



Ep. 17: Billie Weiss (COM'16), Boston Red Sox, Manager of Photography

Host: Jeff Murphy (Questrom'06), BU Alumni Relations

Billie Weiss (COM'16) has what many in New England would consider a dream job. For the past seven years, Billie has documented the World Champion Boston Red Sox as the team's manager of photography. On this episode of Proud to BU, Billie explores his unique journey from BU to Fenway Park and offers a behind-the-scenes look at his remarkable career.

Podcast Transcript:

Jeff Murphy: I'm Jeff Murphy from Boston University Alumni Relations, and I'm your host for an interview series showcasing the career paths of our most interesting and accomplished alumni. Welcome to the Proud to BU podcast.

Jeff Murphy: Today's guest is College of Communication alumnus, Billie Weiss, if you don't know him by name, you've almost certainly seen his work. He's the head photographer for the Boston Red Sox. Billie spent the last seven seasons capturing the defining moments of Red Sox history, and two world series titles. In addition to being our guest on Proud to BU, you'll also find Billie featured in the next issue of Bostonian magazine. He sat down with me on the podcast to share his journey from the dark rooms in COM to the hallowed halls of Fenway park.

Jeff Murphy: Billie Weiss you are the manager of photography for the World Champion Boston Red Sox. Thanks so much for being here today.

Billie Weiss: Thanks so much for having me. Appreciate it.

Jeff Murphy: Sure. So I generally want to start with the most important questions. I know that you were on the staff of the Red Sox in 2013. Did you bring your World Championship ring to show me today?

Billie Weiss: You know, I should have brought it. I got sized for my 2018 one yesterday, so I have it in the office, it's right across the street and I completely blanked. Next time.

Jeff Murphy: Okay, perfect. I knew you wouldn't have the 2018 one yet, but I remember that you had started. Well, I'm excited to talk about your work with the Red Sox, obviously. I'm a lifelong fan, of course. But generally we kind of go chronologically. So did you grow up knowing that you wanted to be a photographer? How did that all shape out in your life?

Billie Weiss: Definitely not. I started taking classes in high school, just kind of casually, in the dark room, and I enjoyed it. I thought it was a nice hobby. It kind of came more easily or more natural to me than math and science and that type of thing. But I never at that point thought like, okay, I'm going to make a career out of this. I did grow up in a very artistic household. My dad is a

fine artist and my mom's a pianist, so creativity was always kind of encouraged and pushed. And so I think that for sure had an influence on my life. But it kind of developed into more of a serious career when I got to college and started working for the student newspaper in college.

Jeff Murphy: And remind me what you were majoring in in college.

Billie Weiss: I was a communications, which is very broad, but probably halfway through college I started thinking about how to kind of tailor it towards photography.

Jeff Murphy: Where did you go undergrad again?

Billie Weiss: I went to Goucher College, which is a small liberal arts school outside of Baltimore.

Jeff Murphy: And did you grow up in Maryland?

Billie Weiss: Yeah, I grew up North of Baltimore. Yeah.

Jeff Murphy: So then how did you make your way to Boston?

Billie Weiss: So I actually came here for grad school at BU So I was applying to grad schools and went through the application process and when I really decided like BU was the way I wanted to go, I made the move up here and that's what brought me up here. And at the time I wasn't really sure that I would stay here after graduating from BU or not. But I'm here eight years later. It just kind of worked out.

Jeff Murphy: So I had taken a look at your LinkedIn page earlier. Did you already have a job at the Red Sox before you started your master's degree here, or how did that happen?

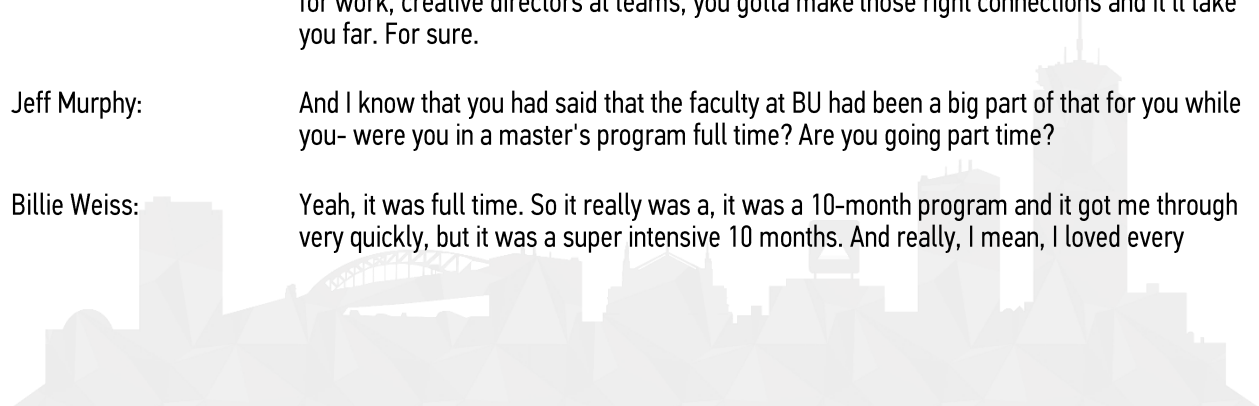
Billie Weiss: It happened all at the same time. So, I got here and then immediately got an internship with the Red Sox and it all happened right at the same time. And actually the way I got the internship was through another BU COM alum who was then the team photographer at the Red Sox at the time, Mike Ivins. And so there was already that BU network kind of in place. And that's how I got linked with the Red Sox.

Jeff Murphy: We were talking about just the network of it before we started recording here today. When you reflect back on your undergrad experience, the internships you've had, would you say that, I mean, what percentage of your success do you owe to your ability to make connections with other people?

Billie Weiss: Yeah, I mean the cliché is like, it's all about who you know. Right. But it definitely, there is validity to that, especially in the photo world. It really does go a long way to make the right connections and meet the right people. When it comes to editors, people who are hiring you for work, creative directors at teams, you gotta make those right connections and it'll take you far. For sure.

Jeff Murphy: And I know that you had said that the faculty at BU had been a big part of that for you while you- were you in a master's program full time? Are you going part time?

Billie Weiss: Yeah, it was full time. So it really was a, it was a 10-month program and it got me through very quickly, but it was a super intensive 10 months. And really, I mean, I loved every



minute of it. I could go on and on, but the faculty, you mentioned the faculty. I think what drew me to BU more than anything was the faculty and the experience that they brought to the table. I mean, these were people who had had incredible jobs and incredible levels of respect within the photojournalism world, and many of them were still working, teaching and working at the same time. So it wasn't like they were just kind of in academia, teaching something out of a textbook. I mean, they were literally doing it every day and then coming to class and telling us how to do it. So to learn from people like that was a unique opportunity. And I think one that was presented most strongly at BU.

Jeff Murphy: Nice. So you had talked, again talking about the faculty. Who are some of the professors that you had that really made an impact on you during your time here at BU?

Billie Weiss: Yeah. So Peter Smith, well, both Peter Smith and Peter Southwick. I was just talking to Peter Smith right before we came here. But I'll start with Peter Southwick. He was the chair of the department at the time. And I remember when I was applying to schools and visiting the schools and looking around, I went into Peter Southwick's office and I looked on the wall, and his wall was just covered with all of these beautiful photographs that he had taken from his career as a journalist for the AP and for the Boston Globe, covering the Red Sox in the seventies and eighties, and news in Boston. He had this beautiful photo of Mother Teresa. He just had all these incredible images that he had made from his career, and from the first time I sat down in his office and looked up at the wall, I was like, okay, this is where I want to come. Like, this is where I want to be. I want to do what he's doing. And his guidance throughout my time here and still to this day, really was memorable and I appreciate it. Peter Smith as well, more on the multimedia and video side. You know, he really taught me the bones of doing video stuff, which is incredibly important in the photography world too, and also just a great guy to kind of bounce stories off of and he was doing it as well in his own career. And Michelle Johnson, she was on kind of more of the web and multimedia side, social media and again, another skill that you really have to have to be successful in this business now. And so it's kind of like the combination of all the professors who brought their unique skill set and unique perspectives, and it all comes together and gives you a really well-rounded kind of set of skills that you can use.

Jeff Murphy: Nice. Well, I also wanted to ask you, I mean, I'm psyched to hear that you had these amazing faculty. Did you come into your master's program, knowing- you had the internship with the Sox, did you know that you wanted to be sort of like working full time for an organization? I mean, hopefully as great as, as the Red Sox, but did you know that you wanted to go to work somewhere? Did you think that you were going to be more of a sort of freelance photojournalist? What was like the dream? What was the vision while you were wrapping up that master's?

Billie Weiss: Being honest, I didn't know at the time where it was going to lead me and what and what I was going to do. I mean, I think I always worked well as part of a team and part of the larger organizations. So I think that was probably my hope. But I definitely had no answers at that time. I didn't know. And I think I kind of began to figure it out over the course of that year. And then it obviously did work out with the Red Sox, but I think one of the great things about the program was that it prepared you for both. It prepared you to go work for a newspaper or a news wire or a sports team. And it also prepared you to be an independent freelancer and learn that hustle that it takes to succeed as a freelancer. And so I didn't know at the time, but I felt like I was prepared to do either.

Jeff Murphy: So I know though that much of the work that you've done as a photojournalist has been around sports. Was that always kind of, have you done other things that are non-sports related that just don't show up on your LinkedIn profile or on your website?

Billie Weiss: I've done a few isolated news and feature stories, but sports were, sports are my passion. I grew up playing sports, watching sports, enjoying sports. And I think as a photographer, whatever you shoot, you should be passionate about it and you should be knowledgeable about it. And I think that's what I know best. That's what I enjoy best. So I think just naturally the opportunities that presented themselves to me were sports-related.

Jeff Murphy: Well, it would make sense to combine your passion with something that you can do for work.

Billie Weiss: Yeah. It doesn't feel like work, you know, it just feels like you're having a great time.

Jeff Murphy: Well now you've been with the Red Sox for what, seven years?

Billie Weiss: Yeah. This'll be eight. Number eight.

Jeff Murphy: Does it feel like work now? Has the magic gone from working for the, again, the world champion, Boston Red Sox?

Billie Weiss: It is work. It's very hard work. I think a lot of people don't realize that sometimes. But at the same time, it doesn't really feel like work. I mean, I pinch myself every day that I'm sitting in the field at Fenway park and taking pictures of the Red Sox. It's like an unbelievable experience and I feel very lucky. But that being said, it is very hard work. It's long nights. It's weekends. It's time in the summer when everyone else is on vacation. So there's a lot of sacrifice that goes into it. But at the end of the day, of course, worth it.

Jeff Murphy: Are you on the road with the team all year, every away game, or did you sort of share duties for traveling? How does that all work out?

Billie Weiss: So we don't travel every road trip. 162 games a year, there's just so many games. You don't need to be there all the time. It's kind of was all the same after awhile. But we'll pick a few key road trips to go on, whether the team has an off day in one of the cities and we can do some cool kind of behind the scenes content, or it's a stadium like a Wrigley field or somewhere that just gives another element, or like the Yankees. So we'll pick and choose our spots throughout the year, but I'm always there traveling for spring training. As soon as we're in the playoffs, I'm traveling, any sort of clinch scenario, I'm traveling, any sort of player milestone that would happen on the road, we'll travel. But day to day, the average road trip, we've got enough that we need at home here at Fenway.

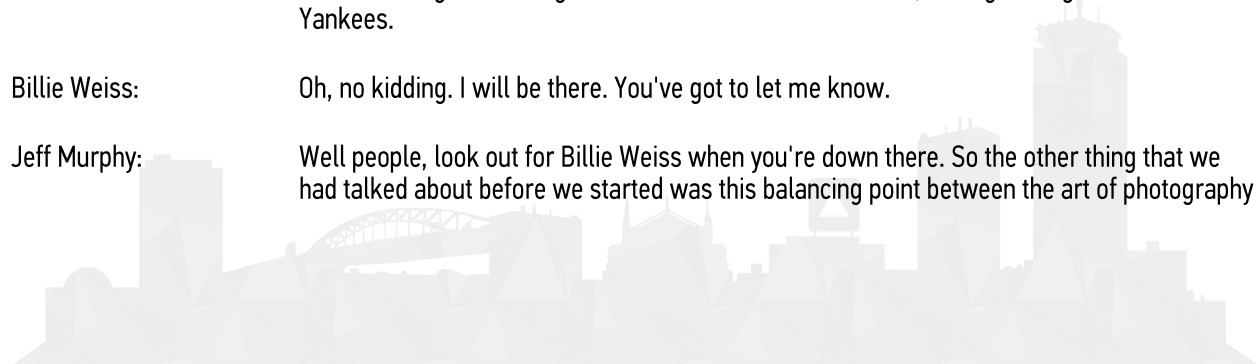
Jeff Murphy: So you are heading to spring training. Are you there the entire time?

Billie Weiss: I'm there half the time. So about a month.

Jeff Murphy: We've got an alumni event we do down at Fort Myers every year. It's coming up this year on February 23rd, I think? Yeah. So I don't know if that's gonna be a time that you're done. There'll be a giant contingent of BU alumni in the stands for, it's a game against the Yankees.

Billie Weiss: Oh, no kidding. I will be there. You've got to let me know.

Jeff Murphy: Well people, look out for Billie Weiss when you're down there. So the other thing that we had talked about before we started was this balancing point between the art of photography



and the sort of journalism aspects i the business aspects. Do you feel like, what was it that got you your job with the Red Sox? Is it a combination of all those things or is it really purely you are somebody who takes amazing shots, we've got to get this guy in the door and then the sort of manager aspect came after that?

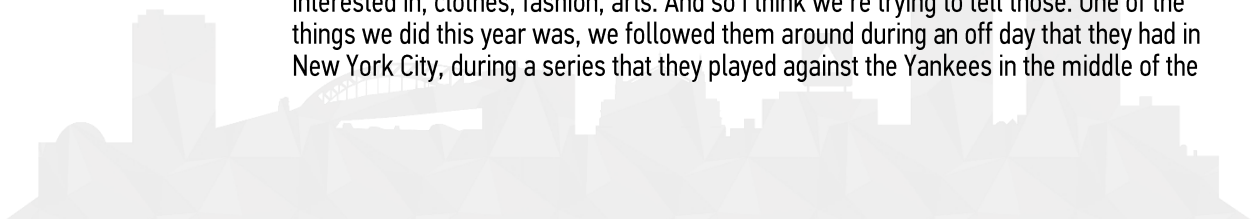
Billie Weiss: Yeah, I mean, first and foremost, you've got to be good at your craft, right? Like you need to be, you know, take great pictures that tell the story of the team or whatever organization you're with. But I think beyond that, it really goes a long way that you're able to work well as part of a team and part of a larger group of people. Like I'm in the marketing department and we have a group called creative services. And so I'm working every day with the graphic designers, our social media people, our advertising people, corporate partnerships. So it takes kind of this ability to be like a chameleon in a way and work with different departments that have nothing to do with photography. So I think that's a big part of it. And also just being easy to get along with and kind of go with the flow and be able to work with people is just as big a part of it as the actual pictures.

Jeff Murphy: So in addition to those things, when you have, whether it's undergrad students or just somebody who loves photography, I'm guessing 80 million times a week, people are asking you like, "How do I get that job?" You know, you talked a little bit about that, but what are the specific kind of like- I know you've got a lot of value out of the Photojournalism Master's Program that you did here, but what are the things you tell people like if they want to have your job someday?

Billie Weiss: Well, the thing is we want people who are shooters. We want people who are out there shooting a lot. Like everyday, really developing a deep, diverse portfolio. Like we don't want to just see 20 pictures of baseball, there's so much more in the world that you can shoot. There's so many stories to tell. So I always like to tell young people who are applying, shoot everything that you can possibly get your hands on. Shoot news, shoot sports, shoot arts and entertainment, portraits, weddings, events, headshots, do it all because you need to be well rounded. And it's not just sports action when you have a job like this, there's so many other types of photography that you have to do. And I think the other thing is develop your own style or look, something that separates you from the other hundreds of portfolios that we're looking at. Like what makes your look or your style unique or different than every other portfolio that we see. So I think those are the main things that I tell people. It's not just about baseball and it's not just about being a fan of the Red Sox, right? Or being a fan of whatever team you're working with, but it's like you want to do it because you love photography and you love telling good stories.

Jeff Murphy: So I'm curious, you're mentioning a lot about sort of telling stories. What are, in your work with the Red Sox or even before, I'm curious to know what are some of the, I don't if it's shots, but what are the things that stand out in terms of the work that you've done that you're the most proud of?

Billie Weiss: Well, I think one of the things we're trying to do right now, which we did a good job of in 2018, is to go beyond the field and kind of tell the story of these players as the humans that they are. Obviously everybody sees the home runs and the strikeouts and everything that happens in the field. But I'm fascinated by what type of people, what kind of people are they away from the baseball field? I mean, yes, in a lot of cases they're multi-million dollar athletes that are in the limelight everyday, but in a lot of ways, kind of find out like they're just like you and I. In a lot of ways, they've got families, they've got other things they're interested in, clothes, fashion, arts. And so I think we're trying to tell those. One of the things we did this year was, we followed them around during an off day that they had in New York City, during a series that they played against the Yankees in the middle of the



season. And it was really cool. It was just kind of like you woke up and just tried to text as many of the guys as I could and say, Hey, what are you doing today? Can I tag along for a couple of minutes? And most of them were like super cool with it. And I got some cool things. I mean, I was at, I was at a, like a southern barbecue for dinner with Mooky, just kind of a nice off-guard moment of him. We had Eduardo Nunez in Times Square, interacting with some New York cops. We had Jackie Bradley at the Central Park Zoo with his daughter and his wife. Just kind of like things like that, that show the human side of them. And that's kind of the stuff that right now I'm the most proud of, because I feel like I've done the action, and I can do that. But I'm trying to dig a level deeper and show a layer that people don't see.

Jeff Murphy: Do you as the manager of photography have that kind of editorial power to go in that direction? Like who do you report to at the Red Sox? And are those folks kind of giving you the direction? Or is it, do you have the freedom to decide that?

Billie Weiss: So I report to the director of Creative Services, who is actually also a COM alum.

Jeff Murphy: We're everywhere.

Billie Weiss: Yeah. They really are. Um, Tim Heintzelman. And so he kind of oversees our operation. But day to day, I don't really, it's more long-term strategically what are we going to do? But day to day it's kind of on me to make those calls. And really the success or failure to be able to do that hinges on the relationships you make with the players. And that's something that just takes time and being around for a while to build up. But once you do build up that level of trust and mutual respect, they kind of let you in and you can really witness some cool moments.

Jeff Murphy: So I wasn't super surprised when I learned that you were working for the Sox year round, even in off season. Are there other things that people, the general public or your friends and family just really misunderstand about what your job is? Everybody I'm sure just guesses that you're palling around with the players all day and that kind of thing.

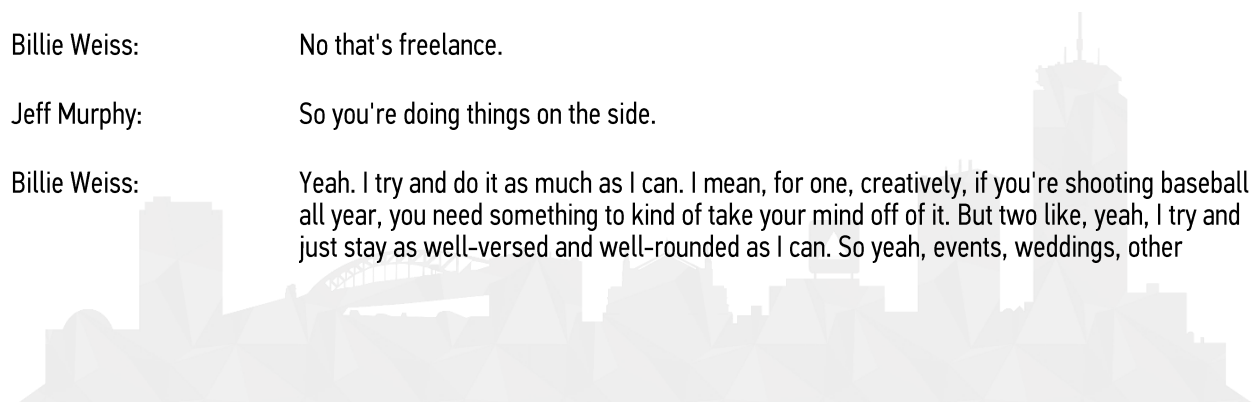
Billie Weiss: Right. I think they see the glamorous side of it, right? But I think what a lot of people don't realize is like I said, it is long nights, long weekends, it's hours, like a lot of hours you put into this. I think the other thing is any photographer is most likely shooting things that they don't maybe necessarily always want to do. Like I shoot a lot of events, cocktail hours, things that creatively aren't going to end up in my portfolio. They're not how I market myself, but it pays the bills. And that's a reality I think of photography these days. You have to be willing to kind of do those things that maybe aren't the sexiest thing to do. But I think that's kind of a general, maybe misunderstanding, is that I just do like glamorous baseball and World Series and whatever, but there's a lot of, I work really hard to do some other things and yeah, it's just you have to put in the hours.

Jeff Murphy: So those things that you're talking about though, are the cocktail hours, are you talking about things that you're doing for the Sox?

Billie Weiss: No that's freelance.

Jeff Murphy: So you're doing things on the side.

Billie Weiss: Yeah. I try and do it as much as I can. I mean, for one, creatively, if you're shooting baseball all year, you need something to kind of take your mind off of it. But two like, yeah, I try and just stay as well-versed and well-rounded as I can. So yeah, events, weddings, other



portraits, corporate work, video work, that's stuff that I do quite a bit of, but maybe is not always as visible.

Jeff Murphy: So it hasn't been that long since you were a student here at COM getting your master's. I'm curious if you sit back and think for a second, what are the things that you know about being a professional photographer now that maybe you didn't know as a grad student?

Billie Weiss: I think it's well, the one is like, as a student you underestimate the work that it takes to get to a high level of success. Like you really have to work and you gotta sacrifice a lot. It's a lot of your time that you would spend with your family and friends that you're going to be working, doing whatever event or whatever game. And I think, I wish I knew that a little bit more back when I started. But I think it's just kind of something that you learn as you go. And then I think the main thing is just learning as many skills as you can. As far as not just photo, but video and writing, blogging, social media, being as well-versed as you can definitely goes a long way. I don't think I don't think I really fully grasped that when I was a student, both in undergrad and at the beginning of grad school. But just being as well rounded as you can will definitely take you far.

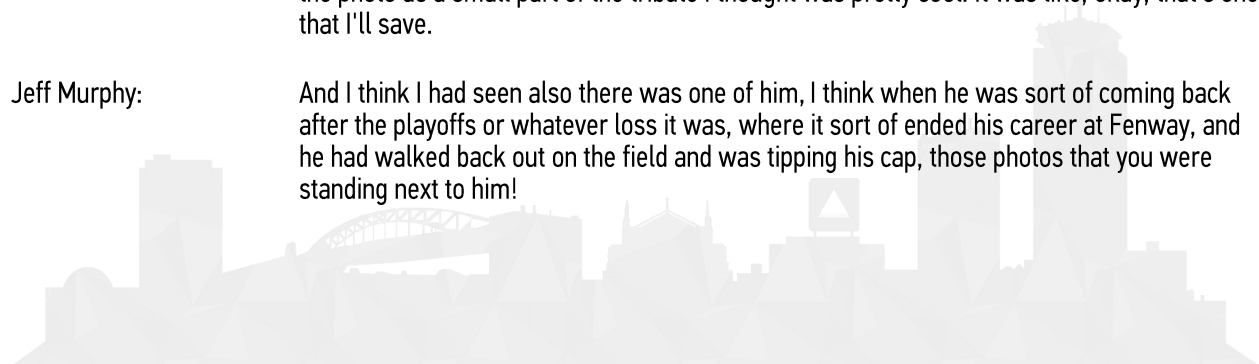
Jeff Murphy: So you have what I think a lot of people who are passionate about photography would think of as a dream job. This isn't saying that you have any plans to move on from the Sox, but what's a dream job for you now? Where do you see your career heading? Are there other kinds of work that you'd love to be doing full time, that sort of thing?

Billie Weiss: Couple of ways, and one is completely unrelated to where I am now, but another BU alum, Pete Souza, I think has the dream job of many photographers. But I mean, I think something like that would be incredible. And I've never really done politics or news, so I don't really have the experience in that realm. But I think just being able to document history, something like what Pete's done, it would be very cool. But I think kind of more directly related to where I am now, I'd love to branch into the agency route and pick up more creative work for brands like the Nike's and the Under Armour's kind of brands like that, that work with professional athletes but not necessarily out at the live game or the live event, but more in a controlled environment for portraits or videos or anything like that. So I think that's where I'm kind of trying to pivot now and I would love to be able to push that way in the future. I love where I'm at at the Red Sox, but always keeping a pulse on what's out there.

Jeff Murphy: Sure, sure, sure. I was looking at your work on your website earlier and there were definitely some shots that I know I had seen. Maybe it was just from following the Sox on social media, but I know you've had things published in countless numbers of publications. Was there one sort of publication of a photo of yours that you were just like, "Wow, I really made it"?

Billie Weiss: That's a good one. I don't know. I mean I think there was one that stuck out when, it must've been 2016, when Ortiz was retiring and they put up this huge billboard saying, "Thank you David". It was in honor of his retirement and it was one of my photos, and I was like, that's pretty cool. I mean this is as big as it gets as far as a sports figure goes, and to kind of use the photo as a small part of the tribute I thought was pretty cool. It was like, okay, that's one that I'll save.

Jeff Murphy: And I think I had seen also there was one of him, I think when he was sort of coming back after the playoffs or whatever loss it was, where it sort of ended his career at Fenway, and he had walked back out on the field and was tipping his cap, those photos that you were standing next to him!



Billie Weiss: I was there. I was there, as were a million, or what seemed like a million other photographers, and that was a surreal moment. It was like, honestly, I think we were all fighting back tears while out there shooting it. I know he was crying. It was actually just looking at those photos this morning and I was like, man, that was a really raw moment. Like that was an emotional moment. It's cool to think like, wow, I was there for that.

Jeff Murphy: Yeah. Well is your website the best place for people to check out some of your work? Will you do a little plug for us?

Billie Weiss: Yeah, so my portfolio is www.billieweiss.com and then I also post a lot to Instagram. So I'm @bjweiss22 on Instagram, and that's probably the best place to follow me. And of course you can follow the Red Sox on social @RedSox on Instagram and Twitter.

Jeff Murphy: One last question. Can you get me a job at the Red Sox?

Billie Weiss: For BU? I'd do anything [laughing].

Jeff Murphy: Billie, thanks a lot for being here.

Billie Weiss: Thanks so much.

Jeff Murphy: Great talking to you.

Jeff Murphy: Thanks again to Billie for joining me on Proud to BU. It was fantastic to get a glimpse behind the scenes of what so many of us would consider to be a dream job. If you'd like to see some of Billie's work and read more about his story, don't miss this profile in the next edition of Bostonian magazine. Thanks again for listening to the Proud to BU podcast. If you like what we're doing, please be sure to subscribe, rate, and review Proud to BU wherever you download your episodes. I'm Jeff Murphy and no matter where your path takes you, be Proud to BU. The Proud to BU podcast is produced by Boston University Alumni Relations. Our theme is from Jump and APM music. To learn more about Proud to BU, visit bu.edu/alumni/podcast.

