shotgun. The result was pretty much the same. We "won," but it was another lesson in how sensitive local communities could be when "their" paper seemed disloyal.

I read fifteen newspapers daily and ten on Sundays. One Sunday morning, scanning the heavyweight *Sunday Times*, I came across a three-line "filler" paragraph at the foot of a column. It said that Vancouver, British Columbia, was expanding a program to save women from dying of cancer. That was all. A hundred questions buzzed in my head, propelled by one of the most consistent emotions of my life since the days I'd seen people in Lancashire coughing up blood from soot-blackened lungs: If preventable, why not prevented? Why did it take so very long for medical knowledge to percolate and have effect?

Ken Hooper was a six-foot-two history graduate and cricketer from Wadham College, Oxford: rather enigmatic, certainly not prone to my emotionalism, and likely, I thought, to wrestle every fact to the ground. He was by now fairly experienced, having joined the paper in January 1961 and survived the subs' room and reporting for both the *Echo* and the *Despatch*. I could ill afford to lose him from the reporting staff, but I gave him the clipping on the Monday morning and asked him to go to Vancouver straightaway. I knew I'd have to worry about the impact on the budget, but I was eager to get started before the *Sunday Times* or someone else followed up. Nobody did.

Hooper saved me the expense. He started his research in Britain (much tougher to do before the Internet) and never went to Canada. He spent endless hours in libraries, hospitals, and ministries, heaping his findings in a shopping bag to the amusement, if not derision, of some of the big shots he visited. He was gone about seven weeks, but four well-informed articles landed on my desk. They were disturbing. Thousands

of women who were dying from cervical cancer might have been saved, thousands of others had died already, and thousands more were certain to die because of chronic inertia in the National Health Service.

The technique that could save lives was called exfoliative cytology, the study of the characteristics of cells shed from body surfaces. The possibilities had been known to science on both sides of the Atlantic since the 1920s, thanks to George Papanicolaou at New York Hospital and Cornell Medical School and Professor L. S. Dudgeon and his colleagues at St. Thomas' Hospital in London. It was another twenty years before their work was put to practical lifesaving use by Dr. Joe V. Meigs, a Boston gynecologist, assisted by a biologist, Ruth Graham. Graham took vaginal smears of three of Meigs's patients. The patients appeared perfectly healthy, but the smears, read under a microscope, showed very early cancer cells. Given the state of medical knowledge then, it was risky/courageous of Meigs to remove the uteruses of the three women, certain he would see tumors not detectable in a routine examination. He didn't. He was horrified. He was roundly condemned—then vindicated. Three days after the visual inspection, the sections of each uterus examined under a microscope showed it contained early curable cancer that would have been fatal if undetected.

What all this meant was that a simple smear test, requiring only a few minutes of a patient's time, could detect a threatened cancer in women. The danger could then be obviated by a simple cone biopsy or removal of the uterus, depending on the condition. It was another five years (1949) before the potential was realized by two doctors in Vancouver and one on the other side of the world, Mr. Stanley Way. (As a surgeon he was entitled to "Mr." The honorific "Dr." was one notch down in British medical parlance.)

Hooper reported that all his findings kept bringing him

back home not with the finished articles, but to see Way, who was just up the road from us in Gateshead. Beginning in 1949, Way's gynecological research unit at Queen Elizabeth Hospital had screened upwards of 150,000 women and found 601 of them harboring very early cancer. None of the women treated had died; of those having the minor operation, 46 of them had gone on to deliver 57 children.

Way's sample was smaller than the one in Vancouver. By 1963 researchers there had screened 214,900 women over age thirty and compared the records of another 248,400 who hadn't been screened. The death rate was seven times greater in the unscreened group.

When Hooper called on Way, he heard how Way had tried for years to have screening adopted as a routine national test. There was interest in a few centers (London, Birmingham, Derby, Edinburgh), but none in the Ministry of Health. So every year something like twenty-five hundred women died needlessly, about double the number dying in road accidents. It was so different in the United States. Early in the century more women died from cervical cancer than any other form, but the death rate began to fall remarkably after the American Cancer Society started to campaign for Pap smears in 1957.

I took up the Hooper articles with passionate urgency, running all four in June 1963, with editorials asking the Ministry of Health to start a national program to save women. I sent everything the *Northern Echo* published to news organizations and wrote personal letters to a group of MPs. They sprang to it, all of them submitting parliamentary questions for the minister of health, Enoch Powell. They ran into a brick wall. "I am advised," Powell intoned, "it would be premature to aim at a general application."

How many more women had to die, we asked in the paper, before the minister acted on the evidence, already years old?

He acknowledged that there had been 2,504 deaths in 1961, but every time the MPs went back to him—as they did month after month—the answer was always some variation of no: "I cannot estimate how many deaths would have been prevented.... I cannot suggest an average cost per smear.... I would refer the hon. Member to my previous answer(s)."

So it went on through the whole sickening year as we pounded away and the minister stonewalled. Regional hospitals, Powell said, would consider any proposals, but they'd have to find the money. We learned that the city of Stoke-on-Trent had done so but had had to wait three years for ministry permission to establish a clinic. One of the MPs I'd recruited, Jeremy Bray, did not let it rest. At the end of the year, on December 2, he asked what further consideration the minister had given to setting up a comprehensive early diagnosis and treatment service for cervical cancer.

The gratifying answer was "I have asked regional hospital boards to expand cytology services. Before screening can be offered to all women in the age groups at risk, more trained staff are needed and I have asked five hospital boards to set up special training centres." It didn't represent a miraculous conversion. Powell had been replaced by Anthony Barber.

It was a victory, the road to a comprehensive national program, but I couldn't help doing the arithmetic. A national program could have been started ten years earlier (Stanley Way had been screening women for fourteen years). Since 2,504 women had died in 1961, I calculated the unnecessary loss of life over the past decade at ten times that number, or 25,040.

Besides our campaigns for public health and revamped economic policies, we were now getting some recognition for our

news reporting. We proved at least as good as the nationals in responding to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963.

I heard of the Dallas shooting on the radio when I was in a dinner jacket driving to the Teesside press ball and turned back to the office. Wedgewood was busy editing the diverse flow of copy—from the agencies and from the London office—with just over three hours to deadline. I added to the tension by saying we would publish a four-page special on Kennedy's life and discuss how often the U.S. presidency had been ended by murder. We sent for photographs from the library. None could be found. The day manager of the picture library, Shirley Freeman (known as "Shirley Fileroom"), had gone home, and the night manager, Bill Webster, had the night off. The indispensable Joan Thomas suggested we call Shirley's parents. "Oh, she's out with her boyfriend." Where? "I think they went to the cinema."

The Odeon was the most popular cinema. Joan got the Odeon manager on the telephone for me. He hadn't heard of the Kennedy shooting. He was aghast when I asked him to stop the film and find our staffer. Then I had a better idea, with the result that Shirley and her boyfriend, canoodling in the back row, saw a flash on the screen—a handwritten message on a Perspex slide: "Miss Shirley Freeman call the *Echo* urgently." Her date was ruined; the paper was saved.

By 1963 circulation had risen by 10 percent, on the way to a rise of 14 percent, and year on year our profit had tripled. Winston Churchill had been a big help. I came across an old copy of his *My Early Life* (1930). I'd read his war histories but not this, and I suspected few of my generation had. I was so enchanted by it that I wrote to him and asked permission to serialize it. He sent a warm note back saying go ahead. It proved popular.

MY PAPER CHASE

Nineteen sixty-three was a significant year, as the poet Philip Larkin made clear:

Sexual intercourse began
In nineteen sixty-three
(which was rather late for me)
Between the end of the Chatterley *ban*
And the Beatles' first LP.

As a happily married man with now three children (Michael had arrived that year), I too missed the sexual revolution—but I kept pace with the music. I could hardly miss the Beatles' first record, "Love Me Do." My wife was a Liverpudlian; our Granada TV broadcast the Beatles' first studio appearance in October 1962; we bought their first album, *Please Please Me;* and I could hardly forget how my sharp producer friend Barrie Heads had told me he'd thrown another new group out of the Granada studio because they weren't as presentable as the Beatles. "Mick Jagger and his group were so scruffy."

The break into music for the *Northern Echo* came out of a snowstorm. George Carr, Westberg's deputy, took a sixteen-year-old printing assistant, Ian Wright, on a long slog to reach people trapped in a blizzard along the route that went over the Pennine hills. Carr and Wright had a broken-down Ford Popular car (Britain's lowest-priced car) with no snow chains, no snow tires, and no heater. They loaded the trunk with four bags of coal to weight down the back axle, along with a shovel and hessian coal sacks for when they got stuck. In this way, with thermos flask and sandwiches, they got through the traffic jams and jackknifed trucks when all others—including the police, rescue services, and ambulances—had failed. Between taking photographs and conducting interviews, they helped people get their cars out of snowdrifts.

As it happened, the best photograph was taken by Wright, who was normally an unseen elf, filing the negatives, mixing the chemicals, and cleaning up. I put his dramatic picture on the front page. Soon after the first edition had arrived, there was a knock on my door, and there was Wright, asking very nervously if there was some reason why he'd not been given the credit. It was an oversight. I put his name under the photograph in the next edition, and so began Wright's career as a photographer. He was the only photographer with any interest in pop groups. Westberg despised those long-haired rockers. It was a hard day's night getting him to concede that if Wright took the pictures on his own time, Charlie wouldn't impede him.

Week after week Wright was out with the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Searchers, Lulu, the Dave Clark Five, Manfred Mann, Dusty Springfield, Cilla Black, Roy Orbison, Billy J. Kramer, and Gene Pitney. I assigned junior reporters to write the stories. They knew more than I did about who was worth covering, though I was keen enough to drive them to and from Newcastle for the first North East tour of the Beatles in March 1963.

Our youngsters struck up a rapport with the new pop stars and with managers such as Brian Epstein and Neil Aspinall. Wright and Guy Simpson were the only pressmen who showed up when the Beatles gave a concert at the Globe Theatre in Stockton, and they had no problem getting backstage. "John Lennon," Wright remembers, "was always asking for complimentary prints. 'Wrighty, don't forget to send those photos; the family love 'em.' " I was so impressed by the initiatives of these juniors that I started the paper's first weekly supplement, the *Teenage Special*, which attracted some thirty thousand sales on Mondays—almost a 30 percent increase. With Tyne Tees Television, the *Northern Echo* organized very loud talent shows in Newcastle—the *American Idol* of Tyneside.

The music juniors all went on to make names for themselves. Philip Norman won a *Sunday Times* magazine essay contest, then became a best-selling author with *The Stones, Shout!, Rave On,* and biographies of Elton John and John Lennon. David Sinclair wrote biographies of Lord Snowdon and the Queen Mother. David Watts became the Southeast Asia correspondent for the *Times,* John Cathcart editor of the *National Enquirer,* and Guy Simpson picture editor of the *Independent* newspaper in London. They must have taken their cue from Tyneside's own Eric Burdon and the Animals, whose great hit was "We Gotta Get Out of This Place."

Granada Television came calling on me at the *Echo.* Since returning from America I'd written a couple of documentaries for them and a pamphlet on their fight to televise a parliamentary election. It's an indication of how suspicious the authorities were of this dangerous new medium that Granada had to mount a full-scale legal and public relations assault before it managed to bring TV cameras to the Rochdale by-election.

The call was from whiz kid Jeremy Isaacs. He would become renowned for producing a series on World War II and the cold war and later become the founding chief executive of Channel 4 and Sir Jeremy, director general of the Royal Opera House. But in 1961–1962 he was winning his spurs commissioning a rotating group of commentators for a program critically examining the week's newspapers, *What the Papers Say.* (One of the world's longest-running television programs, this show is still on the air today, now on the BBC.) Would I care to audition for the program?

Had he not heard of Lewenhak and the talkative gypsies? Five years had gone by, which for television people must have meant it was lost in the mists of time. I didn't bother to brief

him on that history. I wrote a script for the audition and did a dummy run in Manchester with Michael Frayn of the *Guardian*, Colin Welch of the *Daily Telegraph*, and Tom Lambert of the *New York Herald Tribune*. The outcome was a letter from Isaacs: "I hope I can persuade the boys here to let you have a bash on behalf of the provincials."

The boys apparently weren't in any hurry to risk a hick from Darlington, and it was a few months before Isaacs was back. He was, he explained, bringing cameras for the parliamentary by-election in Harold Macmillan's old constituency, Stockton-on-Tees. He asked me to provide commentary on the press treatment of the election. In a howling wind I stood in the town square, orating into the gale and feeling foolish, as I squinted at the teleprompter, watched by a group of giggling urchins.

Soon afterward Isaacs was succeeded by Barrie Heads, who'd produced my interview with the painter L. S. Lowry. He invited me to join what was now a regular panel. This was hard. Brian Inglis, the anchor for the series, was dry, ironic, and authoritative; Michael Frayn and Peter Eckersley were very witty. Barrie's main problem with me was my north country pronunciation. The Queen's English was still the standard on television. Any regional accent was judged déclassé, except in a slice-of-life show like Granada's own *Coronation Street*. In one run-through of my script, Barrie rushed out of the control room shouting, "Butcher, butcher!" He meant that my Lancashire accent was overly stressing the *u:* "Don't say 'boo-ocher'! Say 'butcher'! Try it again." I did. It satisfied him. But on the show I was so concerned about pronouncing it right that it came out "betcher." Thereafter, I continually rehearsed to myself, reciting "butcher, baker, candlestick maker," but the flat *a*'s and deep *u*'s kept coming back all the same.

For the next two years I was on about once a month. It was

a slog in Darlington scouring scores of newspapers scattered amid the children's toys, as well as writing and rewriting, counting and recounting the words to fit the allotted fifteen minutes—all in between hours at the office, followed on the Wednesday night by a long drive over the Pennines for a recording session in the Manchester studio the next day. The newspaper extracts were read by actors, and the tone of their voices, pace, and timing had to be rehearsed.

How I sweated over the early scripts! I had not merely to read all the papers but also to compare them for news getting, accuracy, and fairness. I'd known from childhood, for instance, that the *Daily Express* (circulation four million) believed in putting an optimistic gloss on all news (unless it was about the Labour Party). Its most famous editor, Arthur Christiansen, laid it down that the *Express* "should make everyone feel it is a sunny day." Nice sentiment, but it was remarkable how far the paper was prepared to go to make everyone believe all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds. Milk in Britain was being contaminated by radioactive iodine from a fifty-seven-megaton Soviet bomb test in the atmosphere, reported the Agricultural Research Council; the government made a statement in Parliament that it was keeping a day-to-day watch in case the contamination got to a danger point. These two items were in every paper except the *Express*. Instead it wrote, "There is little danger milk will become contaminated." When all the other papers reported that Britain could expect additional strontium 90 to arrive the next spring, the *Express* reported that "many experts" believed the Soviets could produce "clean" bombs with little fallout. But they hadn't produced them; theirs was a singularly dirty bomb. "All this talk" about fallout, said the *Express*, was "unpatriotic, because it made the Russians think they could scare us." Next,

I said in my on-air commentary, we'd be told by the *Express* that strontium 90 was good for us.

Though that sort of absurdist journalism was meat and drink to *What the Papers Say*, I also tried to highlight any great reporting I'd read in the national papers. I contrasted the *People*'s robust pursuit of the crooks running football pools for bogus charities with the malicious invasions of privacy by the *Daily Sketch* gossip writers simply to make someone miserable. I praised the *Sunday Times'* exposé of the slum landlord Peter Rachman, I chastised the *Daily Mirror* for rejecting a Conservative advertisement without saying why, and I teased the *Sunday Express* for not disclosing that the lively letters it ran were all written by staffers posing as readers.

Some took this better than others. The editor of the *Sunday Express*, John Junor, invited me to lunch. The editor of the *Daily Mirror* slammed me, thundering prominently in the paper, "Evans dedicates his spare time to denigrating the rest of the press. Loftily he lectures the national newspapers as if Darlington exudes a special degree of insight and wisdom denied to newspapers in London and Manchester." I did the most detective work tracking how the newspapers had failed to find out what lay behind the resignation of Lord Mancroft from the Norwich Union Insurance Society. It transpired that the Jewish Mancroft had been forced out by Arab business interests that had dealings with the society, but the *Financial Times*, which had first reported the resignation, was slow to find out why and even slower to comment.

My commentary did not win friends on Fleet Street. I heard that Lord Drogheda, the fastidious chairman of the *Financial Times*, was upset with me; and I was well aware that Pearson Industries, which owned the *Financial Times*, also, through Westminster Press, owned the *Northern Echo*. Drogheda was