

# Ellerbee Fights Odds Against Women Newscasters

By Jan Travers

In 1977, the United States Commission on Civil Rights released figures that revealed 90 percent of the on-air spots on evening network news shows were filled by men. Ten years later, National Organization for Women has released figures that tell a similar story.

Female newscasters know what the odds are against getting on-air time as they move up into the networks. However, there are a group of hardcore, determined women who believe that the quest is not impossible. Linda Ellerbee is one of these.

In her book, *And So It Goes*, Ellerbee provides an entertaining, lightly sarcastic look at the business and offers her solutions for survival. Entering the business, not because of a dream or ambitions, but because she needed the money to raise her children, she was determined not to become a "Twinkie, a pretty face with an overdeveloped ego, who you swear even blowdries her

teeth."

There is no doubt that television news is a cosmetic medium, however, Ellerbee thinks women have been unfairly signalled out. As an example, she related how in 1972, Barbara Walters, then 50 was given the nickname, "Grande Dame of TV News."

## Book Review

When Dan Rather took over the reins of CBS News he was known as the "Brash Young Kid." He, too, was 50.

Ellerbee has adopted a philosophy dealing with this phenomenon. "Do what you can do, don't do what you can't, and if they don't like what you look like, screw them," she says in her book.

She carries this wisdom over into her everyday duties. When she became the U.S. House of Representatives correspondent, she showed up at work wearing jeans. Her male counterparts protested but there was

little they could do. Long ago a dress code was adopted for men covering Congress, but it never occurred to the rulemakers that women could conceivably be covering the U.S. Congress. Thus, no dress code for women.

Women are still seen as second class citizens at the network and Ellerbee points out the subtle ways this occurs. When Ellerbee was covering ex-President Gerald Ford in Palm Springs, Ford commented that he was surprised when he read her biography from the network and it stated her age and date of birth. Since none of the men's dossiers contained similar information, it proves the value of a woman reporter is still often as window dressing or "puffery," as Ellerbee puts it.

Another example occurred in 1984. It's been a custom of NBC to air a prime time special every two years on the arrival of the new Congress in Washington, D.C. Traditionally, it has been hosted by the correspondent of the House and the correspondent of the Senate. In 1984, Ellerbee and Cassie

Mackin were the correspondents. Rather than cause a scene, NBC did the honorable thing. They allowed the two women to anchor the report. But they got around the problem by airing it at dawn on a Sunday morning. "No one saw it," said Ellerbee.

But television news isn't all disappointments. Ellerbee is quick to point out how she has grown to love the unexpected moments confronting her. She discussed the time when the Iranians were holding the American hostages and they (Iranians) staged an emotional rally outside the U.S. Embassy. The leader of the group stood up in front of the crowd and had them chanting anti-American slogans. When the leader got carried away and tried to get the non-American speaking Iranians to say, "Down with the imperial cabinet of the U.S. Government," he lost the uncomprehending crowd. At that instant, a good-natured American reporter decided to lend a hand. That night on the

Continued on page 15

## Air Waves And Vibes

by Vicki Koon

In *Radio Days* Woody Allen says that the radio was more than just as background noise in his youth. The music, the comedy shows and the mystery shows were a part of his youth. Radio helped to create his memories. In honor of Woody Allen, Dr. John Patterson's delightful WITF program, and the resurrection of WNDR, this month's survey will center around the radio.

1. According to a survey reported over a local radio station, the average person owns four radios. How many radios do you own? (Don't forget your car radio.) \_\_\_\_\_
2. How much time per day do you spend listening to the radio (on the average)? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Where are you most often when you are listening to the radio?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What radio stations do you listen to? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Why do you listen to the radio? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Are there any special programs that you enjoy and listen for? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Are your listening pleasures satisfied by your favorite stations? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Are there any new programs or different areas of interest which you would like to see radio address? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What kind of a role, if any, would you say that radio plays in your life? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Do you have any ideas or topics which you would like to see this paper address? \_\_\_\_\_

## Last Month's Survey Results

by Vicki Koon

I received thirteen provoking and informative responses to last month's political survey. I thank you not only for your responses, but for your ideas as well.

I am not sure now why I thought your age and sex would be important to this survey. There seems to be no correlation at all between the answers you have given and your age or your sex. Please forgive me for wasting your ink. I also apologise for the grammatical error in question #6.

Only three of you feel that we should support the Contras. Your reasons: "if not now, a few years in Texas," "to reverse the 'Domino Effect'," and "for the same reason France supported the U.S. in the 1780's - independence from a tyrannical government." Your reasons for being against support are more varied: "the majority of U.S. people do not support the idea, and the majority of Nicaraguans do not support the Contras," "they are U.S. sponsored terrorists! Why the double standard?" "Nicaragua has a right to determine its own style of government," "they aren't a viable force; it's a waste of money," and "give the Costa Rican Peace Plan a chance." One of the reasons that two of you still remain undecided on this issue is that "the press reports give us news about Contra aide, not the Contras."

Your votes on Robert Bork's nomination parallel your votes on the Contras. The three of you that feel Bork's nomination should be confirmed, voted for him because "of his judicial restraint," "none of his 100 majority opinions have ever been reversed, and of 400 opinions only nine have been dissents," and "for too long the Supreme Court has been reading things into the constitution that are not there." But "the U.S. Constitution must reflect society's changes, must meet challenges of new opportunities and situations" responded a dissenting voter. That voter does not think that Bork agrees with this. Another voter feels that "his record on individual freedoms and civil rights is scary." Echoing that remark, another voter states that "his writings in the Illinois Law Review were quite racist." Another voter thinks that "he's biased and doesn't have an open mind." Of the two of you who are undecided, one of you stated that you "don't like him, but who else would President Reagan nominate?"

On the leading presidential hopefuls your answers are as varied as your ages. For the Democrats, we have four votes for Biden, three votes for Jackson, two votes for Hart, two "who knows", and one vote each for Cuomo and Kennedy. In the Republican camp, Bush leads with four votes, Dole follows with three votes, then Robertson with two votes, and Kemp, Stassen, and Baker all get one vote each. If you were to cast your vote for the next president now, Jesse Jackson would win with four votes. Pat Robertson came in second with two votes. Bush/Kirkpatrick, Ollie North, Joe Biden, and Walter Mondale all received one vote.

Impressively, twelve of the thirteen respondents are registered to vote and seven voted in last year's general election. Four of the respondents last voted in the 1984, and one respondent doesn't remember when he last voted.

Again, thanks for your answers.

**Don't forget to deposit surveys in the Capital Times box in the stairwell off the main lobby.**