In an often challenging interview with Matt Lauer, former New York Times reporter Jayson Blair says undiagnosed bi-polar disorder and "character flaws" were behind his plagiarism and fabrication of articles. Blair expresses remorse.

**Keywords**

Transcript
Jayson Blair on His Plagiarism and Lies

MATT LAUER, co-host:
The New York Times is one of the nation's most respected newspapers, setting the tone for news coverage nationwide with all the news that's fit to print. But a young reporter named Jayson Blair shook the Times to its foundation, plagiarizing or making up dozens of articles before another paper blew the whistle on him. Blair tells his story in his new book called "Burning Down My Master's House."

Jayson Blair, good morning. Good to have you here.

Mr. JAYSON BLAIR ("Burning Down My Masters' House"): Good morning, Matt.

LAUER: The book presents a dilemma for a lot of people. They say 'Here's a guy who became famous because he was a liar, and in the opening line of the book he says, "I lied and lied and then I lied some more."

Two hundred ninety-eight pages follow. Why should they believe anything in this book?

Mr. BLAIR: You know, as I've said before in the last few days, I'm done lying. There's a quote in the New Yorker today where the reviewer of the book says, "The one thing that Jayson Blair seems to be unable to do is be dishonest about himself."

LAUER: Here's a review from The Los Angeles Times. "At the end of the day, `Burning Down my Masters' House' is incredible not only because of the author's transparently-based motives, but also because he is a proven liar who again and again demands that his readers accept his account of critical events without the corroboration or attribution required to overcome prudent skepticism."

Mr. BLAIR: I haven't read that review, but I would argue that the reviewer probably, you know, didn't pay a lot of attention to the facts in the--or--or one fact in the book, which is that I take full responsibility for my actions. I made bad decisions.

LAUER: The book is published by New Millennium, kind of a small publishing house.

Mr. BLAIR: Correct.
LAUER: I mean, if I were the editor at New Millennium, I would assign a team of people...

Mr. BLAIR: And they did.

LAUER: ...to Jayson Blair 24 hours a day during the writing process. I'd probably lose a lot of sleep waiting to see if this stuff is factual.

Mr. BLAIR: They put on extra layers of fact-checkers for the story in addition to the editors.

LAUER: You--you talk in the book about possible childhood sexual abuse, about racism, you talk about drug and alcohol problems, you talk about the pressure at The New York Times. You talk about an undiagnosed bipolar condition. Do you think, though, when you say you take full responsibility, isn't that kind of your way of saying, 'Look, I had all these problems, that's why I did this'?

Mr. BLAIR: No. Not at all. These are all parts--different things that are a part of my life and it would be impossible to separate them.

LAUER: When you first lied in an article, first fabricated something, the very first time, did you go home and read the paper the next day and feel good, did you feel bad, did you feel indifferent, did you feel doomed? What did you feel?

Mr. BLAIR: I don't know. I don't even know what my reaction was the first time that I fabricated anything.

LAUER: Were you just happy to see your name above the article?

Mr. BLAIR: I--I can talk a little bit about what it was like later in the process, and it was, you know, a feeling of numbness.

LAUER: That it didn't matter?

Mr. BLAIR: Almost. Almost. And--and--and in retrospect, that-you know, it's the wrong--and this is where I get back to...

LAUER: So the first lie was the hardest. It became easier down the road?

Mr. BLAIR: It became easier as it went on, and this is where I get back to the point that these are clearly character flaws. And the thing about the book, from my perspective, that stands out is as much as it offers about The New York Times and pulls back a curtain on, you know, behaviors that go on there that are problematic, what the book really does is give a searing personal narrative about character flaws.

LAUER: You know what surprises me, Jayson? You admit to making up things about interviews with a wounded soldier, about details at Jessica Lynch's house and things like that, and it seems to me that some of the time it took for you to come up with these details, in that same amount of time you could have actually done the ground work.

Mr. BLAIR: No, and I believe that that's true in many of the cases.

LAUER: So that makes me think you're just a pathological liar.

Mr. BLAIR: I hope I'm not a pathological liar. But in reality, during that time in my life when I was doing the worse fabrications, I was not very healthy. I did not feel very safe in the world. I...

LAUER: However, you also say that--that during the time when you were coming up with the most fabrications, you hadn't done drugs and alcohol in about a year.

Mr. BLAIR: Right. Doctors who have worked with me since then have argued that the substances I was abusing were self-medicated undiagnosed manic-depression, which went crazy afterwards. And once
again, I don't want to use that as an excuse.
LAUER: Did you ever stop and say, Jayson, `Wow, I am putting an awful lot of good people in jeopardy here.'
BLAIR: I did not even think forward to the idea of it coming out, or the consequences for me. Once it did come out, you know, in retrospect, nothing tore me up more than the--the people who lost their jobs or the people who were hurt by it. When I came to the realization of, you know, what I had done and I took a look at the people who were hurt both, you know, inside The Times and by the stories, you know, I--I promised myself that I would try and do something that would bring some good out of it.
LAUER: However--however, comma, in the book you say that your deceptions were "accepted newsroom practice" at the New York Times.
Mr. BLAIR: Not all of my deceptions, but certainly some of them are things that at least, and I can't speak for the Times now that they've taken some steps to make some reforms, but as much as everyone would like to paint me as an evil genius, I didn't come up with these ideas on my own. Many of them I came up with by watching other colleagues, you know, participate. I talk in the book about toe-touch datelines where you just fly in for a minute and the story's really written from another city, or I talk about someone dressing up as a nurse, you know, at ground zero--or excuse me, at a plane crash to get on the site. These are things that, you know, in the competitive environment are subconsciously built--burnt into your head.
LAUER: Do you feel you have made an adequate apology to the people whose lives you have negatively impacted? Not only your colleagues at the Times, but what about the people you wrote about?
Mr. BLAIR: I am sorry. I--I feel that I've, you know, I need to ask-or I need to ask--I am asking for forgiveness from those people.
LAUER: Another quote from the Los Angeles Times: "Blair owes the readers and colleagues he betrayed a credible explanation and as sincere an apology as he can muster. `Burning Down my Masters' House' is neither." It goes on to say "This is a vile book, as distasteful a thing as you're likely to handle without gloves."
Mr. BLAIR: You know, I understand why some journalists are still very upset by this...
LAUER: Why not any journalist...
Mr. BLAIR: Right.
LAUER: ...would be upset?
Mr. BLAIR: Well, some journalists have been able to look at the story and read the story and, you know, step back from who they are as journalists and, you know, get some greater understanding of the situation. But I understand why some journalists are upset. I don't know what I can say to them that will emphasize how much remorse I have.
LAUER: What--what are you going to do now? Where does your life go from here?
Mr. BLAIR: I don't know. I'm going to take some time off, head down to where my parents live, think about different writing options.
LAUER: Trying not to be sarcastic, is it safe to say your future writings will be fiction?
Mr. BLAIR: Most likely.
LAUER: Jayson Blair, good to have you here.
Mr. BLAIR: Thank you, Matt.