

Production Note: The Tip Off was produced as an audio series. If possible, we encourage you to listen to this episode wherever you get your podcasts. The following transcript is for reference only and may contain typos. Please confirm accuracy before quoting.

Maeve: Just a warning before we start. This episode contains strong language and deals with sexual abuse. Listener discretion is advised.

Maeve: Last time on *The Tip Off*:

Meirion: You immediately start thinking, *What was it that I was really seeing back then?*

Liz: I hadn't spoken to her before the interview. I'd read her accounts of what had happened. But it was meeting her and talking to her. That was it. Then I absolutely knew that she was telling the truth.

Meirion: As I left the interview, she said to me, "The BBC will stop this. They won't let you put this out."

Maeve: I'm Maeve McClenaghan, and this is *The Tip Off*.

This is the second part of a two-part special. Last time, we heard how Meirion Jones and Liz MacKean were deep into an investigation for *Newsnight*. They were talking to several women who alleged that popular children's entertainer, Jimmy Savile, had sexually abused them decades earlier. They had followed clues online and made contact with many people, including getting a vital on-screen interview recorded with a woman called Karin Ward.

They knew this story could be huge. And all of this is going on while their BBC colleagues in the daily news teams are reporting on Savile's recent death. Even his

funeral was splashed across the news – a bombastic affair involving a gold coffin in Leeds Cathedral.

Audio from news report: His coffin, which was carried into the cathedral by Royal Marines, was first driven around some of his favourite places in the city, including his childhood home and the Leeds General Infirmary. The eponymous star of *Jim'll Fix It* had raised large amounts of cash for the hospital. And it was this generosity that many of the eulogies focused upon.

Audio from news report: Usually, with cigar in hand, terrible jokes, but no matter what, everybody that he came across – was it staff, patients – felt better for the encounter with Jim.

Maeve: Meirion remembers watching all the coverage in shock.

Meirion: It feels like a car crash. It feels that all this stuff is being done, and it's all gonna be undone, you know, we are gonna be able to say it's completely untrue. All the rumours that so many people heard about him over the years – *they* were the truth.

Maeve: Liz, too, is excited. The interview with Karin Ward, a victim of Savile's, had convinced her. She believed Ward was telling the truth. And after arriving back from the interview, she and Meirion had relayed all this to their editor at *Newsnight*.

Liz: He'd been very keen on the story and enthusiastic. Not so other people on the programme.

Maeve: Some colleagues thought it was salacious, tabloidy and not in keeping with the highbrow focus of the *Newsnight* programme. They saw it as a 'sex scandal,' rather than widespread sexual abuse. Others thought the timing of the story, so close to Savile's death, was in bad taste.

Liz: All of which I found completely disbelieving. I mean, how can a story where you have all the powers that be praising an individual on his death, and then you have other people saying, 'Hang on a minute': How can the mismatch between those two things not be at least worthy of investigation? And by then we knew there was a story there, and we had evidence to show it. So when we had Karin Ward's interview on camera, we really felt we'd made a huge step forward.

Maeve: And one day, Meirion got a call from a former police officer, called Mark Williams-Thomas. They had worked together before on other stories. Mark had also worked in the Surrey police force. And several of the Duncroft women the team had spoken to had mentioned that the Surrey police force had investigated Savile in the past.

Meirion: I told him about Savile, and I hoped he would say, "Yes, I know, we investigated him." But instead he said, "Yeah, I heard all the rumours about him, but I don't know about any Surrey police investigation." And he made a few inquiries, but it went nowhere.

Maeve: But now that Savile had died, Mark got back in touch with Meirion.

Meirion: He says, "Are you working on this?" And I say, "Yes, of course we are." "Can I come in as a consultant on it?" "Yes." Because we wanted an ex-police officer that we could run the evidence past, and they could give observations.

Also, he went back to Surrey police, and he tracked down the ex-head of the paedophile squad, who then confirmed that they had investigated Savile. They thought he was guilty. They'd passed a file to the CPS.

Liz: When it was confirmed by Surrey police that they had investigated Savile after complaints, we thought, *brilliant*. Our editor, really enthusiastic, he said let's prepare for TX – transmission. So by then it was all systems go. We had dates for editing.

Maeve: Inside the *Newsnight* office was a large whiteboard. On it was written which segment would appear on which date. And now, the Savile story was finally added to that list.

Meirion: The date goes up on the wall, on the chart, of films coming up. We are out then gathering every bit of information we can. We're talking to people. We find another woman, who wasn't abused but observed stuff, Rochelle Shepherd, she does an on-camera interview. We're just building more and more.

I hire a 1970s white Rolls-Royce convertible to drive around and do reconstructions around Duncroft. We're putting all the material together for the film. And by this time, other parts of the BBC are now preparing to run very big with the story. There's what's called the Impact team. It was going to be on every domestic BBC channel, and it was going to be a huge story.

Liz: And we'd started to speculate only. But this could indeed be quite far-reaching. Meirion even said to me, "There could be 100 victims," and I remember laughing, because, you know, I would always think Meirion never knowingly undersold on a story. And of course we both wildly underestimated it, as it turned out.

Maeve: The team pushed on. They talked to more and more women. But they were going to wait until the last minute to put the allegations to the big organisations they were going to name: the police, the NHS, even their own employer—the BBC. Some of the allegations involved abuse that happened on BBC premises when Savile was presenting various TV shows with children and teenagers. The journalists knew they were going to ask hard questions of those who had worked with Savile at the time.

Liz: All of that we were going to do as late on as possible. Because we didn't want to risk any interference with the story. We'd known how other journalists had tried and failed to get news of Savile into the public domain. And we just thought the later we leave all that stuff, the better. You know, we wanted to get our ducks in a row.

Maeve: Both Liz and Meirion were counting down to the moment they could shout it from the rooftops.

Meirion: You know, even though it's a really sad subject, it's always very exciting getting to that point with something. It also felt—it felt very much that for once we were going to get the victims' voice out there.

Maeve: Their editor, Peter Rippon, seemed to be fully on board. He had emailed his line manager, the Deputy Head of News for BBC, explaining, "The women are credible and have no motive for speaking to us, other than that they want the truth to be known. We also think that Sky is chasing the story, too, so we don't want to sit on it."

Rippon's then-manager, Stephen Mitchell, replied, saying he would call Rippon later. But when asked at a later date, neither man could recall if a conversation had taken place. Still, things suddenly seemed to change.

Liz: Suddenly, what support we had on the programme began to drain away. And it was clear that in particular our editor Peter Rippon had an apparent change of heart. So from being very enthusiastic, he began to introduce new tests for getting the story on air. Tests which we thought, *That's never going to stand up.*

Maeve: Editor Peter Rippon told Meirion and Liz that what they had wasn't strong enough to run. That, in his view, the *real* story centred on institutional failure, namely the police. He wanted them to get clarity on why the police investigation, which Mark Williams-Thomas had confirmed had happened, hadn't gone anywhere.

Liz: Some of the women had said to us that when they'd been contacted by Surrey Police, they then received a letter saying he would not be prosecuted because of his age and infirmity. *Too old and infirm.*

That is *not* an acceptable reason, to many people, not to proceed with the prosecution. So we wanted to find out if that was true. But suddenly that became the absolute benchmark for getting the story on air. It became *the* editorial test. Well, it always

struck us as very unlikely that the CPS would admit to such a thing, even if it had been true.

Maeve: Still, Liz and Meirion put in a request to the Crown Prosecution Service, asking them to explain why the investigation into Savile had not proceeded. Meirion had a sinking feeling.

Meirion: Yes. I mean, I think Liz sort of believed that if we could prove that, we'd then be able to run the whole story. So she really kept going at the CPS and the police. I thought that they were actually just trying to kill the story.

Maeve: They waited for the CPS response, both journalists trying as hard as they could to persuade Rippon that what they had *was* strong enough.

Liz: Every time we thought that we'd come up with a very good argument for the story to stay on track, you know, the ground shifted yet again.

Maeve: Rippon was adamant they wait for the response. Without it, he said, all they had was "just the women." That phrase infuriated Liz.

Meirion: We were both having blazing rows with our editor. I mean, Liz, in particular, would go into his office and leave the door open, so the whole office could hear what she was saying to him.

And it gradually becomes more and more apparent to me that this is going to be blocked. And I write what I call a 'red flag memo,' where I write down all the arguments and what will happen to the BBC, if they pull the story.

If we run the story, the story is: *The BBC was bad in the old days, but it's good now.*

If we *don't* run the story, it'll be: *The BBC covering up again.*

So I write down all my thoughts. I've got a contemporaneous record of that, and of the

sort of discussions I was having with my editor. It seemed obvious to me that there was no point going higher up the chain, that he wouldn't be doing this unless he was being instructed to. And we got to the end of the year then.

Unbeknown to me, one of my other friends who's a reporter, Caroline Hawley, was invited to drinks with the Director General just before Christmas. So she immediately grabbed him and said, "Why are you suppressing the Savile story?" He said, "I don't know anything about this, I'll find out." And we now know that there were then discussions between him and the Head of News and Current Affairs about the Savile story and he was put in the loop on what had happened.

Maeve: It wasn't looking good. And then, finally, a response came through from the CPS.

Liz: A very vague letter talking about the Kent Police investigation – when it had not been Kent Police, it had been Surrey Police – saying that the reason they hadn't prosecuted was lack of evidence.

You know, just because the CPS might say they don't have the evidence to prosecute, doesn't mean the evidence isn't there. It doesn't mean the evidence couldn't be gathered. We'd spoken to people, including Karin Ward, who'd never been contacted by the police and had never spoken to the police. So how valid really was the police investigation, let alone the decision by the Crown Prosecution Service, *not* to take Jimmy Savile to court.

Liz: It was clear that a decision had been taken somewhere within the BBC that this story wouldn't run, because at no stage were any reasonable journalistic reasons given for not running it.

Maeve: Liz and Meirion both thought that pressure had come from above to kill the story. Later a review into the affair didn't agree. And indeed Rippon said the decision was his, and his alone. But whatever happened, the decision was made.

Meirion: We actually get to the point that I'm in the edit suite, with the editor who's

gonna cut the package, when it is pulled. The story is pulled. We are days from transmission.

Maeve: Liz and Meirion walked past the whiteboard, the one detailing which segments would run on which dates. And saw the story was gone.

Meirion: By the time I got out of the edit suite to argue with my editor, it had been wiped off the whiteboard.

Maeve: It was a devastating blow. Liz took it hard. All those women she and the team had spoken to, they had all put their trust in her, told her painful, terrible things, in the hope that the truth would finally come out. And now it wouldn't.

Liz: And it just shows the difficulty, that the sorts of people that Savile preyed on, the difficulty that they've heard through the years of being believed, all the way up until the moment when they finally are willing to talk about it to the BBC. And far from being all ears, the BBC just shut up shop and didn't want to know.

Meirion: I talked to Karin. I don't remember this. But she says I'd had a conversation with her saying they were trying to kill it, but we're still trying to get it out. And then apparently, I just sent her a one-word text, which she thinks I said, "Bugger." I think that's unlikely. It's much more likely I said, "Bollocks." And after that, she wouldn't take our calls. Liz talked to the other women and had those conversations.

Maeve: To add insult to injury, all the TV tributes to Savile kept rolling out, including a Christmas tribute version of *Jim'll Fix It*, the long-running BBC show that had been presented by Savile, in which he encouraged children to write in to have their wishes granted.

Meirion: You'd have thought that at the very least that the Director General would have wanted to sit down with me and Liz and make sure that there was nothing in this. But there was nothing like that. It was going to be, *Jimmy Savile is great. What a hero.*

Maeve: Stunned, Liz and Meirion tried to get back to work. There were other investigations to do, stories to tell. But it was hard. Yet, interestingly, it didn't really occur to either of them to leave the BBC.

Meirion: We should have thought, *No, we'll just walk out of here*. But because we'd been on BBC for so long, we were institutionalised, really. It just didn't occur to either of us to do that, which is what we should have done.

Maeve: And yet, it seemed the story was seeping out anyway.

Meirion: There's a call to the office before Christmas from *the Daily Mirror*, saying they've heard rumours that we're investigating Savile and the story was pulled. I assume that that has sort of leaked out as gossip from other people in the office or whatever. What I didn't know at the time was Liz was so furious that she had actually talked to Miles Goslett, an outside journalist, and told him what happened.

Maeve: Liz had leaked details about how editors had killed the story to freelance journalist Miles Goslett. He had tried to get it published in seven Fleet Street papers. But all had turned him down.

Meirion: Because they were still intimidated by Savile and everything that had happened around him. He was the great charity giver, he was a hero. And in the past, they'd been terrified by his lawyers. So in the end, he went to the *Oldie* and put out the story in the *Oldie*.

Maeve: The *Oldie* is a British monthly magazine, written for older people. It's not exactly where you go to get breaking news.

Meirion: And again, there was a bit of a buzz. There was a panic inside the BBC about it. But the story didn't really go anywhere.

Maeve: But the story *was* going to come out properly. Back during the whirlwind of their investigation, Liz and Meirion had shared all the materials they had with Mark

Williams-Thomas, a former police officer who was acting as a consultant on the investigation.

Meirion: He hadn't seen the interview with Karin Ward, but he'd seen everything else.

Maeve: And unlike Liz and Meirion, he didn't have the same kind of loyalty or allegiance to the BBC. Determined to get the story out into the world, he took the materials to ITV's *Exposure* programme, a rival to *Newsnight*. Mark told Meirion what he was planning, and Meirion passed on leads and contacts when people came to him. Liz heard about it, too.

Liz: I'd complain to Meirion. I'd come into the office and say, "This can't stand. It's just not right. You know, the story has to be told." And he was much calmer about that than me. And just said "Well, it will. Mark Williams-Thomas. He will run it on ITV."

Maeve: Months and months passed. And one day, Meirion went to meet Mark.

Meirion: In a café on the South Bank, Mark showed me the film. I thought it was good.

Maeve: Around 11 months after their story was spiked, Liz and Meirion started to see press reports about the ITV show that was soon to air.

Liz: And my first thought was, *We can do it now*. So I remember, with real spring in my step, going into the office and saying, "Well, let's run our stuff now. Better late than never. Better to do it than not at all. And at least let's finally get it out and also get ahead of ITV." And it was obvious that that wasn't going to happen.

Maeve: *Newsnight* still wasn't going to run the story. But, little did they know, they were about to *become* the story.

ITV's press team start to advertise that they are about to expose Jimmy Savile's crimes. But there's something else.

Meirion: Then they start saying, "And the BBC covered up an investigation of him that could have come out a year ago."

Maeve: The papers started to ask why the BBC had dropped the story when they had it all those months ago. On the third of October 2012, ITV aired its programme, *Exposure: The Other Side of Jimmy Savile*.

ITV clip: For more than 40 years, Jimmy Savile was a show business friend of the establishment. A friend of the rich and famous, even of Prime Minister's and royalty. He was celebrated for his charity work and famed for his TV programmes, most of them featuring children. But tonight, *Exposure* investigates allegations that away from the cameras, Sir Jimmy Savile was far from a genial eccentric.

Meirion: By the Monday morning, there's only one thing anyone is talking about. And it's on every news bulletin. It's on every newspaper. And the only place it isn't is *Newsnight* — because our editor prevented anything about Savile appearing on the programme, night after night. People started tuning in to the first minute of *Newsnight* just to see if we are ignoring the story yet again.

Maeve: After the ITV documentary aired, things exploded.

The children's charity, the NSPCC, said calls to report the serious sexual abuse of children had risen by more than 80% in the wake of the story.

An inquiry later found that as many as 500 people might have been victims of Saville. Some were children as young as two years old.

People just couldn't understand how Savile had got away with his crimes for so long. How he had died without facing justice. And there were questions as to why the BBC hadn't reported all this months ago. But the BBC's press team was spinning the story,

briefing journalists that in fact, Liz and Meirion had only ever been looking into Surrey Police's investigation, and the CPS angle. Peter Rippon published a blog explaining his decision to spike the story: *"This statement [from the CPS] specifically denied the allegation that the investigation was dropped because of his age. I felt it was significant the guidance was included and we had not established any institutional failure and I judged it weakened the story from a Newsnight perspective. I took the decision not to publish."*

Liz: And there was absolutely no one at the BBC I could talk to or get any sort of advice from, because we were seen as the enemy. There was a total lack of support. There was a real propaganda effort, I think, all about covering up the fact that *Newsnight* had decided not to run this story. So the whole aim was to just try and pretend we were doing a different story, that we couldn't stand up. I remember driving home one Sunday, and the phone going and it was someone from one of the national newspapers to say that a member, a senior member of BBC management, had told him that the investigation had been run by a 'work experience person.' And I almost drove off the road.

Meirion: *It had just been a couple of calls by a work experience girl. That's literally what they said.*

Liz: We were working with Hannah Livingston, who is a really good, young journalist who the BBC put on its trainee scheme, which is a really prestigious scheme.

Meirion: And myself and Liz put in writing that we will not go along with the lie on this. We *will* tell the truth. If there's an inquiry into this, we will tell everything that happened. And the emails make it absolutely clear what happened. There is a paper trail here which shows what happened.

Liz: It was just a blatant attempt to rubbish what we were doing, along with insisting that our story had been an investigation into Surrey Police, saying that the women weren't credible, and that they'd all got together and somehow cooked it up on social media. And by the time the BBC was strongly saying all this and using all its senior

figures and supporters, to try and get this across, dozens more people were coming forward.

Maeve: Things got frenetic. Liz and Meirion found themselves at the centre of the story — on the other side of the news cameras for once.

Liz: And I remember, I had a two week period of journalists ringing up round the clock, knocking on my door at home, putting letters through the letterbox. And I live outside London, so in other words, they'd gone to trouble.

Meirion: Yeah, we were being hounded by the press all the time. I would walk up from Oxford Circus tube station, and journalists would start appearing from nowhere, and by the time you'd got to the church, outside the BBC, there would be packs of them, cameras in your face. It's ironic, really, because I'd done that to politicians in the past, who were involved in financial scandals or corruption scandals or whatever. I'd been part of that pack, chasing *them* around. And it certainly made me think twice about how I behaved perhaps in the past.

Maeve: The pressure was intense, both from outside the BBC and perhaps even more so internally.

Meirion: You know, I think management thought, probably for misogynistic reasons, that Liz was weaker than me. So they sort of concentrated their fire on me. But in fact, we were absolutely back to back throughout that whole process. I wouldn't have made it through without Liz.

Maeve: Meirion and Liz stood strong. Even when it felt like the whole rest of the organisation was against them, they knew they had each other's backs.

Meirion: Obviously we spent a lot of time together. We were probably in contact every hour, you know, during waking hours. And we were in the same building, so it was quite easy to actually meet up. But you know, if management saw the two of us

together, there'd be a sort of 'deathly look' which would instantly morph into like they were quite happy and relaxed about it and so on.

Maeve: It was a strange atmosphere. But things were going to change. Meirion was soon to get an offer.

Meirion: Tom Giles, who was the editor of *Panorama*, took me for a quick lunch and said, "Would you be prepared to join us to make a film about Savile?" And this was going to be the whole thing, his offending, the scale of it, but also the BBC.

Maeve: He said yes.

So Meirion is shuffled out of *Newsnight* and goes to *Panorama*, the BBC's other flagship investigative show. That show has a reputation for holding the powerful to account. And their editor, Tom Giles, decided this wasn't going to be any different. Their clout meant the show would go through. But Liz is still at *Newsnight*, working day in and day out, surrounded by colleagues who worry their jobs, their programme, might be on the line because of the scandal surrounding her story.

Liz: There was a feeling that the programme was under attack, that me and Meirion were responsible, because we weren't toeing the line, we weren't agreeing that we'd been investigating the police or the Crown Prosecution Service. And as such, we were seen, well we were described by a very senior member of BBC management as traitors to the BBC.

I mean, overnight, my relationship with the BBC changed, and I'd always loved working [there]. I'd worked there for over 20 years, and I'd always felt lucky and very privileged. I'd always been really happy in my work.

And all of a sudden, I was persona non grata. And people who knew me wouldn't be talking to me. I'd sort of sit down, no one would, all the usual chit-chat of an office — that seemed to just fall away. I was offered a paid holiday, I was told I didn't need to come into work.

And I said, "Well, hang on, I haven't done anything wrong." So I actually started going in five days a week, rather than the usual three or four. And it was then this realisation, my goodness, I might professionally, I — this could be the end for me, because I'm really on the wrong side of this. And there was absolutely no one within the organisation that I felt I could talk to, or who could help or advise, because it seemed everyone was involved in this huge effort to pretend we hadn't had the story at all.

Maeve: With nothing left to lose, Liz decided to cooperate with the *Panorama* programme and agreed to be interviewed.

Liz: And I gave all my emails from the time, all my notes of the investigation, everything that we'd done and all that had happened and agreed to do an interview. And I assumed it would be, you know, me and Meirion, and obviously, BBC management, but in the end, all the BBC management, under very expensive legal advice, decided *not* to be interviewed by *Panorama*. So obviously, it was us.

Meirion: Well, we're told by somebody on the *Panorama* team that management have said, *If we give an interview, if we hand over the emails, we will be sacked.* Well, they already had the emails, and there was no way that Liz and myself were not going to do the interview.

Maeve: Hastily, the *Panorama* was pulled together. But the BBC management offices were on the same floor as the *Panorama* team.

Meirion: And it was, yes, very, very, very tense.

Maeve: It became clear that BBC Director General, George Entwistle, had been called before Parliament. He was going to be questioned by the Culture Select Committee on a Tuesday. So the *Panorama* team knew they had to scramble.

Meirion: Tom Giles, who's the editor of *Panorama* says, "Right, he's appearing on Tuesday. We're going to have to do this *Panorama* as a crash for Monday night. We cannot conceal this from Parliament. It has to be out there." He says, "Anyone who volunteers for this won't sleep for a week. And their BBC career will be fucked. Who's in?" Everyone put their hands up. It was quite an amazing moment.

Maeve: So a few weeks after ITV aired their doc, *Panorama* put out their show, *Jimmy Savile: What the BBC Knew*.

Panorama clip: Not the BBC's most triumphant hour. One of the corporation's flagship current affairs shows investigating the other. The inside story of why a BBC investigation that could have exposed Savile almost a year ago was spiked instead.

Maeve: On it, Karin Ward, one of Savile's victims who had first spoken to Meirion and Liz, explained what the disappearance of the story had meant.

Karin Ward: It was hurtful. And it was difficult, because I had been pushed so hard to do it when I didn't want to. You have to remember, I wasn't very well at all, I had cancer. In the end, I said, *Okay*, and for all that stress. That's what made me angry. The fact that I'd gone through all that stress, when I really needed to concentrate on getting well. And then they never used it, because somebody higher up didn't believe me.

Liz: It wasn't until literally the moment that *Panorama* went on air that the BBC made its biggest correction, which was that: an admission that *Yes, we had been investigating Jimmy Savile*.

Now this was 20 days after *Exposure* was broadcast on ITV. So for 20 days, the BBC have been denying this sort of fundamental fact. So it was a relief that finally the BBC was acknowledging the truth.

Maeve: Former Head of Sky News, Nick Pollard, was tasked with looking into what went wrong at the BBC, and after deep research, presented his findings in December 2012.

Nick Pollard: The *Newsnight* investigators got the story right. They had found clear and compelling evidence that Jimmy Savile was a paedophile. The decision by the editor to drop the original investigation was clearly flawed. And the way it was taken was wrong. Though I believe it was done in good faith. It was not done to protect the Savile tribute programmes or for any improper reason. The *Newsnight* editor's most serious mistake was that he didn't look properly at the evidence before deciding to drop the story. It's not surprising therefore that he didn't understand the evidence that he had. And that was to cause enormous confusion in the months to come.

Maeve: Pollard went on to write, "In my view, the most worrying aspect of the Jimmy Savile story for the BBC was not the decision to drop the story itself. There was a complete inability to deal with the events that followed. The efforts to get to the truth behind the Savile story proved beyond the combined efforts of the senior management, legal department, corporate communications team and anyone else for well over a month. Leadership and organisation seems to be in short supply."

Maeve: *Newsnight* editor Peter Rippon stepped down from the role. His blog, put up in the days after the ITV story broke, was corrected. Liz stuck around for a bit longer.

Liz: I mean, I think I'd hoped I could. But there's something about being vindicated. It's not enough. You know, the organisation had been so entirely embarrassed by its own mishandling of the situation.

But I really questioned whether I'd ever get a decent story again to do. There are all sorts of ways in which you can be sort of quietly pushed to the side. And I just thought, after that experience, I like being a journalist, I enjoy working. And I thought it's not going to happen here anymore, so I need to leave.

Liz: It was difficult to leave. It was difficult to make that break. But I remember one of my best projects at the BBC was interviewing people who'd lived to be 100 and their

lessons for life. And this woman I'll never forget said, "You know what, when one door shuts, another door opens." And I've, I've found that helpful actually during that period. I've held on to it. And I found it to be true.

Maeve: She moved to Channel 4's *Dispatches* programme, where she made the award-winning show *Hunted*, about Russian vigilante gangs entrapping and attacking gay men. She was named Journalist of the Decade by Stonewall at their annual awards, honouring people who have affected the lives of British lesbian, gay, bi and trans people.

Maeve: Even in the years after the scandal had broken, Liz had been thinking about the women who had been brave enough to tell her their stories about Savile.

Liz: I really think is how hard it is for victims of child sex abuse, particularly where it had happened many years before, actually ever to be believed. And a lot of how the BBC behaved was as other institutions behave: whether the courts, the police, NHS, hospitals, even within families. You know, the people making the complaints are sidelined. They are disbelieved. They are seen as not credible and often blamed for something that they weren't at all responsible for.

Maeve: In fact, the more she thought about it, the more she wondered if it was particularly because these women were who they were that they had been so easily to brush off before. The women they'd spoken to from Duncroft School were already considered 'troubled' or 'troublesome.'

Liz: The fact that they'd been in a school like Duncroft showed that their lives were on, if you like, a difficult course going forward. And people aren't that interested actually in the experiences (in inverted commas), "unsavoury" of middle aged women when they were tricky teenage girls. I suppose it's sexism, but I think that there is within the mainstream establishment there is a sort of just a dislike of that sort of thing, those sort of people, a lack of interest. And you see it repeated. The current cases of grooming and street gangs and all these girls often from care backgrounds who were abused, you see the same sort of official indifference, which is that people see them as

responsible, or they're not that interested, or they just find them difficult to deal with. And I think the BBC suffered from that.

Maeve: In the weeks and months after the Savile story broke, inquiries and reviews were undertaken by the BBC, the NHS, the Crown Prosecution Service, and the Department of Health. Karin Ward, the woman whose online account and then brave decision to be interviewed on-camera had been vital in bringing the story to light, died in 2021. Years earlier, she wrote the book *Victim Zero* about her experiences.

Meirion Jones left the BBC, and now works at the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, where he is my editor. He remembers watching the revelations grow and grow.

Meirion: I had thought by the time it was pulled that we were talking about maybe 100 people in 10 institutions. The scale of it was just staggering. The whole system, the whole corruption of the whole system, was exposed by Savile. Personally, for both of us, it also felt really good that we were giving Karin her voice, that we were letting her say what she'd been trying to say for so long.

Maeve: A BBC spokesperson told *The Tip Off*: "Savile's actions were profoundly wrong, and we're sorry for the pain caused to his survivors. These issues were considered in depth by the comprehensive independent Pollard Review in 2012, which, as you've noted, concluded that while the decision to drop the original *Newsnight* investigation was flawed, and the way it was taken was wrong, it was done in good faith. Mr Pollard did not believe that there was any inappropriate managerial pressure or consideration that influenced the editor of *Newsnight* not to run the Savile story. In response to Pollard's broader findings on editorial practises, and as we made clear at the time, BBC management made a number of significant changes, and these were subject to much scrutiny."

In 2017, six years after her Savile story was spiked, Liz MacKean suffered a stroke and died. She was 52 years old, and left behind her wife and their two children. The Savile exposé was just one of the remarkable stories she had investigated during her amazing career. It was an incredible story with huge consequences for almost everyone

involved. But at the heart of it were two journalists who had each other's back through thick and thin, journalists who were *not* going to be silenced.

Meirion: We knew what it was like going through those really tough times where you have to be together. And we knew we could absolutely trust one another. We both knew that we were both rock solid. So that made it much, much easier going into there. There was no thought on either side that one of us is going to back down. You know, there was absolutely no possibility that either of us would have said, "Okay, we're going to cover this up and go along with the cover-up." I mean, the other thing to say is that Liz was very, very funny. And in those stressful situations, it's incredibly good to be working with somebody as funny as that.

Maeve (in interview with Meirion): I guess then just finally, to wrap up, I guess you can't go through an experience like that without it changing you both as a person and as a journalist. Were there lessons that you learned along that road that impacted the way you work now – and now you're an editor – how you kind of work with journalists yourself?

Meirion: That's a really good question. I suppose the real lesson is the editor is not always right. And I say that as the editor.

Maeve: I may or may not hold that against you one day.

Maeve: Thanks to Meirion and to Liz's family for letting me tell this story. And a big hat tip to journalist Poppy Sebag-Montefiore for her brilliant *Guardian* article, which helps inspire this episode. I'll include a link to that, and more about Liz MacKean's work, in the show notes.

That's all for this episode of *The Tip Off*.

Please do review, subscribe and pass on word to your friends, and visit our new website

— thetipoffpodcast.com — to explore show notes, past seasons, transcripts and more.

This show is a co-production of Studiotobe. Our co-executive producers are Joaquin Alvarado and Ken Ikeda.

Maeve McClenaghan – that's me – created this podcast.

Olivia Aylmer produces the show.

Chloe Behrens handles audio editing.

Claudia Meza does our audio mixing, sound design and original music. Thanks to her for editorial consultation, too.

Thanks also to Soobin Kim and Rushana Miller for transcription support.

Dice Muse composed our theme music.

As always, stay tuned for more stories behind the headlines.