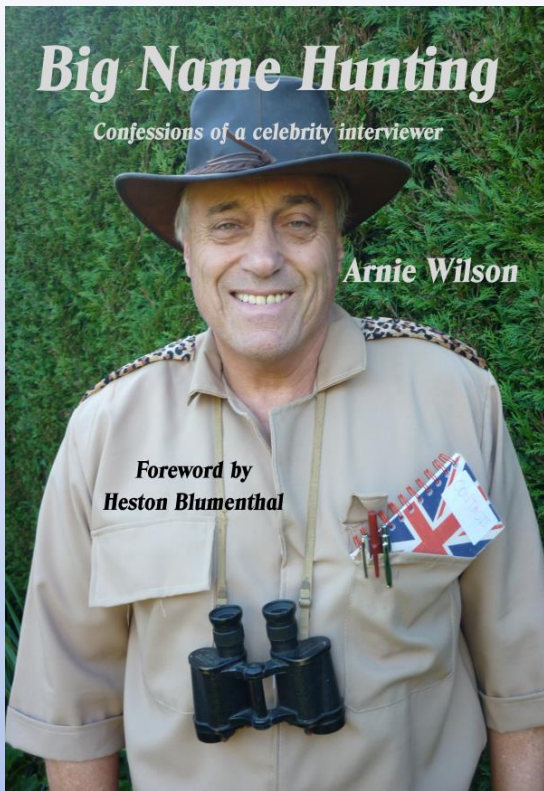


# Big Name Hunting

Confessions of a celebrity interviewer

Arnie Wilson

Foreword by  
Heston Blumenthal



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## With Friends like Bob ...

But how did my descent into celebrity journalism come about?

It was all thanks to the man I had gone to work for in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, more than 10 years earlier. A man who would himself become something of a celebrity. He was called Bob Friend.

Bob Friend had seen some of my early scribbblings in the *Kent Messenger* in Maidstone, where I had been given my own front page column – rather an honour for a cub reporter still wet behind the ears. He had hired me at the then not immodest wage of £15 a week. This wasn't too bad when I recall that the local Tiki Tonga restaurant served delicious business lunches for five shillings (25p in today's language). I moved in to a bed-sit in Upper Grosvenor Road, Southborough, while my new office 'home' in nearby Tunbridge Wells was christened 'the dungeon'.

Upstairs, Bob Friend – soon to become well-known as a BBC TV news correspondent in Tokyo, Sydney and the US, and then even more famous as a Sky Newscaster and bit-part actor (playing newscasters in movies like *Mission Impossible*) – was in constant touch from upstairs via a squawk box. Friend, who had employed me on a hunch, was about to change my life and steer me into a world I had never dreamed of visiting and scarcely knew was even there. It was the beginning of a 40-year flirtation with the heady world of celebrity.

At first I felt – as a raw 20-something local newspaperman – nervous, shy and embarrassed about talking to VIPs, particularly during 'cold calls'. But gradually, under Bob's pushy tutelage, I developed a habit – even a kick – from constantly chatting to lords and ladies, as well as to a handful of the biggest show-biz names of the day.

Sooner or later, it seems, if you work as a showbiz writer for any reasonable length of time, you end up meeting just about everyone. And inevitably some actually become quite good friends. In the coming AF (After Friend) years I would meet or telephone – sometimes briefly, but others repeatedly, perhaps once a month,