David Frost died today on a cruise ship, typical.  I used to have lunch with David, not me alone, but along with other executive-thinkers at Westinghouse broadcasting, where monthly and weekly lunches were held with our own correspondents like Rod MacLeish and thinkers and linguists and notables like Abba Eban would sip and tell stories or make profundities and jokes, I was often restless I admit especially after I was put on a one-martini leash after a week in Washington where I’d done a profile on Helen Thomas and got a little too drunk with Bill Buckley – these lunches were arranged by Dick Pack, who invented “all news all the time” at or O&O – owned and operated stations – Westinghouse since disappeared having bought CBS – but no doubt it was my familiarity with smart interviewers like our Steve Allen and Mike Douglas and David Frost that enabled me to go off on my own after I saw the two Nixon daughters on TV and thought it’d be interesting to have them both out on a date – I was twentysomething and could think anything – still can --and next I thought if they could like or feel any kind of affection for their father at all they must know something nobody else in America knew – and so I conceived in my apartment on St. Marks Place across from the Electric Circus THE PRESIDENT’S DAUGHTERS which I first presented to my bosses at Group W (we created a logo called Group W and you wouldn’t believe the commotion when somebody said our “W” was Hebrew)  who thought it was a yawn, and then, freed, pretty soon I was having martinis with Margaret Truman at Sardi’s, (a mixed couple we were, with her wearing beret)  and she said nobody had ever asked her personal questions about her father Harry, or even her own life in that context – she told me how she was standing in a cafeteria in Paris when George Marshall put a scoop of mashed potatoes on her plate and talked about his Marshall plan for Europe – and so Margaret called up her friend Katherine Graham who was in contact with Alice Longworth Roosevelt – who I got really toasted with one evening, with her really sparkling blue eyes, both drinking Katherine’s single malt scotch, while she read with little shakes of laughter pornographic poetry by President Harding– I thought I’d broken her fingers when I first shook hands with her when Katherine introduced us– with Anna Roosevelt it was high tea in Georgetown, where she was preparing for a march the next day against the war with her grandson – one story about a drunk who walked straight into her father’s upstairs writing room one night to complain about that earlier war, and how her father had listened carefully to the man -- and how such access was gone etc. – and then came the first interview in Arlington with Linda Robb where a light burst and we thought a gun had been shot, her memories and her sister Lucy Nugent’s memories of the Kennedy assassination and their unprepared entry onto the world stage, and Lucy’s being “ a low achiever around high achievers who lost her pet mouse” – and how she reacted to her father’s return to the White House as President - was really surprising and  touching – to get the Nixon daughter’s I got the help of my associate producer and later nemesis, a lady named Ann Duggan, most famous for attempting to shoot her husband Tom with a pistol.  At first she seemed playful, but she didn’t take kindly to my affection for what she thought were Democrats, and it was way too late that I discovered she was telling Richard Nixon what I was telling her, and that must’ve seemed really leftist I suppose to people like Ann and Nixon’s secretary, who I had lunch with, almost choking when she started talking about the communists running Mexico – “Is that what the President thinks?  Mexico is communist?”  I asked – we were lunching at Watergate.  This is a long story, so I’ll cut to the shooting at the White House where Julie – we shot Tricia in the Green Room and Julie in the Red Room to highlight their hair – and Julie had drastically cut the 110 questions I’d presented her, saying her husband David, who I knew was Eisenhower’ grandson– was a lawyer and had cut questions for “clarity” and I said the “clarity” would be in her answers and my deal with the daughters was that nothing would embarrass them or the administration, the point was personal etc. and so I asked all the questions which was my first mistake among many, but who knew?  Husband David Eisenhower didn’t look too happy when Julie told me the really marvelous story a out Richard Nixon’s first night in the White House, how he took the family here and there and even upstairs to see the Eisenhower kitchen, since the General never allowed his VP in the private kitchen -- Tricia never thought twice about saying the Nixon’s had the names of each and every demonstrator outside their gates and would deal with those people properly – there was also a great openness in Tricia and Julie and all the others, since none of them had ever been asked quite these questions before.  Linda told me she’d never given an interview like that. Months later, after lots of shouting matches between me and 60 MINUTES legend Don Hewitt –he was great to shout against, screaming towards consensus – and we had a rough cut with Tricia and Julie and Luci and Linda talking about their fathers as never before – Maury Safer was replacing me as interviewer – Hewett said he’d been guaranteed 3 first of the month covers at TV GUIDE, and Mike Wallace suddenly dropped by and sat at the edge of the desk I was borrowing at CBS and said “I want to tell you I haven’t seen better interviews since Ed Murrow” and I said “Aw thanks, Mister Wallace.”  We got my indie documentary to CBS after a phone call from Pat Nixon’s press secretary Gerry Van der Heuvel who called me one day in my sixth floor walkup on 3rd Avenue (same floor as Michael Lutin’s Star Factory) and I well remember trying to get my steam heater to shut up while she was saying “The President asked me if you’d like help selling your documentary to the networks…Excuse me? – I said the President says he has contacts at the networks and wants to know if he can help” – so that was how we got to CBS from my totally indie production, now I realize that it’s impossible for a twenty something to sign up the living daughters of US Presidents for $500 each like I did– Gerry committed the daughters by telegraph on her last day before leaving for Rome – turns out she was a reporter herself -- anyhow we did a stupendous first cut but then I got a call from Don Hewitt one day saying “Bill, we sent our news head Dick Salant to the White House and I have to tell you they don’t like your documentary.  They REALLY don’t like it.  The President doesn’t like it.”  “Well gee Don, that’s not good news.” “No it’s not, Bill…” “Then I guess you won’t show it?”  “We’ll show the Johnson daughters but not the Nixons.”  “Okay, then when can I pick up my Nixon cut?”  “I don’t think we have it any more.”  “Oh. -- Where will I get it, then, Don?”  “Bill you’re not listening –“ – Yes I am, Don –“  I don’t think we have your film any more.  The White House does not like this – but Bill, we want to work with you on other projects.  You should come in and talk.”  “Don, I’ll come in when I get my footage back.”  “When you can, then.”  This was basically the calmest talk I ever had with Don Hewitt., and the last. Soon afterward our editor, Barbara, who’d parachuted behind the lines for CBS during the war, got killed in a “freak” accident in England.  No space this morning to tell the whole story, but in my own special way of back-flipping out of something extraordinary back into obscurity after almost every film I’ve made, thus assuring, apparently, constantly fresh horizons, like part of the intestines grow new every day, making our intestines immortal if they lived somewhere else outside our bodies, I suppose – anyway turns out Ann was actually Richard’s mistress.  Who knew?  [Who knows?  Who cares?]  Somehow it matters that the one secret Richard Nixon managed to keep might soon be out there.  This is my season for lifting the lid on cover-ups I’ve known. Like the great lie about out how River Phoenix died and the WGA’s credit thefts and SAG’s foreign levy thefts.  David Frost’s death sparks a personal review:  One incident:  after a particularly long and loud call where my associate producer Ann was almost screaming into the phone after calling the White House on a private line (1969) – Ann was fuming about how Erlichman and Haldeman were ruining his presidency with “idiocy, it’s idiocy” she kept saying and I could hear this voice in an echo-y room saying “Ann, Ann, don’t worry, it’s no problem --I’m saying. – shut up and listen to me, Ann” (– Julie said “My father’s favorite saying is ‘no problem’.” ) – Ah well, turns out that right after that phone call Ann leaned against the 30’s style white lacquer bar in her alcove overlooking 57th street and 6th avenue and fell dead asleep.  She’d taken her sleeping pills too early, and I hadda lift her up and carry her to her bedroom.  Ann was Latino and built, a ringer for Dolores Del Rio, wearing a satin sash gown at this time, which fell open and I closed it like a gent while carrying her but still could not help saying the following day:  “Jeez Ann, I gotta say that you have absolutely rock like breasts.”  Instead of wondering how I knew that with mild curiousltiy or even surprise, she says “YOU TOUCHED MY BREASTS?”  Well now, try as I might I couldn’t explain to this pissed off – mistress, basically – that it was pure accident and I didn’t mean to grin – looking back, it could be that this incident torpedoed the entire project.  Looking back, of course, it might have been that when Nixon heard that Katherine Graham of the Washington Post, the paper that was crucifying him daily and impeached him ultimately, the powerful publisher of Woodward & Bernstein, was now a supporter of my documentary about his beloved daughters, even inviting me to her house. To top it off, his mistress was now apparently telling him that I’d made a pass at her.  I came understand that the President of the United States was really pissed off at Bill Richert in his 3rd Avenue walk up for making a pass at his girlfriend, and it was personal. Richard Nixon took another look at the permission he gave for me to interview his kids.  Now, I knew the difference in our statuses; however, I had the outtakes.  But then in the early 70s, when I was writing WINTER KILLS from a house boat off Key Biscayne that was a little replica of THE FRANCE ocean liner, which I’d taken to Southampton in one of it’s last cruises, and where we watched planes land at the island airport, I was told was smuggling cocaine using Bebe Rebozo’s diplomatic immunity – when I went back from Miami to New York I discovered a break in at my apartment on West 85th street – only things missing were my brand new Sony TV, a tiny piece of incredible Moroccan hash, and my outtakes of THE PRESIDENT’S DAUGHTERS.  Didn’t take me too long to figure out whoever took that little bar of brown hash without opening my police lock or the solid black iron bars on the windows --could have replaced it with a pound of coke and it would be a long goodbye in a low ceilinged no-view room for me.  Besides, I was presently being paid by Bob Sterling, the producer of WINTER KILLS and the first major U.S. pot lord who was vegetarian and still had his mother’s voice on his answering machine.  I’m gonna finish this little memorial about myself in honor of David Frost, who was very serious underneath and already like fifty at twenty, so he has really lived to 175, which is a great age for any comedian-journalist. Roger Ailes, the mastermind of Nixon’s media machine, was the first to try to stop the interviews altogether, saying like, “who’s this kid wanting to do this?”  But it was Nixon’s little Dick who must’ve given in to first to Ann’s interview request and then to Ann’s outrage, which outraged the President, which led to  my very first “arbitration-litigation” which awarded Ann and her lawyers the rough cut and all the hundreds of photos of me in the White House etc.  All gone except two photos, which I still have, one of which was on my mother’s wall, forgotten till after she died.  Thanks, mum; otherwise I’d have no proof whatever that any of this really happened – though somewhere in their vaults CBS may still have the Johnson daughter interviews, and maybe the Secret Service or Rober Ailes has the Nixon’s Daughters interviews.

The girls really did look gorgeous on film, we lit them well, their father comes off just fine; Richard Nixon shouldn’t have killed his kids’ opportunity for the wrong reasons. They said a lot of good things about him, and they’ve never looked better. Since there is no time pressure here, I’ll be saying more about my adventures like this after my River documentary and after the litigation against the cover-ups at SAG and the WGA, in particular how these and other stories became the basis for THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT and THE WEST WING, my original sources and dialogue taken by Aaron Sorkin for another kind of cover up and, after the brambles and slashes and falls – another fresh horizon.  Later, David.  Welcome to a fresh horizon.