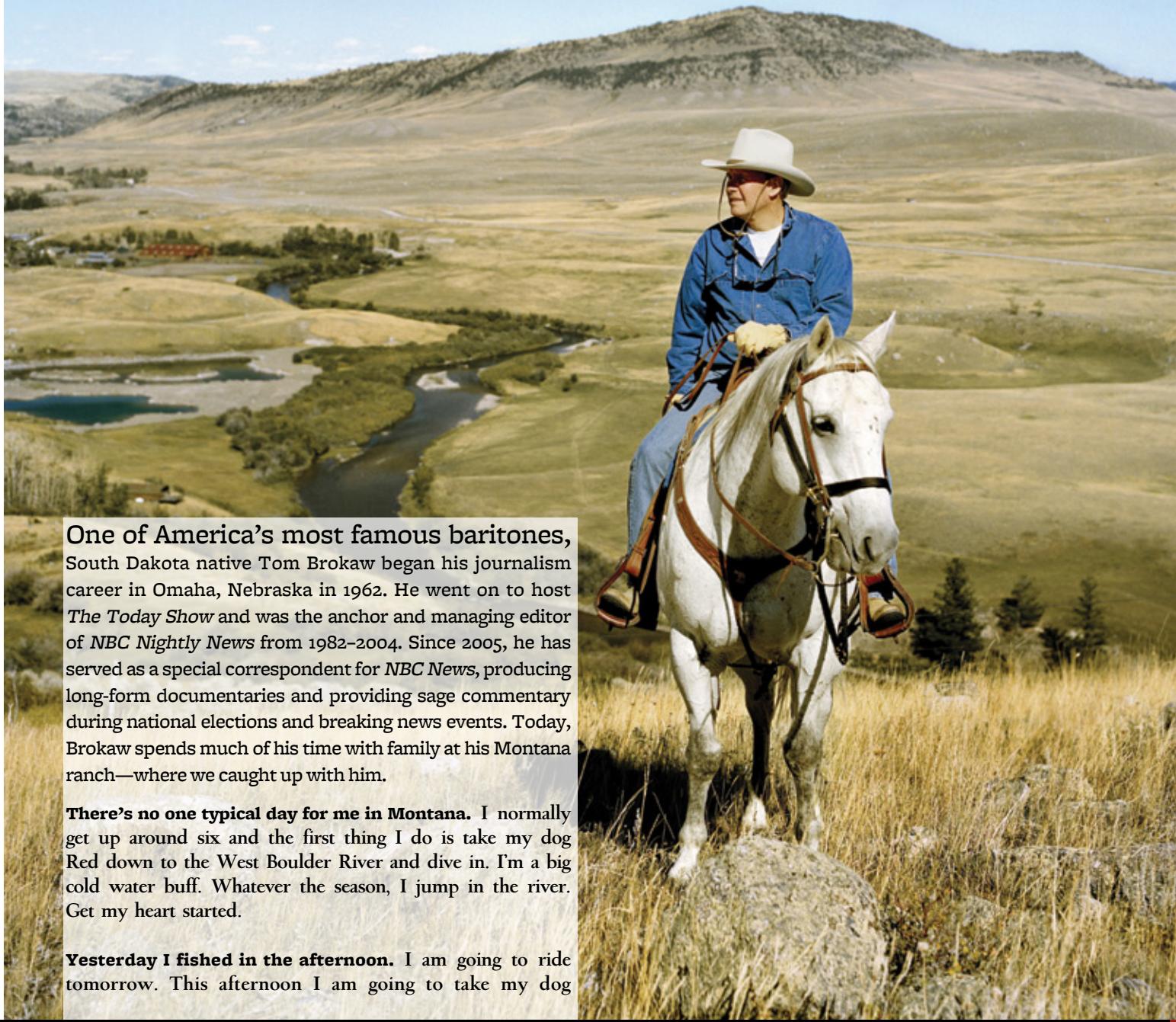


# Tom 71 Brokaw

New York & Montana  
interview by Brian Schott  
photographs by George Holz



One of America's most famous baritones, South Dakota native Tom Brokaw began his journalism career in Omaha, Nebraska in 1962. He went on to host *The Today Show* and was the anchor and managing editor of *NBC Nightly News* from 1982–2004. Since 2005, he has served as a special correspondent for *NBC News*, producing long-form documentaries and providing sage commentary during national elections and breaking news events. Today, Brokaw spends much of his time with family at his Montana ranch—where we caught up with him.

**There's no one typical day for me in Montana.** I normally get up around six and the first thing I do is take my dog Red down to the West Boulder River and dive in. I'm a big cold water buff. Whatever the season, I jump in the river. Get my heart started.

**Yesterday I fished in the afternoon.** I am going to ride tomorrow. This afternoon I am going to take my dog

up into the hills. We're starting to inventory the upland bird population.

**I'm promoting a documentary** I've got running on Baghdad. We're going to get a remote truck out to Montana so I can be on *The Today Show*. That means I'll go into Sweet Grass County today and talk to the sheriff and make sure we can get Main Street in Big Timber, Montana cleared out at five in the morning.

**I don't remember a time when there were so many things** that demanded the attention of what I would call rank and file citizens. And war is a big part of it. Big Timber, Montana, and towns like that, sends their young people off in uniform. When they graduate from high school, very often their first choice is not Stanford, or Harvard, or Princeton, it's the Marine Corp, the Navy, or the Air Force. I want to remind people of that.

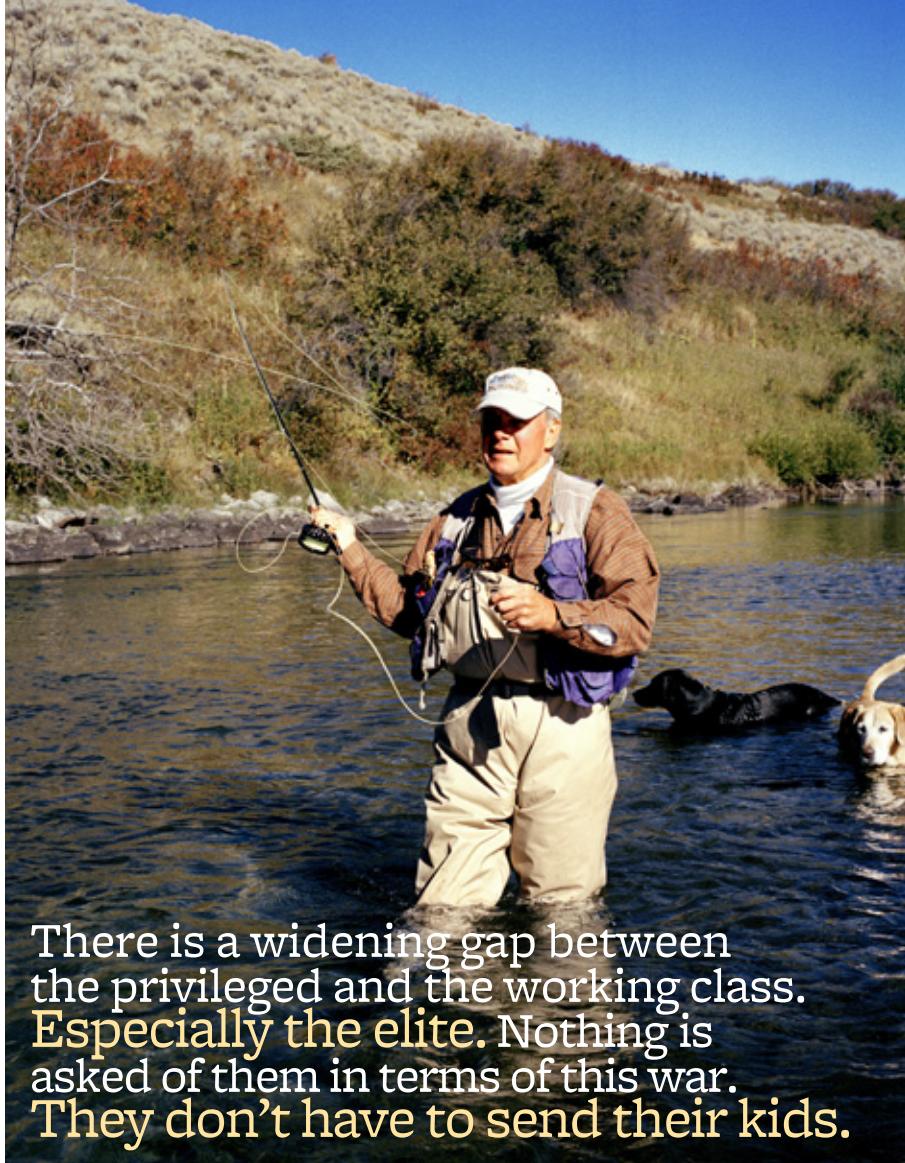
**There is a widening gap between the privileged and the working class.** Especially the elite. Especially those at the very top. Nothing is asked of them in terms of this war. They don't have to send their kids. It's out of sight, out of mind. The middle class and the working class are fighting the war.

**I don't remember when there has been the level of disgust** across the country with what's going on in Washington as there is now. We seem to be occupying two separate universes—inside the Beltway and outside the Beltway.

**Regionally, wolf reintroduction is a hot-button issue.** We have wolves in our valley. A young man working for us spotted one the other day. We were in favor of wolf introduction and followed the issue very carefully from the beginning. It was not an easy issue for our neighbors. The wolves have been in and out of this valley for five or six years now. There's been a very small calf kill, maybe three or four, all compensated except one. A bear got on it so they couldn't compensate the rancher who had his cattle grazing on our lands. We picked up the cost of the calf.

**A wolf did kill a dog, a pet, this past winter,** and that, of course, lit it up again. My own impression, and it's not just anecdotal, is that the wolves have proliferated a lot more than anyone had projected and I do think that we can have a management program. Two years ago when they had the hunt in Montana, one was shot not too far from here and the wolf pack dispersed very quickly. The elk began to move around in an entirely different way, which is how it was supposed to work.

**The outdoors is a [source of] constant renewal.** I learn more from



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just watching the complexity of the wilderness, the grass, and the animals that are around than I do from almost anything else. It's always instructive to see how nature moves on its own terms, how animals take care of each other, how they avoid predators, and how the predators make their living.

**We don't kill anything on the ranch.** I saw a big rattlesnake again the other day—there's a fair amount of them around. We always let them go unless they come into our yard where they would be a danger to our grandchildren. Rattlesnakes are part of the cycle of life.

**I have a book coming out this fall and I wrote most of it here.** I've got a log cabin office and a commercial satellite for broadband.

**I haven't Tweeted and I haven't Facebooked.** I think that the real test of technology is that you should be the master of it; it should not be the master of you. I don't think it's necessary for all my friends to know when I am walking across the bridge and drinking a cup of coffee. I don't need to add to that.

**There was a time when you could be a couch potato** as a citizen. You could get up in the morning and take the paper off the front stoop, watch *The Today Show* for awhile, get home in the evening, watch Walter Cronkite or Chet Huntley and David



Brinkley, and you'd have a pretty good fix on what was going on. Now there is a tsunami of information *all day long*. And a lot of it comes from unknown sources.

**You have to have a much more proactive attitude** as a news consumer about where you are getting your information. How does it hold up? Does it have credibility? Does it have a separate agenda? You have to bring the same active intelligence to information as you do to making a decision about what doctor you're going to go see. People come to me wide-eyed and say, "You're not going to believe what I read on the Internet this morning." And I say, "You're right, I'm not going to believe it."

**There is a feeling—among too many parties—that global climate change is some kind of a fraud.** We're not responding to it with the alacrity that it deserves. Even well meaning people are not changing their habits the way that they ought to. And that includes us. We're doing solar here at the ranch for about half of the residences in terms of heat and water, but we could be doing more.

**The younger generation will help.** A perfect example is this debate about light bulbs that resurfaced. About whether we should go back to the old-fashioned light bulbs and people should have the choice. Well, I thought if you're going to think that way, why not eliminate seatbelts in cars, for example. Or get rid of catalytic converters. We do these things because it advances the common interest.

**The Yellowstone is one of our mother rivers.** It's the longest

un-dammed river in [the lower contiguous 48 states of] America. The oil pipelines under rivers like this appear to be an accident waiting to happen. I think they were lucky they confined the oil spill as much as they did. But these are cautionary tales.

**On the other hand, that oil was going to a refinery,** which produces gasoline. And no one wants to give up the SUV.

**You should go into the wilderness** on your own terms and not rely on a GPS or your cell phone. Leave those behind.

**When I was coming out of the Beartooth Mountains** a number of years ago, I ran into a group of young people and an older guy with them and they were scurrying around in kind of a frantic mode. I said, 'What's the problem?' and they said, 'Well, he's a Stanford professor and he's a beta tester for a new GPS system and he put it down and now we can't find it.' I roared with laughter and thought, the GPS system knows where it is, but they don't.

**I find my hope from the ground up.** Politically, environmentally, culturally, it's the people who are doing the right thing, not for recognition or celebrity, but just because it is the right thing. And that's what I always found throughout my journalistic career. The most memorable interviews I've conducted were very often the people whose names I didn't even know. They were civil rights workers in the South; or young aid workers in the Kashmir, Pakistan earthquake; volunteers from Doctors Without Borders in Somalia and Mogadishu. Those are the people who give you hope.