed page of the newspaper. I did that, and then I went upstairs

to the *Daily News* because Kitty was at the *Daily News*. The *Daily News* was just the greatest place.

Risley: I want to talk about that more.

Wilkinson: It was just full of characters. I mean, it's like a rogue's gallery, but getting paid for being rogues! So, I was able to do freelance work and fill in when the cartoonists were gone and I built up a portfolio. Then the job came open in San Jose and out I went.

Risley: And were you able to get that because San Jose was a Knight-Ridder paper? Did that play a role?

Wilkinson: I don't even know if they were Knight-Ridder yet. Probably. I'm not sure when Knight Ridder took over because they were owned by the local owner for a long time.

Risley: Okay.

Risley: So, what year did you go to San Diego?

Wilkinson: San Jose, uh, 1982.

Risley: What was it like being a full-time cartoonist?

Wilkinson: Well, first of all, going from Philadelphia to San Jose was like going from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century. It was so different. Philadelphia was old and gray. San Jose – at the bottom of the Silicon Valley – was young, and full of color and sun and green. Apple Computer was just getting started, and Hewlett Packard had moved out of their garage and was a huge deal. All the smartest people from Philadelphia, and probably State College, were going there rather than staying here. So, it was a huge culture shock and great for me to see because, you know, I was stuck in the old world. I might as well have been in Lithuania, and then, you know, getting a burp on a ship that landed me in New York or something. It was just, it was so different.

Risley: What about being an editorial cartoonist full-time for the first time? How did that go?

Wilkinson: Slow! I mean, I was pretty terrible when I first got out, I have to say. My editor was not happy with me because my drawing was bad. Some of my ideas were pretty lame. I mean, I was getting better, but he wasn't paying me to learn I was liberal and my publisher was not liberal. His golfing friends said my cartoons "frosted them." So, if you're in the heat of San Jose, and I'm frosting them, you can imagine. But you know, we lived in a really cool neighborhood in San Jose, right in downtown San Jose, which was 12th street and Zoe Lofgren was a neighbor.

Risley: I don't know her. Who's that?

Wilkinson: She's the congresswoman from California. She's on the January 6 Committee. and on the first night of the January 6 recent hearings, she presented. I mean, she's now a big deal. She was just a neighbor back then. So, it was great. All that was very exciting. And we had Steve Lopez, who came while I was still in San Jose, came from the Philadelphia *Inquirer*. He is a wonderful writer. So, it was a lively place.

Risley: So, what made you come back East?

Wilkinson: Well, a job offer. We had just had our first child. My family's back here, my husband's family was back here. But at first, I didn't take it because I was not sure that the management at the *Daily News* was really behind the pick. I think I thought that they wanted someone with more prestige, better known, better cartoonist further along in their career. But none of them would take the job at the *Daily News*. [laughter]

Risley: It worked out for you.

Wilkinson: Well, you know, we had just bought a house. We would have stayed and we would have stayed happily.

Risley: What year was that?

Wilkinson: That was '85. So, I'd only been there three years. But we eventually decided to, you know, we came back, and we took it. I arrived back in the fall of '85 and both papers were on strike. So, I wasn't sure that I'd done the right thing.

Risley: Yeah. Wow.

Wilkinson: But put up with me.

Risley: So, how did the *Daily News* compare to the *Mercury News*?

Wilkinson: Well, the *Mercury News* was a good paper and had really nice people. Funny things happened there. I remember once, I think it was a Cambodian family had been poisoned by mushrooms that they were foraging, because they look like the mushrooms in Cambodia. But they are different. They were different and they were poisonous. I remember they were putting an illustration of a mushroom and doing all the parts. One of the parts is the volva and there was some discussion whether that was allowed in the newspaper [laughter]. And the guy, the editor was just like going, it was a young guy who was just like, "Oh, you must be kidding." So, mores have changed. We had some wonderful people working there and I'm still friends with a number of them.

Risley: What was the *Daily News* like when you joined? You described it as a rogues' gallery.

Wilkinson: Well, it was personality based. We had Chuck Stone, who was a fantastic Black columnist. Prisoners would always be turning themselves into Chuck. So, you never knew who was coming into the newsroom. Pete Dexter, who became a really well-known writer and novelist, was another columnist. And they would have back and forth [arguments] about race, and they would just hammer each other. But they loved each other. I mean, privately they just thought it was a riot. You know, it would be “You stupid honky!” and “You ignorant Black guy.” But, you know, I just wish we had that now because there’s no fun anymore. We had the “King of Debris” about trash. We had a phantom rider would go on SEPTA [Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority] and report about how what was going on with SEPTA.

So, there were really people on the street who were all over what was happening in the city, but in funny ways, and not straight journalism. So, it was a very lively paper to read and personalities. My friend Kitty had a fistfight with her boyfriend, who was another columnist and a real IRA supporter – Jack McKinney. The two of them: the hot Italian, the hot Irish. They just went at it in the stairway one day. People came up from being a copy boy to start writing. Some of our best writers came up that way. So, we had people from all economic strata. They didn’t go to journalism school. They just liked the news, and they wanted to be part of it.

Risley: Do you think your editorial cartooning and the way your views and your subjects fit with sort of the tabloid approach of the *Daily News*? Did you think it was a good fit?

Wilkinson: Yeah, because they let you go do what you wanted. I did some cartoons that I wouldn’t do now. There were a couple that I’m sorry I did.

Risley: We’ll talk about that. What was your process for drawing back when you were doing a regular daily cartoon?

Wilkinson: Well, you have to remember that when I got started, the printing presses ruled how things looked, because they were black and white. You know, only black and white, and they didn’t take shading, so it affected the way you drew. Then you got half tones at a certain point, and then all of a sudden around 2000, you got color. So, I would get up in the morning - I got a number of newspapers delivered - and I’d read them. And then I’d listen to the radio and start drawing first thing in the morning.

Risley: At home?

Wilkinson: Well, I would start at home. I also rowed on the river. When the kids went to school I’d row, and then I’d sit on the balcony of the boathouse and read the paper. That morphed into getting up really early here and doing the sketches. I’d send them to the editor. You could email them to the editor, you didn’t have to be there. And then drawing them and then scanning them myself and

then coloring them myself. There used to be twelve people in between me and the presses. And then it was just me and the press. So, the technology really, really changed how I worked.

Risley: Did you send your editor one idea a day or a couple ideas?

Wilkinson: I like to have some reaction to the cartoons because I think they're all brilliant [laughter]. But some are more brilliant than others. So, I would send it to my editor. My first editor, Rich Aregood, was fabulous. He was really, really good.

Risley: He would say, "I liked this one more than this one"? or, "This works better than-."

Wilkinson: Yeah. He would have ideas too. He'd say, "Why don't you do this?"

Risley: Was it a full day process, from start to finish?

Wilkinson: Yeah.

Risley: Did you ever try to work ahead?

Wilkinson: You know what, I tried to work ahead on September 8, 2001, when I had done a cartoon, and I thought, okay, it's in. You know, that's done. It's in. And it was nine o'clock in the morning, and I was home. My copy editor called and said, "You should turn on the television now." The planes had just gone into the Twin Towers. So, I wasn't going to put a cartoon about whatever the stupid issue was. I went in, and I did a cartoon. And that was the first time I posted a cartoon on the web the same day that I had drawn it. I didn't wait for the next day. I really liked the cartoon.

Risley: That's great. So, what were some particularly memorable cartoons?

Wilkinson: Now that one was pretty memorable because it's really difficult to do a tragedy in a cartoon, especially when you don't know how things are turning out. I mean, the buildings were still burning. And the stories were coming in about people jumping out. But there are a number that I think I'm that I'm proud of over the over the years.

Risley: Any, in particular, that stand out?

Wilkinson: Actually, my last one on Donald Trump, I really thought captured the man.

Risley: Why?

Wilkinson: This was after January 6, and he was saying, "Oh, I didn't have anything to do with it." [The cartoon] was just this huge fire where you could see the dome of the Capitol and, you know, hands coming up and this big fire, he's walking

away with a gas can that's dripping the gas and whistling. "I didn't have anything to do with it." I thought that summed up Donald Trump.

But there are other ones. I was at my daughter's house. It was a Friday night, so I just finished for the week. My daughter was on her cell phone and goes, "Ruth Bader Ginsburg just died." I mean, I could physically feel my reaction, because you could just see the world cracking apart and change coming and horror coming.

It was Friday night, so presumably I wouldn't have a cartoon until Monday. But I got an image I really liked. I went home, I drew it, and I put it out, like at 11 o'clock at night. Our editorial page was one of the ones that they did really early, so, it was set. But we had a really terrific young editor who was like, "Okay, get some new stuff in." And they got, I think they an editorial in and maybe one column. I got the cartoon done, colored, by like noon or one on that Saturday morning. I really liked the cartoon.

Risley: That was for the Sunday paper?

Wilkinson: That was for the Sunday paper. So, it was Saturday morning. But that's what's so cool about journalism. You know, you're there and there's a lot of boring stuff. But then something exciting happens, and you're right there in the front row.

Risley: What about cartoons you regret, or you maybe wish you had done differently?

Wilkinson: Well, there are a couple. There are a couple that I probably wouldn't do now, but I'm glad I did them. And I wish that if I did them now, I wouldn't be burned at the stake for them because I've always done cartoons about race and equality in prison, you know, sending Black kids to prison and all those issues all the way through my career. But I also felt like, you know, we don't talk about a lot of things that are problems, like Black kids killing other Black kids. And the stray child and mother and whoever else. And I did, I've done a couple on that subject and they are always controversial.

Risley: Did you ever have an editor say, "We can't run this cartoon"?

Wilkinson: Well, I had an editor really not like a cartoon after it ran. The only time I didn't do a cartoon was after Charlie Hebdo. People were being shunned and killed about it and I needed to defend the craft. So, I wanted to do a cartoon on it. I was still at the *Daily News* at the time. And my editor, Mike Days, who was a terrific, benevolent editor, and never gotten between me and the cartoon before heads just said, "You know, this isn't the *Daily News*' issue. I think we'll pass on doing one." So, of course, I was pissed off. And I thought about it, and I came up with a cartoon idea, which I really loved. And he, he ran it. It was a picture of the Buddha and Vishnu, a rabbi and Muhammad and Jesus. They're all in the semi-circle and what you see that they're reading a big fat book of stupid cartoons. And they'll all laughing together. No one complained that

Muhammad was in the cartoon, because it's been my experience that people only complain if you're using their symbols critically about them. If they're, if they're positive, they're all, you know, fine. And that has happened to me with the cross and with the Star of David. Almost very similar kinds of dynamics.

Risley: Did you try to balance your cartoons between local, state, national, and international issues?

Wilkinson: Local is always better and the *Daily News* was the local newspaper. So most, I would say were local. I did international ones, but my readers couldn't care less about what was happening in Nicaragua or something like that unless it really hit the news. I mean, that's not fair. People did care. A lot of people were very political, even then. But they prefer seeing the mayor skewered [laughter].

Risley: Of course. When there's somebody new in office, whether it's the mayor or the governor or the president, and you're thinking about how you want to portray them, what do you look for as a way to try to capture them?

Wilkinson: Well, you just have to learn to draw their face. And it takes a while to get a good caricature. My Trump developed over time.

Risley: Did you look for distinguishing characteristics about them?

Wilkinson: Yes, absolutely.

Risley: I guess with Trump, it was his tie.

Wilkinson: His hair.

Risley: His hair, of course. Obama, I don't want to guess, maybe his ears?

Wilkinson: His ears were big, yeah. Now he was a delicate character to cartoon because he's Black, the first Black president. And so, all our readers – not all our readers, but many of our readers – were super proud of him. You had to stay away from exaggerating his lips or other things, but he's a handsome guy.

Risley: How would you describe your style?

Wilkinson: How would you describe it [laughter]?

Risley: I'm not an artist, and I wouldn't even begin to try. I guess, when you were just beginning to cartoon, did you have cartoonists that you really liked, and you tried to learn from?

Wilkinson: Well, Tony was a huge influence.

Risley: Tony Auth?

Wilkinson: Yeah. His were the cartoons I saw every day because he was in our paper.

Risley: Any other cartoons?

Wilkinson: Well, I mean, I love Pat Oliphant. But we didn't see as many cartoons as we do now. I mean, you can go scroll through and see twenty cartoons. And then you just didn't see. You'd see them later. But there was some wonderful cartoonist. Jeff MacNelly was a gorgeous cartoonist. Beautiful, beautiful drawing style. There are a couple of others. I like the simpler ones.

Risley: Is that how you would describe your style?

Wilkinson: Well, it's a clean style, I would say. You know, not a lot of cross-hatching. Not a lot of dark, negative space. I just live in the light of positive thinking [laughter].

Risley: So, what was it like to be one of the few editorial artists who was a woman?

Wilkinson: Well, I didn't have anything to compare it to. But I, you know, it worked in my favor. I mean, the guy in San Jose was interested in diversity. So, getting a chick cartoonist was one way to do it. He had to pay someone.

Risley: Did you ever get any sort of pushback on being a woman?

Wilkinson: Not really, because my name was very ambiguous—I mostly just signed "Signe." And no one knew who I was for the longest time. I mean, now you can look up at anybody and find out who they are or get their picture. But a lot of my hate mail said, "Dear Mr. Wilkinson."

Risley: Really?

Wilkinson: Oh, yeah. Oh, almost all of it.

Risley: I never thought about that.

Wilkinson: So, I never made an issue of it to readers or publicly.

Risley: Interesting.

Wilkinson: When I first got to the cartoonist conventions there used to be 120-130 cartoonists. Now they're like eight that have full-time jobs. So I went, and you I think Tony Auth was talking to Jeff MacNelly. They were all good friends. So, I'm standing nearby at the table and chatting with them and then went back and somebody said, "Oh, are you Jeff MacNelly's wife?"

Risley: Really

Wilkinson: Oh, he had a series of wives, so new ones would show up from time to time [laughter]. We went out to Oklahoma for one of these conventions, and the host, the cartoonist from the Oklahoma paper, was talking to people and saying, "You know, cartoonists are doing X today." "And you ladies," - he looked at me - "are going to visit the governor's wife at the governor's mansion." Are we now? We'll see about that.

Risley: Oh, boy.

Wilkinson: It changed, very fast.

Risley: I'm glad for that.

Wilkinson: They just had to get used to it.

Risley: So, what did it mean to win the Pulitzer Prize?

Wilkinson: Well, I believe, as one of my colleagues said, tell me who's on the jury, and I'll tell you who will win the prize. I don't like formal; I don't like corporate. I mean, I don't like the journalism emphasis on prizes and awards. I think it shows a certain insecurity in our profession. But I put my cartoons in as insecure as I was. In 1992, of course, it had been the year of Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill. I'd done a number of cartoons on that and that was the bulk of my portfolio. It turned out that there were women on the panel - several women - and I think that probably helped me. I was just at the right place at the right time and picked the right cartoons.

Risley: But a lot of the cartoons in your portfolio were about the -

Wilkinson: The hearings.

Risley: Any that you're particularly proud of from that group?

Wilkinson: Well, one I particularly liked was Arlen Specter, who was the U.S. senator from Pennsylvania. He was a very powerful senator. And he waffled all over the place on Anita Hill, because there were women in Pennsylvania - especially in Philadelphia, which is where he was from - were all over him that he shouldn't be grilling her the way he grilled her. But he went ahead. So I had Clarence Thomas stepping off the curb toward the Supreme Court, and there was a puddle, and Arlen Specter was laying down a rug in front of him to protect him, and then the rug was the Anita Hill. I liked that one. And then I did just a funny one where there was an elevator. I can't remember how I did the punch line. But, you know, there were two women and mostly men and one saying to the other, "Well, the Anita Hill hearings had some good benefits." And all the men had their hands up like this [laughter].

Risley: That's good stuff.

Wilkinson: I have to say, having a supportive spouse was very, very helpful to me.

Risley: How so?

Wilkinson: Well, I mean you get a lot of criticism as a cartoonist. So, to come home and have someone there other than a dog or a television set to say, "Oh, I liked your cartoon," or "Oh, that cartoon wasn't that bad." You know, it's really, helpful to have someone who loves you, no matter what stupid cartoon you do. I've always been grateful for that.

Risley: So, what do you think is the role of an editorial cartoonist?

Wilkinson: Well, I think it's quite different now.

Risley: When you started?

Wilkinson: It was another voice, another voice on another way to look at the world and to look at the people around you and the politicians around you and the culture and what was going on around you. It's a way that people can look at without having, you know, they can read it, get it, hate it, like it, whatever. And the cartoonists sort of became part of the way a city looked at itself. And fortunately, in Philadelphia, we had two cartoonists. So, I think that's how it used to be.

Risley: What about today?

Wilkinson: There are no cartoonists, and people only have syndicated cartoonist, so there's no voice. There's no cartooning voice about the city. And my most important cartoons were about city hall, about the prison system, about murderers in the street. You know, they were about local issues. I think it wasn't just cartooning. But as I said, we had great columnists. Columnists are not the same as they were. Because journalism has shrunk so badly that, you know, they want to have people reporting on the news, first and foremost. But the heart of the city, the way we see each other, it comes from a variety of different ways and a good editorial cartoonist is one of them. So, I think it's lost and there are still tons of good cartoonists, and they're doing good work.

Risley: So, let's back up a little bit. When did you move to the *Inquirer*?

Wilkinson: Well, let's see. When Tony Auth retired, so, it was about eight or nine years ago. Ten years ago, maybe?

Risley: Did anything change at the *Inquirer* about the way you worked?

Wilkinson: Tony was an institution at the *Inquirer*. He did a wonderful job. I think I did a good job, too. But the *Inquirer* was five times bigger than the *Daily News*. So, the readership was five times bigger and quite different. Ours was almost all in the city. It was more blue-collar and a more diverse readership. But so, my local

cartoons changed [after joining the Inquirer]. I think I did fewer of the local cartoons. Michael Nutter was the mayor at the time and he wasn't a bad mayor, so he wasn't as fun. I mean, I did cartoons about him. But city hall wasn't a corrupt, horrible, place.

Risley: Nothing changed about sort of the process of drawing?

Wilkinson: It just kept, just kept changing. The technology just kept changing. And Tony's cartoons style changed, too, as things were going forward.

Risley: Right. So, let's shift gears a little bit. Why did you want to publish a daily comic strip?

Wilkinson: A friend of mine asked me, who worked for a United Media. I said, "Oh, yeah, sure. I need this." I had an idea and I really loved the cartoon strip. It only lasted three years because we launched right as the market crashed in 2008. Timing is everything.

Risley: What did you like about doing it?

Wilkinson: I liked it because it was about characters. And it was essentially me reliving my life as a mom of a teenager. It had environmental issues. I love to garden. The dad ran a nursery. And the mom did things I did, like in her book group, all that kind of stuff. So, it wasn't about just one member of the family. "Zits" is mostly about the kid. I love Jim Borgman's stuff and I love that cartoon, but it's about the whole family. I look back on [my comic strip] fondly.

Risley: Just bad timing?

Wilkinson: Well, it was bad timing. The other thing that happened is, our Quaker meeting was building a new meeting house. And my husband and I were sort of key to pushing that forward. It was going to cost \$6 million and Quaker meetings don't have \$6 million laying around. So, it was a big struggle to figure out how we were going to do it. I thought I was going to have a heart attack during that time. I was so over extended, and to do a comic strip is just relentless, no time off. If you want to go on vacation, you have to do two weeks' worth of cartoons in advance. It's really brutal.

Risley: We haven't talked about your Quaker upbringing. How do you think that has influenced your cartooning?

Wilkinson: I'm not exactly sure. But, when I grew up, the older people in the meeting were interested in fair housing in the suburbs. I lived in the suburbs. And that was a big issue. During the Vietnam War Quakers used to go down to Cape May every summer where all the meetings would come. The parents were upstairs listening to anti-war speakers. All the teenagers were downstairs trying to make-out and flirting with each other [laughter]. So I was probably the worst Quaker in the land. But I really feel like the idea that each person has the ability

to connect with whatever it is that's greater and stronger than any one human being is. And you have the freedom to find the way that that works. I think that's very important in my worldview, so I do not like dictators.

Risley: Why did you decide to retire from the newspaper, and what have you been doing since then?

Wilkinson: I'm failing at retirement. I described my day; it was very rigid. And now, what do I have to do? Thank God Ford called! I have something to do today [laughter]! Well, what I love to do is I love to talk about cartoons. I do a lot of public speaking.

Risley: You still draw a lot too.

Wilkinson: Well, I do.

Risley: You post things on Twitter and social media.

Wilkinson: Well today, I was just drawing, I was doing watercolor. So, I'm trying to learn how to do watercolors.

Risley: You still like to speak out on issues?

Wilkinson: I do. But it's not like I'm going down to a rally about *Roe v. Wade*, and "Ra ra ra." I've never done that. I don't know exactly how to say this, but I meet people on the other side all the time, and they're largely decent human beings. And I, I think my cartoons speak for themselves. I think I try to defend causes I believe in rather than just – except for Donald Trump – attack and belittle the person on the other side.

Risley: You published a book on free speech. Why don't you think that was important?

Wilkinson: Because it's the bedrock of what we offer the world. That we can stand up and say, what's on our minds without getting shot. I mean, you know, when something like that Khashoggi thing happened, the Saudi Arabian. I mean, we're talking about barbarism still alive and well in the world. I don't want it limited. I don't want it limited by progressives, who say you can't say that. And I certainly don't want it limited by conservatives who want to keep a lid on it. I want. I really do believe that if people talk to each other, they can figure things out.

Risley: What was the idea behind the book? How did it come together?

Wilkinson: Well, Jonathan Zimmerman is a Penn professor who wrote a lot of op-eds for the *Inquirer* while I was still there. I liked what he was saying and it turned out he lives a couple blocks away. I just called him up cold and said, "Would you like to have coffee?" And we had coffee, and I said, "Would you like to do a

book together? I'll do the cartoonists and you write it. You do the difficult work." He couldn't do it right away. But like, a year later, he finished his previous projects, and we did this. Unfortunately, it came out in the middle of the pandemic. But it just won an award. The Independent Booksellers Award gave it a gold medal.

Risley: Congratulations!

Wilkinson: Thank you. I'm very proud of that.

Risley: Do you have any other book projects in mind?

Wilkinson: No, not at the moment. I will. I will. So that the next time you come I'll be able to say, "Ford, let me tell you!"

Risley: Is there anything you'd like to add that we didn't discuss?

Wilkinson: Just that I think there will always be cartoonists and cartooning has to adapt to the new landscape on how people find cartoons. But as we've talked about, I think what we haven't found is a way to, to regionalize the cartoons for local audiences in a really good way. Because no one's going to pay anyone to do them locally. I mean, some genius kid will figure it out, and good for them. I can't wait to see who does it. 'll be their biggest reader.

Risley: Thanks so much. This was great.

Wilkinson: Thank you for your questions.