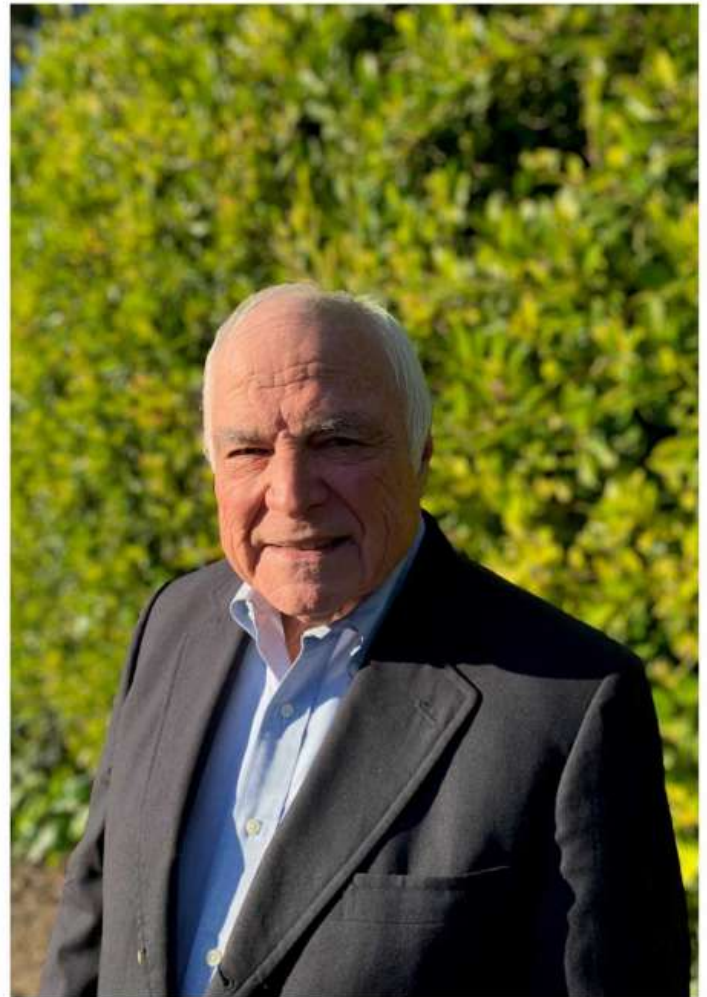
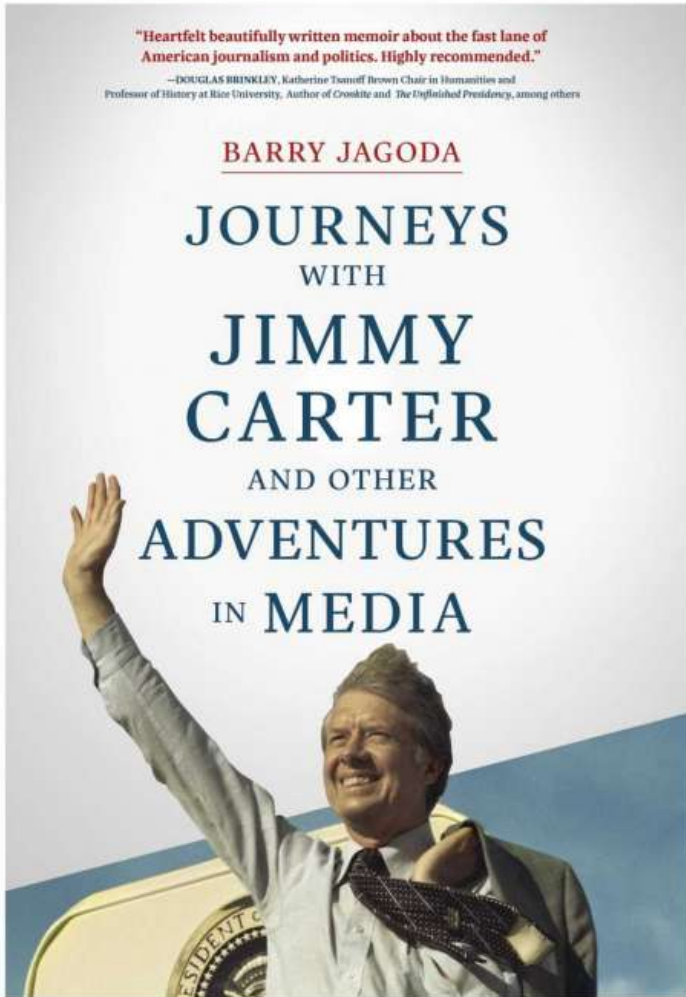


LIFESTYLE

Memoir tracks a career from Houston to the White House with Jimmy Carter

Andrew Dansby

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Raised in Houston, Barry Jagoda is the author of *Journeys With Jimmy Carter and Other Adventures in Media*. Photo: File

Deep into his memoir about a life in journalism and media, Barry Jagoda looks back on his college years and recalls an old poly-sci class in which he learned the definition of "politics": "the skill of resolving conflict."

Jagoda's career would take him through news, the White House and news again, giving

him a long view of the ways politics can change. And he doesn't believe they operate with any degree of progress.

"When I grew up in Houston," he says, "there were three legitimate papers. Each of those were papers that had writers and editors who cared about facts. What changed is that there's more information out there, and it's being used in our politics. But often it's not mediated by people who care about facts."

Across Jagoda's "Journeys With Jimmy Carter and Other Adventures in Media," he observes the ways the distribution of information in our culture have changed. He was at the heart of a significant change in the 1970s when he left news behind to work for Carter's presidential campaign, attempting to use TV to form a message that would create a surprising presidential candidate from the governor of Georgia.

Jagoda's winding path began in Ohio, but his grocer father's health necessitated a move to warmer confines. After a brief time in Phoenix, the family moved to Houston, where Jagoda's childhood was split between Jacinto City and Meyerland, where in high school he was drawn to debate and journalism. Jagoda considered law school as a career, but he saw another path by the time he was at the University of Texas. He returned to Houston for President Kennedy's speech about plans to put a man on the Moon. He still has his press pass for Kennedy's visit to Texas in November 1963. After graduating, he headed to New York to start a career in journalism, a trail head for a career that included writing and producing at NBC News and CBS News, and working closely with Walter Cronkite on coverage of the Apollo 11 Moon landing and later Watergate.

"So I didn't go to law school," he says, "but I'd found another career where I felt like you could shine the light of truth and take things in a better direction. I suppose I could've made a lot more money as a lawyer in Houston. Lawyers in general make more money than journalists. But I never regretted the decision. It felt like a great privilege."

But covering such a remarkable time in American history left Jagoda feeling restless. "I guess I'd just felt I'd put in my time," he says. "It was a fruitful and successful journey. It wasn't that I was looking for a career in politics. The Carter opportunity just happened."

Jagoda in the book describes lining up interviews for Carter that “would help pave the way for the previously unknown ‘Jimmy Who’ to become the 39th occupant of the White House.”

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He admits the book’s title was prompted with a nudge from his publisher, who thought the president’s name would help sell books: “It’s my story, not Carter’s. But I couldn’t argue with them about wanting to sell copies of the book.”

That said, just one of the memoir’s five parts covers the Carter years. His admiration for Carter comes through clearly.

He suggests one of Carter’s struggles as a president was an approach that sounds pretty sensible. That the key to maintaining power in a situation is to keep options open. But Carter, Jagoda says, “could seem like he had 50 positions. In other words, he wasn’t bound by mere message. If somebody asked him something, he’d think about it. And then he’d give an intelligent answer. That’s one of his strengths. But at the end of his term with inflation and the hostages, there wasn’t a simple, clear message.”

Still, another line from the book that sticks: Carter’s assertion that “the American

people deserve a president as decent as they are themselves.”

Jagoda touches on the Trump presidency a few times throughout his memoir, but he doesn't dwell on it.

“I think if we let political figures speak for themselves, we learn a lot about them,” he says.

“Journeys With Jimmy Carter” offers an interesting and varied perspective on media and message over the past half century.

“There's a wider variety of the approaches to what we call truth,” says Jagoda. “That strikes me as quite dangerous.”

The last part of the memoir covers Jagoda's move to California, where he works as an advisor for political campaigns and tech firms, while also writing for the Times of San Diego.

More Information

‘Journeys With Jimmy Carter and Other Adventures in Media’

by Barry Jagoda

Koehler Books

269 pages, \$18.95

He says “writing this book was such a different experience for me compared to being a young journalist or even a seasoned reporter or producer. It gave me this chance to reflect on where I've been, what I've done. It's funny, people would ask me what I do, and I'd say, ‘I'm a writer.’ There was this idea that if I were a writer, I should have written some books. So now I can say I have written a book.”

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