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THE LIFE AND TIMES OF FRANCES ALVORD HARRIS:
MICHIGAN'S FIRST WOMAN NEWSCASTER

By

Carole Mary Eberly

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to

Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English
Program in American Studies

1995

UMI Number: 9631262

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ABSTRACT

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF FRANCES ALVORD HARRIS: MICHIGAN'S FIRST WOMAN NEWSCASTER

By

Carole Mary Eberly

In 1931 Frances Alvord Harris began her long career in broadcasting, appearing as host of homemaker shows at Detroit's WWJ radio station. Since so many of the male newscasters were in the military during World War II, she asked for an assignment broadcasting the news, thus becoming Michigan's first woman newscaster. After the war, Harris remained on the news side at WWJ, eventually winning a George Foster Peabody Award in 1949.

The research and historical issues involved for this study are Harris' experience in radio from 1931-1950, how it compared to other women in radio, the media and work force in general, and what she encountered in her personal and professional life before and after her move into newscasting. In addition, how she juggled the roles as working woman, wife and mother are studied. Also investigated is the growth of radio and its impact on women working in the medium.

The issues are significant because Harris was among the women radio pioneers who opened the way for contemporary women in both radio and

television broadcasting. It is important for women in the media today to know, generally, upon whose shoulders they stand and to know, specifically, the experiences of one early woman newscaster.

Several sources for analysis have been used. Harris, her colleagues, family and friends were interviewed. Personal documents were examined. Videotapes of Harris were studied. Newspaper and magazine articles were analyzed.

Among the major findings are that Harris was successful in her career because of her personal qualities of independence and pragmatism. At the same time, her family's political influence and home life support were factors that made her achievements possible.

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CAROLE MARY EBERLY
1995

Dedicated to:

My daughter, Jessica,

the other half of the Donner party,

who never doubted I would reach

the finish

line.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many persons gave generously of their time, papers and ideas to make this work possible. It is impossible to cite all of them, but each of those noted in the bibliography has my thanks. In addition, Mary Jones and Michael Unsworth at the Michigan State University library deserve a special salute for giving me invaluable information. Thanks also to helpful folks at the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame.

Thanks also to my committee members, Dr. Joyce Ladenson, Director of Women's Studies at Michigan State University, and Dr. Douglas Miller from the Department of History, who provided insightful suggestions and support for this work.

Special thanks to Dr. Robert V. Hudson from the School of Journalism who put in countless hours editing and directing my work. It is a far better piece because of it.

Finally, thank you, Dr. James McClintock, my adviser from American Studies, who stuck with me all the way, providing encouragement and running interference.

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INTRODUCTION

Few scholarly works exist on women radio pioneers. In fact, little scholarly research exists on radio as a field of study. Alan Havig suggests that interest in early radio has been left almost entirely to the "nostalgia merchants and their patrons,"¹ with little support coming from the academic community.

One reason that Havig points to is the bias of scholars toward the printed page, the published book. A significant proportion of popular creative writing since the 1920s has never appeared in permanent, published form, Havig contends. Words spoken into the early microphones came from written scripts which constituted an enormous volume of recent American writing, but writing that was and is not recognized as worthy of study.² Bruce Lohof asserts there is a tendency among scholars to equate serious work with literature.³ The study of material culture is a partial corrective of this situation, but Havig believes words spoken on radio have been left out as an area for analysis. He believes

¹ Alan Havig, "Beyond Nostalgia: American Radio As a Field of Study," Journal of Popular Culture 12:2 (Fall 1978), p. 218.

² Alan Havig, "Beyond Nostalgia: American Radio As a Field of Study," Journal of Popular Culture, p. 223.

³ Bruce Lohof, "Popular Culture: The Journal and the State of the Study," Journal of Popular Culture VI (Winter 1972), pp. 457-58.

that the examination of early radio will come only when scholars overcome their bias toward the published book.⁴

In academe it might be expected that schools of journalism would lead in the study of early radio. This, however, is not the case for at least three reasons.

Radio broadcasting is a relatively new field of study for historians. For most journalism historians, in particular, this area, until recently, has not been part of their professional background. That is, most journalism scholars with professional experience have worked in print journalism or have taught in schools of journalism where print has been the primary focus. The hands-on involvement with radio which might lead to a scholarly interest simply has not been there. For instance, the Journalism Quarterly for 1993 and 1994 printed only four articles, out of a total of one hundred forty-four, about radio. None dealt with historical issues of the medium.

Add to this the bias that broadcast journalism has been considered the step-child of print⁵ and a situation is created where scholars may simply lack

⁴ Alan Havig, "Beyond Nostalgia: American Radio As a Field of Study," Journal of Popular Culture, p. 223.

⁵ George E. Lott, Jr., "The Press-Radio War of the 1930s," Journal of Broadcasting 14:3 (1970) p. 275.

the interest to study early radio. In other words, what is the point in studying an area viewed as low-status or even suspect among journalism educators?

Another reason for the dearth of scholarly literature available is the difficulty of examining an area where few permanent records are kept and existing documentation is scattered. Unlike print journalism, where records may exist of a journalist's work, much of the work radio pioneers did was erased. The large Electrical Transcription (ET) 16-inch recording discs made were recorded over for other uses. During World War II, when metal was scarce, many of the ETs were scrapped for their aluminum-based metal content.⁶ Scripts and notes were tossed in the trash. Many radio hosts and announcers, working in an auditory world, did not keep journals or collect letters. Such historically valuable resources as log books were thrown out after five years, the federally-required time for keeping them. Early radio was a fast-paced, exciting medium where little thought was given to the historical impact of material going out through the airwaves.

If all these problems and biases face a scholar studying early radio, the study of women in early radio poses even more difficulties. Susan Henry believes scholars in women's journalism history face the serious problem of the

⁶ Marvin R. Bensman, "Obtaining Old Radio Programs: A List of Sources For Research and Teaching," Journal of Popular Culture 12:2 (Fall 1978), pp. 360-367.

scarcity of primary data.⁷ Interestingly, Henry focuses her remarks on women in print journalism. If a scholar runs into the problems Henry outlines with women in print journalism, how much more difficult is the task of studying women in early radio where documentation is slim and pieces of the puzzle must come from interviews, newspaper clippings and photos. Indeed, any scrap of paper buried in a box in a friend's attic becomes a potential source of gold.

This study adds to the slight body of knowledge about women in early radio; it gives voice to one woman who helped open the door for contemporary women in newscasting. It is important that women today in radio and television newscasting know upon whose shoulders they stand. Harris is one woman who, through her work and active support of women, made it a little easier for women following her to enter and maintain media careers. She performed her various media jobs well, raised a family, contributed to professional and community organizations; she is very much a prototype for women in the media today.

As a media trailblazer, Fran Harris, was out there alone, navigating unknown territory in a male-dominated industry. She had no role models, no

⁷ Susan Henry, "Changing Media History Through Women's History," Mass Communication: Challenging Gender Values, ed. Pamela J. Creedon (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1989), p. 38.

precedents to follow. Her children recall her as distant. She was a workaholic. She was ambitious. She was single-minded when pursuing issues that held her interest. Harris used her family's political influence to further her career goals and relied on their domestic support to help raise her children. Her story is also one of courage, independence, intelligence and accomplishment. It deserves to be recorded.

That she worked at WWJ-radio was an achievement in itself. The station prided itself on being the first commercial radio station in the world to present regular daily programming. An on-going argument continues to this day whether WWJ or KDKA in Pittsburgh holds the "first" title. WWJ did beat KDKA with its first broadcast on August 20, 1920 by more than two months. Eleven days later it announced the results of a Michigan primary election. "Regular broadcasting of news was born that night," maintains radio historian Mitchell V. Charnley.⁸ Night and day programming commenced at WWJ on the August date; semi-weekly programs were broadcast at KDKA until December 1, 1920. However, KDKA received its commercial license October

⁸ Mitchell V. Charnley, News by Radio (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1948), p. 1.

27, 1920, almost a year before WWJ.⁹ Some historians award the first to WWJ; others to KDKA. Perhaps the best answer to the riddle is this one:

Dredging up radio's early history isn't an easy job. Radio historians find much that was never documented. The result has been a sort of Abbott and Costello routine of "Who was on first?"¹⁰

Adding to the station's prestige was its focus. The "baby" of William E. Scripps, publisher of the Detroit News, it was journalistically-oriented from the start. Close connections were established between the newspaper and the station, with newscasters routinely using material from the News and broadcasting from the News Building itself in the early days. This emphasis on news was to become important in the development of Harris' career at WWJ.

Frances Alvord Harris was both a stereotype and an anomaly in radio broadcast journalism. She hosted the usual women's programs of the 1930s and early 1940s. However, she pushed for a position as newscaster during World War II in the days when women's voices were not considered authoritative enough. She remained on the air after the war when many women working in the media were eased out of their wartime jobs -- or demoted -- to make room

⁹ "Birthdays: WWJ's Sixteenth Anniversary Reopens Old Feud," Newsweek 7:9, 29 August 1936, p. 12.

¹⁰ Bettelou Peterson, "Radio Looks Back 40 Years," The Detroit Free Press, 11 June 1962, p. 6-D.

for returning GIs. When wives and mothers were urged to stay home to raise families in the 1930s and after World War II, Harris continued working although married and a mother. She created many award-winning radio programs, interviewed more than four hundred newsmakers and anchored her own daily show, "Fran Harris Reports." In 1964, she was promoted to management at WWJ as features coordinator. Besides her professional work, Harris was active in community work, serving on numerous local, state and national boards. She was an important person in media organizations. She was chair of the National Executive Committee of the Advertising Federation of America's Women's Council from 1964-67 and national president of Women in Communication, Inc. from 1971-73.

Harris is recognized as the first woman radio newscaster in Michigan -- and among the first in the nation. She was the first woman broadcaster on television in Michigan. She won numerous awards for her work,¹¹ including a 1949 George Foster Peabody Award for a series on sex offenders. In 1986, she became the first woman inducted into the Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame.

¹¹ See Appendix A.

How Harris got where she did, how she managed to stay there and what she encountered along the way are important issues for journalism historians as well as working journalists, particularly women in the broadcast media.

Literature covering the historical aspect of women in journalism is limited. And since most of that examines women in print journalism, books and journal articles dealing with pioneer women in radio broadcasting account for only a minute percentage of the total. One researcher maintains that the radio field cries out for additional scholarly research and resource material, with the subject of women in radio leading the way for attention.¹²

Although no book-length study on the historic role of women in radio has been published, two important books cover the history of women in the media while including references to early women broadcasters. Marion Tuttle Marzolf's Up From the Footnote: A History of Women Journalists (Saunders 1977) contains a chapter -- "Women Share the Golden Voice" -- outlining the growth of women's programming as well as short sketches of female radio pioneers, including Harris. Marzolf's book, which traces women's role in the media from colonial printers to the second wave feminist press, is often a source for research done on women in the media. Maurine H. Beasley and

¹² Thomas Allen Greenfield, Radio: A Reference Guide, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1989), p. 141.

Sheila J. Gibbons' Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism (University Press of America 1993) includes a short history of women in radio. It is followed by an interview with Ruth Crane, who hosted a homemaker's program for WJR-radio in Detroit during the 1930s. An overview of the history of women in the media is contained in the first chapter. The book's format includes brief summaries of the lives of women journalists in history along with samples of their writings.

Insightful feminist perspectives on a variety of media and the impact of a patriarchal culture on women working in the media and media education is provided in Pamela J. Creedon's Women in Mass Communication: Challenging Gender Values (Sage Publications, Inc. 1989). Historical references to women in radio appear in the chapter "A Woman's Place Is on the Air."

In a work devoted to women radio and television journalists, brief sketches of Harris, Crane, Mary Margaret McBride and Kathryn Cravens are presented by David Hosley and Gayle K. Yamada in Hard News: Women in Broadcast Journalism (Greenwood Press 1987). In addition, the book contains an analysis of women in radio broadcasting during the early days, the war years at home and after the war.

Harris is also referred to in Maurine H. Beasley and Kathryn T. Theus' The New Majority: A Look at What the Preponderance of Women in

Journalism Education Means to the Schools and to the Professions (University Press of America 1988). Their work provides a perspective on the impact of the Depression and World War II on women in journalism schools and those in the profession.

By far, the most detailed and valuable source of information about Harris' career is in Anne G. Ritchie's transcript of an interview with her in 1990. The interview is part of an oral history project undertaken by the Washington Press Club Foundation.

An account of women's programming in early radio is an important section of Judith C. Waller's Radio: The Fifth Estate (Houghton Mifflin 1950). Shorter but valuable accounts of women's programming appear in Mitchell V. Charnley's News By Radio (Macmillan 1948), Giraud Chester and Garnet Garrison's Radio and Television (Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. 1950) and Paul W. White's News on the Air (Harcourt, Brace 1947). White also offers good information on women working in radio during World War II.

Works of particular benefit in explaining the overall history of broadcasting include Erik Barnouw's The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Volume II -- 1933 to 1953 (Oxford University Press 1968), Christopher H. Sterling's and John M. Kittross' Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting (George Washington

University 1990) and Edward Bliss, Jr.'s Now the News: The Story of Broadcast Journalism (Columbia University Press 1991).

The economic value and place of women as a radio listening audience led to women's specialized programming. Works addressing these issues include Douglas Duff Connah's How to Build the Radio Audience (Harper 1938) and Paul F. Lazarsfeld's and Patricia L. Kendall's Radio Listening in America: The People Look at Radio -- Again (Prentice-Hall 1948).

The early history of WWJ-radio is documented in "WWJ, The World's First Radio Station: A History" by Robert Preston Rimes (Rimes 1963), an M.A. thesis. It provides information on the formation and major players involved in establishing the station. However, it mentions Harris only in one footnote and briefly on one page.

An important journal article that provides a contextual view of early daytime women's programming is Morleen Getz Rouse's "Daytime Radio Programming for the Homemaker," Journal of Popular Culture 12:2 (Fall 1978) 315-327. A series of brief, anecdotal profiles on women radio pioneers is offered in Catharine Heinz's "Women Radio Pioneers," Journal of Popular Culture 12:2 (Fall 1978) 305-314. Maurine Beasley and Paul Belgrade present Eleanor Roosevelt as an interesting role model for other women who wished to

enter radio in "Eleanor Roosevelt: First Lady as Radio Pioneer," Journalism History 11:3-4 (1984), 42-45.

Specific works that examine the American woman's social, economic and political roles in the 1930s and 1940s include Barbara Sinclair Deckard's The Women's Movement: Political, Socioeconomic, and Psychological Issues (Harper & Row 1983), William H. Chafe's The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century (Oxford University Press 1991), Alice Kessler-Harris's Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States (Oxford University Press 1982) and Lois W. Banner's Women in Modern America: A Brief History (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1984).

A work that explores the movement of women from the home into the work force over the last 150 years is Barbara R. Bergmann's The Economic Emergence of Women (Basic Books, Inc. 1986). Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s by Susan Ware (Twayne Publishers 1982) gives valuable statistics on women in the work force during the Depression as well as explanations as to why their lives in the work place were less disrupted than men during that era. The ambivalence many middle-class women in the 1920s felt combining careers and marriage, thus leading many to choose wedding rings over work, is well-explored in Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America (The Johns Hopkins University Press 1986) by Peter G. Filene. In

addition, Filene includes concise tables of women's movement in the work force from 1890 until 1980. Women's place in the home and at work during World War II, is analyzed in Wartime Women (Greenwood Press 1981) by Karen Anderson. Oral histories of women in the civilian work force during World War II as well as brief contextual information is provided in Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, The War, and Social Change by Sherma Berger Gluck (Twayne Publishers 1987).

The sources discussed in this review of literature show the context in which Harris worked. They cover women in the media, women in the work force and the medium of radio during the 1930s and 1940s. The sources also provide valuable socio-economic and cultural information for time periods before Harris' entry into, and during her tenure in, broadcasting.

Methodology

This study is based on primary and secondary sources. Background on the early days of radio and women's place in it, as well as women's roles in the work place in general, were included to put Fran Harris' experience in perspective.

The principal primary sources for this research were interviews with the subject, co-workers, her children and friends. In addition, newspaper and magazine articles from the 1930s through the 1980s and personal letters and records from Harris and her daughter provided evidence. Wherever possible, cross-checking of data for corroborative purposes was carried out. Articles about and book references to Harris as well as interviews with her and others have remained consistent in the facts of her career. Interview subjects, newspaper and magazine articles, and book passages corroborated Harris' statements. During personal interviews with Harris, I asked many questions that already had verifiable answers from other sources. In all instances, the answers matched. From there, I was able to move into areas that required more emotional, nonverifiable responses. I spent three days, over a period of time, in face-to-face interviews with her. In addition, we talked nineteen times on the telephone. In these conversations, Harris clarified or expanded on previous

statements. Not once in any of the face-to-face or telephone interviews did Harris' comments or recollections cast doubt on verifiable statements. She was consistent in her recall of information.

Many of her co-workers and all of her employers are deceased. The ones I did interview provided assessments of her personality, her professional competence, and working conditions at the radio station during various time periods as well as anecdotes about Harris. They also corroborated some of Harris' statements as well as those from other sources. Her children, in rare interviews, furnished important opinions on Harris as a mother and working woman. Their recollections of Harris matched her evaluation of these roles. At the same time, they afforded unique viewpoints which contributed to the overall picture of Harris. In addition, they brought up points about her personality that perhaps only they had seen or considered important. And while each emphasized different aspects of Harris' role as mother as they saw them, their overall impression of her was similar.

At some points, I had to rely on Harris not only to fill in details, but also to tell her story. Only Harris could explain how it felt to be the sole woman in the newsroom, what took place in conversations between herself and the station manager and how she viewed her radio career in terms of personal satisfaction.

After collecting all materials obtained in documents and interviews, I compared statements made with other evidence. It was my determination that statements made to me by interviewees were probably true and accurate. And although plausibility does not necessarily correlate with accuracy, the statements also were consistent with other information known about Harris' behavior and life events.

As is the case in research, value judgments were made as to what was relevant to the topic. Much material, while interesting, did not answer the questions asked by me or contribute to the project. For instance, comments by Harris about her grandchildren revealed basic information about them but did not add to the story of her radio days. Similarly, interviews with other subjects at times went off on tangents that were irrelevant to this study.

Value judgments also came into play in selecting contextual material. From the material available on the role of women in society, women and the media and the growth of radio from 1920 to 1980, I relied on the work of respected scholars in history, journalism, communications and women's studies. In addition, I chose newspaper and magazine articles as well as Harris' personal material to construct an overall picture of Fran Harris. Awards hanging on her office walls, clippings about her mother's activities, and articles written by Harris all provided information that put her in the context of her time.

A major impediment to research was that all primary sources of information of historical value concerning radio station WWJ such as personnel files, log books and radio scripts were destroyed by 1978. That year, the radio station moved from downtown Detroit to Southfield, Michigan. Rather than move the material or donate it to a library, all items were thrown out. Some historically minded employees saved a few documents, photographs and scripts, but almost everything else was destroyed. I discovered a valuable transcript of interviews done with Harris in 1990 by Anne G. Ritchie as part of an oral history project undertaken by the Washington Press Club Foundation. I used this to cross-check my own information and also as a source for some quotations in my work. A search of information held by the Detroit News, WWJ-radio, the Michigan State University Voice Library, the Broadcast Pioneers Library, the National Archives, the Museum of Broadcast Communications, the Burton Library, the Bentley Library, Greenfield Village and the Washington Post Corporation yielded only scattered original data on Harris.

In addition, early recordings and later tapes of Harris were recorded over or destroyed. Only one recording was located of Harris interviewing a subject

for her show, "Fran Harris Reports."¹³ Scripts, if they existed, were also destroyed. Her work as a newscaster and interviewer involved reading news from the wire or asking questions with only a few handwritten notes, all since destroyed.

Harris' career was vast and varied, encompassing more than four decades and two mediums. The purpose of my study, however, is to examine her role as a radio broadcast pioneer. Her years in the 1940s and 1950s as a television pioneer, while fascinating and tangentially related, involve a separate medium and set of experiences. While I touch briefly on her role in television, her early radio career, encompassing her work as Michigan's first woman newscaster, is my primary concern. Therefore, this dissertation focuses on Harris' career in radio during the 1930s and 1940s. These two decades allow for an examination of her background and maturation in broadcasting during an important era -- its golden age -- in the medium.

With all this said, I did, however, believe it important to highlight some of her community and professional association work for three reasons. First, she was instrumental in making far-reaching changes in organizations. Her roles need to be made clear. Also, her tireless work in these groups and the

¹³ See Appendix B.

methods she used to bring about change add another dimension to her personality. Moreover, the accolades and awards she received for both her professional and community service work were just too extensive and prestigious to ignore. To examine her outside activities it was necessary to explore briefly the circumstances surrounding her move into management at WWJ in 1964.

Questions I sought to answer from the evidence included:

1. What was Harris' experience as a broadcaster?
2. Was it typical of a woman broadcaster in the 1930s? If so, how?
If not, how?
3. Was it typical of a woman broadcaster in the 1940s? If so, how?
If not, how?
4. What support did she receive from employers and co-workers?
5. What personal qualities did she possess that related to her career?
6. What type of personality and voice did she project over the air?
7. What impact did her parents and home life have on her career choice?
8. What support did she receive from her husband and children while working?

These questions were particularly useful as a guide in selecting material and formulating a blueprint for this study.

CHAPTER I

Offspring of Independent Thinkers

The only child of a dentist and a socially active mother, Frances Alvord Harris was born April 9, 1909 into a comfortable, middle-class home in Highland Park, Michigan -- a municipality encompassed by the city of Detroit. Harris' parents, William Roy Alvord (who went by the name of Roy) and Edith Vosburgh Alvord, were independent and active individuals, traits they instilled in their daughter.

"My father was an independent thinker," Harris recalled. "My mother was always an independent thinker. She had a theory -- you don't hang on. I'm an only child, so I'm an independent thinker."¹

Her mother was such an individualist that Harris said it took seven years of courting by Alvord before her mother, a high school teacher in Morris, Illinois, finally said "yes" in 1902. The two met while students at Olivet College in Michigan during the 1890s, and Alvord immediately became "quite taken" with Vosburgh. But Alvord, being "something of a hellion," was involved in a panty raid on the women's dorms, and his misbehavior resulted

¹ Interview with Fran Harris recorded by Carole Eberly, 2 October 1992, Westland, Michigan.

in his expulsion. Alvord's father sent him a train ticket to Kentucky to do surveying work for a year in an attempt to tame him. It worked. He returned to Michigan, where he eventually graduated from Olivet college, obtained his degree in dentistry from the University of Michigan and won Vosburgh's hand.²

Once married, Harris' parents set about developing their interests outside the home -- Mrs. Alvord in community work and music and her husband in singing and drama. Harris acknowledged that her father ward off some criticism from his friends for her mother's involvement in activities outside the home. "Why are you letting your wife do this?" she said they asked. The common assumption, of course, was that as the middle-class wife of a professional man in the early 1900s she would focus her life on her family.

One accepted public outlet for middle-class women during the first two decades of the 1900s was the club movement in which women working through such organizations as the General Federation of Women's Clubs took on reform causes. It was through these groups that Mrs. Alvord eagerly channeled her energies.

An active participant in the suffragist movement, she drafted little Fran to carry a flag down Detroit's Woodward Avenue during a march prior to

² Eberly interview.

ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. Mrs. Alvord was asked by Carrie Nation to run for president of the United States in 1920. In a telegram from Geneva, Switzerland, Ms. Nation, secretary of the Women's World Congress, said 300,699 names were submitted as candidates but "at the last minute your name has come up and the mere mention of it swept the Convention off its feet. We...breathlessly urge and await your favorable cable reply."³ There is no record of Mrs. Alvord's reply, but she obviously was not on the 1920 ticket. That Mr. Alvord accepted his wife's frenetic activities outside the home was apparent, but running for president of the United States may have been pushing his tolerance level somewhat.

Closer to home, Mrs. Alvord ran for the Highland Park School Board in 1918. Elected as the first woman on the Board, a minor flap occurred when it was revealed that she did not fulfill a requirement in running for the post since she owned no property. The Alvord property was held in the name of her husband -- a common practice in 1918. The law gave her ten days to rectify the

³ Telegram from Carrie Nation to Edith Vosburgh Alvord, 9 June 1920. The full text of the cable read:

We, the women in Convention assembled to consider names of candidates of our sex for the Presidency of the U.S. have so far had submitted to us three hundred thousand six hundred and ninety-nine names but at the last minute your name has come up and the mere mention of it swept the Convention off its feet. We, representing the whole feminine world, the Press and Christendom in general, breathlessly urge and await your favorable cable reply.

situation. She then was seated and took over as treasurer -- a position she held for nine years.

In addition to her school board position, Mrs. Alvord was busy with club activities. She served as president of the Detroit New Century Club in 1913. She was president of the Detroit Federation of Women's Club from 1914-16, persuading the City Health Department to adopt a rule requiring bread to be wrapped before being placed in markets. Also in 1914 she helped organize the Women's Auxiliary of the Salvation Army. She became president of the Michigan Federation of Women's Club in 1920. From her position there, she crusaded to clean up burlesque shows by meeting and corresponding with theater owners.⁴

⁴ The following letter was written October 13, 1915 from J. M. Ward, Manager of the Gayety Theatre to Edith:

Dear Madame:

I was glad to note in the public press that the club women of Detroit had exerted their influence for cleaner burlesque along with cleaner shows in other classifications of the stage. The result is admirable.

You stated the case with frankness and good sense: there are some indecent burlesque theatres but just because a theatre calls itself "burlesque" is not sign the shows there are other than respectable.

It is generally understood, and rightly so, that the Gayety does not need the attention of civic organizations in the campaign to cleanse burlesque. When I became Manager last Summer I instituted a set of rules that made this theatre a pioneer in higher grade burlesque. These rules against profanity, smut and vulgarity have been enforced. Only once all this season has it been necessary to levy a fine against an actor for violation of any of these rules, and this was in the case where a performer used the word "damn".[sic] The Gayety has made an enviable record for decency.

I am glad to note that the attitude of club women as civic bodies, will be to applaud honest efforts at betterment. So that you may judge our theatre correctly I invite

Beyond her suffragist and women's club activities, Mrs. Alvord served on local and state boards. From 1918 to 1928, she was a member of the board of the Detroit Young Men's Christian Association. In 1918, Gov. Alfred E. Sleeper appointed her to the Wayne County War Preparedness Board. She also served at that time on the State Council for National Defense. She was asked by Gov. Alexander J. Groesbeck to be the Michigan delegate to the Illiteracy Conference of Northern & Western States in 1922.

Mrs. Alvord had a great deal of influence on her daughter. In a letter written to her mother in 1921, young Miss Alvord starts out with: "Dear Mama, I love you." She ends up with "I love you more than tongue can tell, Peep. P.S. Your roses are coming out." "Peep," as well as "Peeps" and "Peep Lover," were nicknames her mother called Fran. In turn, Fran called her mother "Mudger" in other correspondence. While the letters displayed evidence of her affection, Miss Alvord carefully corrected spelling errors, asking if certain words were

you to attend, as out guest, at any time, making use of the inclosed [sic] tickets which you can exchange for two complimentary seats at the box office. Because of our clean musical comedies, ladies are attending our performance, both afternoon and evening, in large numbers.

Other theatres may try to put on cloaks of decency because of recent attacks, but higher grade burlesque has been uniform at this theatre this season, and is the permanent policy.

Very respectfully,
J. M. Ward,
Manager

spelled right and requesting that her mother excuse her mistakes. It was apparent that attention to good written communication skills were emphasized at an early age in her home.⁵

Although Mrs. Alvord was affectionate toward her daughter, she admonished her when necessary. In one undated note, clearly she was irked with her daughter's behavior. She wrote: "It is easier to write to you than argue with you. You know what I think you should do this morning and with a little planning you can do it all." Referring to Miss Alvord's grandmother, who lived with the family, Edith said that she "is cleaning not because she is made to do it but to be kind and helpful to us. Do your share. I love you dearly but I do wish you saw more clearly how worthwhile it is to be of service to others. With love, Mudger."⁶

At the same time, Miss Alvord had a good relationship with her father, a gentle man who had a fondness for acting and directing plays. In the same letter sent to her mother, she wrote that her father had gone to a Methodist church to sing that night and she missed him. She had accompanied him to a practice session "for the singing tonight and Daddy was so funny." Also, she

⁵ Letter from Fran Alvord to Edith Alvord, 10 May 1921.

⁶ Undated letter from Edith Alvord to Fran Alvord.

said they went for a ride the previous night "and had lots of fun" and she looked forward to a picnic with her father the next day.⁷

An avid amateur thespian, Mr. Alvord played such roles as that of Friar Tuck in "Robin Hood," a Detroit opera production, and General Popoff in the "Chocolate Soldier" in 1928. In addition to singing and acting, Mr. Alvord also directed local groups in plays. Dramatics claimed so much of his time that by 1936 he gave up dentistry to devote his entire time to directing, coaching and acting.

It was from her father that his daughter gained a love of acting. In the summer of 1929, Miss Alvord joined him as a member of the Adams Rice Detroit Players, which produced plays in Michigan resort towns. Often she acted with her father or appeared as the lead or a character actress in his productions in the Detroit area.

Miss Alvord's grandmother, Mrs. Addis E. Vosburgh, lived with the family and took over much of the child care burden for Mrs. Alvord. This allowed her the time and energy to become politically and civically involved. This was a pattern which was to follow in Miss Alvord's marriage, when Mr. and Mrs. Alvord were to move in with their daughter and her husband to look

⁷ Letter, 10 May 1921.

after the couple's children. Mr. Vosburgh was a farm implement salesman who spent most of his time on the road, especially in South America during the winter. Mrs. Vosburgh, deaf from scarlet fever as a child, influenced young Fran's vocal skills by requiring her to speak carefully and enunciate well so she could read her lips. This, combined with her love for drama, helped lay the groundwork for a career in radio and, eventually, television.

Miss Alvord's early years at home and school were happy and unremarkable. "It was a nicely knit family," Harris said. "My mother and father liked each other as well as loved each other."⁸ Living in a middle-class neighborhood, she played the usual games of jacks and hop-scotch with other children and walked to school with them. As an only child, she says she was a "spoiled brat;" she lacked for nothing in the way of material things and her mother had to continually remind her to clean up after herself and hang up her clothes. "I never did any housework for anybody -- never," she said. "I was never allowed in the kitchen because I would spoil things so I never really learned how to cook. But that was my grandmother's fault -- I'll blame her. The only thing I could do was watch her roll pie crust, thinking how wonderful it

⁸ Interview with Anne G. Ritchie, Women in Journalism oral history project of the Washington Press Club Foundation, 29 September 1990, p. 1.

would be if I could do that. After I was married I made an attempt, but it didn't work out very well."⁹

She was an avid reader. As an annual treat when a youngster, she received an expensive book which required special care. Besides children's stories and fairy tale books, Fran read the comics in the newspaper. She was not interested in news; she gravitated toward make-believe and fantasy.

During high school, she took college preparatory courses. She especially liked chemistry because she was the only girl in the class and her father played tennis with the teacher, so good grades were all but guaranteed. But, she admitted, she had no great devotion to any of her subjects. Her extra-curricular activities included a stint as third-page editor of the high school newspaper, the Spectator. Every page of the four-page paper had an editor and Fran was it for page three, doing editing and layout of general school news, as well as fighting with a boy who sold advertising space because she wanted it for news. "We weren't very friendly for a while," she said.¹⁰

Ironically for someone never allowed into the kitchen at home to cook, she played the part of a pastry chief in "The Knave of Hearts," a one-act play

⁹ Eberly interview.

¹⁰ Ritchie interview, p. 16.

by Louise Saunders for the senior class of 1925 program at Highland Park High School.¹¹ It marked her first formal foray into the world of theater. Shortly after, her parents received a letter from the principal reporting that their daughter was tardy and reminding them that "tardiness develops into a habit and can be of great annoyance to the pupil and to others, and it is a serious handicap in any work now or later."¹² The admonishment she received from her parents stuck with her in later years since colleagues and friends uniformly described her as organized and punctual during her broadcasting career.

On June 13, 1925 Miss Alvord attended the Senior Class Day Banquet, where the menu consisted of fruit cocktail, chicken and ham, mashed potatoes, mushroom sauce, rolls and butter, vegetable salad, chocolate mousse, cake and iced tea. It was during this occasion that she read a poem she had written. In the eight-stanza poem, Alvord predicted what life would be like when the students had grandchildren. Although she had no idea she would establish her career in the media, one portion was prophetic:

¹¹ Program, 21 November 1924.

¹² Letter from Office of the Principal, 24 November 1924.

We'll think of the Gleams and debaters,
The cup our Spec has won,
and we'll tell those mighty journalists,
how in our day it was done.¹³

Harris believed that teachers felt compelled to give her good grades in school because of her mother's school board position. "In those days, she had to personally sign all those checks, so the last name was very useful."¹⁴ When she went away to Grinnell College in Iowa, Alvord discovered that she wasn't as bright as she had thought because her politically-involved mother was no longer at her side.

Her college years were undistinguished by scholarly achievement, and she eagerly looked forward to graduation day. She did average work and was "not a star student because my mother was not on the board of trustees. My uncle was in charge of all electric work in the whole town of Grinnell and that included the college, but that didn't seem to help me a bit."¹⁵ At one point she saw her French teacher walking across campus she politely said she enjoyed the

¹³ Program, 13 June 1925.

¹⁴ Eberly interview.

¹⁵ Ritchie interview, p. 8.

course very much. "He was startled. He said, 'Oh, I didn't know that you really got much out of the course.'"¹⁶

During her first year at Grinnell, I.M. Allen, superintendent of Highland Park Public Schools, wrote to Dr. H. T. Main, the president of Grinnell College, questioning a "C" grade given to Alvord in English.¹⁷ However, the political arm of her mother didn't seem to reach to Iowa since Main wrote that "I think unquestionably there is a difference in the method of marking papers" between the Highland Park system and Grinnell College.¹⁸

Just as Alvord was less than an enthusiastic student, her classmates thought little of her journalistic talents. After her stint as third-page editor of the Spectator, she was ready to work on the Scarlet & Black, the college newspaper. But the editors didn't want her. After telling her she didn't have enough experience, one editor told her she might try selling advertising for the Malteaser, a monthly comedy magazine. This meant that the sales staff would go to Des Moines and "try to chisel an ad from the various merchants in Des Moines as well as those from the Grinnell community. And they did all right. And I thought, 'Well it's a terrible comedown, but maybe if I start selling ads,

¹⁶ Ritchie interview, p. 8.

¹⁷ Letter, 3 May 1927.

¹⁸ Letter, 6 May 1927.

I can get something printed eventually,' and it did work out."¹⁹ Harris admitted she was not a good salesperson, but she did end up writing for the magazine -- her goal in the first place. This led to her becoming inducted into Theta Sigma Phi, the journalism honorary sorority. Nearly forty years later, she would become national president of the organization and spearhead the successful drive for a name change to Women in Communication, Inc.

At Grinnell, Alvord was somewhat unconventional. Not only did she skip the daily ten-minute chapel sessions, preferring instead to eat sweet rolls in the kitchen of an aunt, but also she taught fencing -- a skill she had practiced with her father in the basement when growing up. She rounded up interested students, taught them the basics, then challenged them to push an elevator button with the tips of their foils. "And that's what all the people tried to do -- and one, I think, made it."²⁰ "I think the woman who was head of the girls' gym was just glad to have somebody take a little bit off her shoulders."²¹

"But college didn't do all that much for me," she said.²² When Monday, June 10, 1929 -- graduation day -- rolled around, Fran Alvord was ready to

¹⁹ Ritchie interview, p. 6.

²⁰ Ritchie interview, p. 9.

²¹ Ritchie interview, p. 10.

²² Ritchie interview, p. 10.

move on. Armed with a degree in English and psychology, she moved back to Detroit, her career plans still unclear. All she knew was she didn't want to be a nurse, secretary or teacher. Traditional women's working roles held no interest for her. They seemed boring and predictable.

She carried with her a letter from an uncle that uncannily predicted her future:

Experience sharpens intuition and, no matter what our circumstances and environment may be, most of us manage to get a good deal of fun out of life, with all of its serious side, just the same; for we possess the happy faculty of contriving to do the things we like and omitting or postponing at least some of the others.²³

Unknown to Alvord, she was about to enter the relatively new medium of radio where she would have a good deal of fun and contrive to do the things she liked.

Also unknown to Alvord was that she would move against conventional attitudes of the 1920s which saw middle-class women choosing wedding rings over careers. Feminists had led and won the fight for enfranchisement in 1920, yet the new-found freedom did not result in middle-class women moving in large numbers into the labor force.

²³ Letter from Lewis H. Whitbeck, Rochester, NY, to Fran Alvord, 25 May 1929.

At the beginning of the decade, 24 percent of women were working; at the end of the decade, just as Fran entered the work force, 25 percent of women were working.²⁴ And most women worked for economic necessity as servants, waitresses, factory hands, salespersons and secretaries. The overwhelming majority of female professionals in the 1920s were in the lower-paying sex-segregated areas of teaching and nursing.²⁵ The benefits of the suffrage amendment that economic feminists envisioned for business and professional women during their campaign to eliminate barriers to female employment did not materialize in any significant way.²⁶

Male-dominated professions remained nearly closed to women. For example, the number of women in medical schools dropped from 1,280 in 1902-03 to 922 in 1926. There were only sixty female certified public accountants and 151 dentists. In New York, women accounted for only eleven engineers and seven inventors. Often when women did enter a male profession,

²⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, (Washington, D.C., 1975) p. 133.

²⁵ Peter G. Filene, Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) p. 121.

²⁶ William H. Chafe, The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970. (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 57-58.

such as finance, they frequently would be slotted into dead-end jobs.²⁷ Even in fields where women dominated, such as teaching, the top-paying administrative positions were more often than not filled by men.²⁸ Quotas were in force at most medical and law schools, serving to deter only the most determined women from entering these fields.²⁹ In short, barriers, limitations and an unfriendly, at best, atmosphere awaited many potential professional women.

But many women seemed not to care about the limitations. The 1920s is known for its flapper, hedonistic image. William H. Chafe points out that youthful apathy, lack of seriousness in serving a higher goal, and the absence of enthusiasm for feminism combined to dampen the spirit of young women to push for goals their feminist forbearers sought. It was more fun to live the good life.³⁰

In addition, many middle-class women rejected the double-duty chores involved in maintaining both a home and career life. The hours involved in

²⁷ William H. Chafe, The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) p. 100.

²⁸ Alice Kessler-Harris, Out To Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) p. 235.

²⁹ Lois W. Banner, Women in Modern America: A Brief History (New York: Horcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984) p. 163.

³⁰ Chafe, The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century, p. 103.

doing an adequate job in both spheres were daunting to many.³¹ Women's magazines championed a solution by promoting the domestic life with such phrases as:

"The creation and fulfillment of a successful home is a bit of craftsmanship that compares favorably with building a beautiful cathedral."³²

Only as a wife and mother could the American woman "arrive at her true eminence."³³

At the same time, a boom had taken place in home economics courses at colleges and universities, turning homemaking and child rearing into pseudo-scientific enterprises. With a bleak professional outlook, feminist apathy and societal pressures, many women solved the dilemma of whether to enter a profession by making marriage their careers.

Despite this milieu surrounding Alvord during her college years, she chose the unconventional path of plowing through her studies to enter the working world. That she chose radio as her career was fortunate since the picture for women in the media was different than for those in many other

³¹ Filene, Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America, pp. 126-129.

³² Elizabeth Cook, "The Kitchen Sink Complex," Ladies Home Journal XLVIII (September 1931), p. 12.

³³ "Editorial," McCalls LVI (April 1929), p. 2.

fields. The number of female print journalists in reporting and editing jobs doubled in the 1920s, bringing their total to almost 15,000.³⁴ The curve was upward as more and more women found journalism a hospitable place for their writing skills.

While most women in the print media worked as reporters and editors on women's pages, on magazines or in book publishing, some made it beyond the traditional slots. Great reporters such as Anne O'Hare McCormick and Doris Fleeson all started their careers in the 1920s. Countless others covered hard news at smaller dailies and weeklies throughout the country. Still, the norm was to steer females toward careers on the women's desk.

Alvord was to become an example of this sex-stereotyping trend in a different medium -- radio. She soon began working on the "woman's page" at WWJ in Detroit.

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³⁴ Maurine H. Beasley and Kathryn T. Theus, The New Majority: A Look at What the Preponderance of Women in Journalism Education Means to the Schools and to the Professions (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), p. 25.

CHAPTER II

From Salesgirl to Julia Hayes

In January 1922 there were 60,000 radio sets in use in the United States, serving an audience of about 75,000 people. The percentage of homes owning radios was .2 percent. By 1928 a phenomenal 8,000,000 homes were equipped with radio sets, with a listening audience of nearly one-third the population of the country. The percentage of homes owning radios leaped to 27.5 percent.¹ Sales figures for radio equipment jumped from \$60,000,000 in 1922 to \$842,548,000 in 1929, an increase of more than 1,400 percent.²

It was into this popular and wildly growing medium that Fran Alvord was to enter as a young woman barely out of college. However, her route to radio broadcasting started in an unlikely place.

With the onerous job of school work out of the way, Alvord went to work as a salesgirl for \$15 a week plus commission in 1929 at Himelhoch Brothers & Company, an exclusive women's speciality shop in Detroit. But she was something less than a politically astute or diplomatic clerk. In her first

¹ Christopher H. Sterling and John M. Kittross, Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1990), p. 11.

² Broadcasting, 1939 Yearbook, p. 11.

position, in the millinery department, she managed to sell \$150 worth of hats to a banker's wife who was a steady customer of the star saleswoman in the department. Alvord was transferred into the jewelry department after that faux pas. She wasn't there long before a customer complained about Alvord's attitude. The woman asked how long a certain necklace should be. "Well, it just depends on how big your neck is," Alvord shot back.³ It was apparent to management that Alvord was not cut out for sales and she was exiled to a dress department, where no one went and where she hung up dresses "forever," an ironic job since her grandmother was always after her to hang up her clothes at home.

Finally in 1930, a bored Alvord asked if she could be sent to the advertising department to write newspaper copy. She got her wish. In the autumn of that year, I. Himelhoch, owner of the store, made a decision that steered Alvord in the direction of her career. He bought five minutes of radio time three times a week for the Christmas season. Few other downtown stores were using radio, a ten-year-old medium, for advertising, but Himelhoch believed that if the store's name went over the airwaves perhaps people would come in and buy. "It was beneath the dignity of any of the copywriters to have

³ Eberly interview.

anything to do with radio...so it was up to me to do this radio show," she recalled. "So I would write up the merchandise and I would do five minutes, three times a day. And I just loved it."⁴

With her stint over as copywriter and broadcaster of advertising spots, Fran approached assistant station manager Ty Tyson of the Detroit News-owned WWJ-radio station asking for a permanent job. She sensed there could be a place for her in this new medium because although women were in the minority in radio, they were not uncommon.

And her intuition was right. In the early days of radio women generally found a warm reception. Gender discrimination was generally less than in most other occupations of the day and opportunities existed to move into creative and responsible positions.⁵

Women were found in a variety of jobs during radio's early days. For example, Chicago's Judith Waller announced and served as station manager, starting in 1922 at WMAQ. She retired as NBC's public affairs representative in 1957 after 35 years in broadcasting. Also in Chicago, Myrtle Stahl started her career in programming and administration in 1922 at WGN. During this

⁴ Eberly interview.

⁵ Marion Tuttle Marzolf, Up From the Footnote (Toronto: Saunders, 1977), p. 123.

time in Newark, New Jersey, Bertha Brainard worked as a full-time announcer WJZ, which counted metropolitan New York as its audience. In Detroit at WJR, Ruth Crane began her twenty-six-year career in broadcasting as women's editor and commercial editor in 1929. Crane, however, was not a newscaster. But opportunities for women shifted mainly to the areas of women's programming as radio entered its Golden Age. Sex-role stereotyping, which had the effect of limiting women to women's and children's programs or appropriate comedic and dramatic roles, became more pronounced with the growth, sophistication and program segmentation of the medium. Alvord found herself on the cusp of this change.

In most major cities by 1930, women were pioneering programs for women and children, areas they were to dominate for the next three decades. At first women's programs "were unwanted children -- there to fill the air until something better came along."⁶ However, as home-bound women sought the social contact radio offered, programs geared toward them became a programming staple. The magic of those radio dials allowed women to meet people, gather information and enjoy experiences far beyond the four walls of

⁶ Judith C. Waller, Radio: The Fifth Estate (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1950), p. 109.

their homes. In short, women were looking for companionship and the radio became their "electronic liberator."⁷

In a 1948 study of the medium and its audiences, Paul Lazarsfeld posited that listeners preferred radio programs that dealt with familiar situations. They wanted content that agreed with their own experiences.⁸ The women's programs in the 1930s and 1940s provided this substance.

In addition, radio needed programs to fill its expanding hours of on-air time. In the mid-1920s it was not uncommon for stations to broadcast as little as eight hours a day. By 1930 major stations were running a full broadcast day from at least sunrise to midnight.⁹ The morning and mid-afternoon hours began to fill up with programs aimed at female listeners in the home. Household hints programs centering on such topics as child care, educational issues, canning, food prices, cooking, party plans, home sewing and recipes began to take hold as station executives realized the advertising potential of the women's market.

⁷ Morleen Getz Rouse, "Daytime Radio Programming for the Homemaker," Journal of Popular Culture (Fall, 1978), p. 315.

⁸ Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Patricia L. Kendall, Radio Listening in America: The People Look at Radio – Again (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1948), p. 29.

⁹ George H. Douglas, The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Company, Inc., 1987), pp. 187-88.

In the late 1920s and 1930s, formal connections were established between sponsors, programs and musical groups such as the "Radio Homemaker's Club" (sponsored by Proctor and Gamble's Crisco), "The Lux Radio Theater," "Our Daily Food" (sponsored by A & P food stores), "The Kraft Music Hall," "The Eveready Hour," "Maxwell House Coffee Time," and "The Camel Caravan." The procedure involved a large company hiring an advertising agency to develop a program that would draw listeners to hear, along with entertainment or information, commercial messages designed to sell the sponsor's product. It made bottom-line sense for businesses and advertising agencies to hire women hosts to push name-brand products on programs targeted toward one large segment -- female listeners.

And women's programs were an important part of a station's line-up. These programs in 1932 accounted for 4.9 percent of the shows, behind dance music at 23.5 percent, vocal music at 13 percent, concert orchestras at 8.4 percent and educational shows at 7.2 per cent. By comparison, news was at 1.2 percent and sports at 1.7 percent in the markets surveyed. Further, women's programming more than doubled from 1925 to 1932, in stations surveyed.¹⁰

¹⁰ William Albig, Modern Public Opinion (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), p. 447.

It was into this women's market that Alvord entered radio. Ty Tyson had a request from the Robert P. Gust Company, a Chicago advertising agency representing a cosmetics firm, for a woman to do a six-day-a-week half-hour program of household hints interspersed with organ music and, of course, pitches for the firm's cosmetics. Alvord auditioned in Chicago and although she got the job, the head of the agency questioned her suitability because of her young age - - twenty-two. Luckily, quick-thinking Alvord convinced the man she could do the job because it was radio; no one would see her. She also agreed with the proviso that all of her scripts would be written in Chicago. Even her fan letters and questions from listeners were to be forwarded to Chicago where responses would be scripted. Nothing would be left to chance or spontaneity.

Also asking questions and not taking chances was Alvord's father. Unknown to her while in Chicago, Roy Alvord met with Tyson to determine if radio was a respectable field for women. Tyson assured her father that the staff was professional and principled, and he promised to look after his daughter.

And so in 1931, at \$150 a month, Alvord became "Julia Hayes," one of eight in the nation. Her family "nearly went into hysterics"¹¹ when they discovered she would be doing household hints since she rarely cleaned her room. "I don't think I even made my bed, but I would keep things off the floor, that sort of thing," she recalled. Being spoiled, lazy and unconcerned with household hints, she knew some acting would be in order for her. "But [the show] was fun," she said.¹²

As a measure of her listening audience, Alvord did a promotion for Paquin's Hand Cream, giving away a sample for ten cents. She received more than 1,000 letters a day for weeks. It was part of her job to open the envelopes and collect the dimes. She would then trudge over to a bank on Washington Boulevard "where they hated to see [her]" because the tellers would have the tedious job of counting the dimes. She would then order a cashier's check that she sent to Chicago.¹³

As Julia Hayes, Alvord was part of a tradition whereby radio personalities, particularly women, often were given fictitious names. One reason for the practice was simple economics. If a program host using her own name

¹¹ Ritchie interview, p. 14.

¹² Ritchie interview, p. 15.

¹³ Eberly interview.

became too popular, she might ask for more money. Her name became a commodity. In addition, women with fictitious names could be replaced as the need arose. Perhaps the most famous example of this was Betty Crocker, who was on the network for more than twenty years. Betty, though, was actually a series of anonymous women.

Even Mary Margaret McBride, who killed off her grandmotherly character, Martha Deane, on the air at station WOR in New York in 1934, carried on her fictitious name after her shocking announcement. As the supposed grandmother of six children and many grandchildren, she was expected to name and describe her brood when dispensing philosophical advice and pitching commercial products. Her son Johnny had twins named Penny and Jenny, and girls named Judy, Joise and Jessie. After three disastrous weeks of getting them all mixed up, she finally just gave up with:

Oh, what's the use? I can't do it! I'm mixed up again with all those grandchildren I've invented. I'm not a grandmother! I'm not a mother. I'm not even married. I made that up and it doesn't sound real because it isn't. The truth is I'm a reporter who would like to come here everyday and tell you about places I go, people I meet. Write me if you'd like that. But I can't be a grandmother anymore.¹⁴

¹⁴ Mary Margaret McBride, Out of Air (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1960), p. 20.

Nonetheless, McBride continued on as Martha Deane, "columnist of the air." She read recipes, dispensed household information and used her skills as a former newspaper reporter at the New York Daily Mail by interviewing celebrities and newsmakers. And she stayed Martha Deane until 1940 when she left WOR first for CBS and then NBC. At the networks she was able to become an institution in her own right, pioneering the skill of radio ad-libbing -- something Alvord was also to do -- in a time when almost everything was scripted. Her successor, Bessie Beattie, at WOR continued on with the fictitious "Martha Deane" name.

It was not surprising that women found their voices in the separate sphere of daytime women's programs in the early days of radio. Men may have possessed the voice of authority, but only a woman could speak "heart to heart" to another woman. Women's programs provided support and aid for the majority of middle-class women who chose marriage over careers. Social and cultural mores dictated women's place in this medium -- as an extension of the home. Young Fran Alvord filled this role as Julia Hayes.

On Women's Voices

One important difference between print and broadcast -- the written versus the spoken word -- was voice. In print, a woman could, as many did, hide her gender behind initials. Or she could write without a byline. But in radio it was apparent when a woman was speaking.

It was a no-win situation for women in radio as the medium moved out of infancy into adolescence, from the 1920s to the 1930s. Women's speech tone and patterns, generally criticized for being too shrill and not authoritative enough for announcing or doing news,¹⁵ were, at the same time, expected to be different from men. Waller described the ideal female radio voice, writing:

The feminine listener dislikes any hint of affectation, particularly in women. Occasionally she will relish sophistry, cynicism or bombast from men, but she will shrink from the polished and perfect woman every time. She is yearning for friendliness. The normal, everyday voice and diction of the broadcaster will give her that, especially if the voice carries a note of cheerfulness and ease. It is the direct, personal, warm approach, as real and vital as a handshake, which wins the woman listener.¹⁶

¹⁵ Marzolf, Up From the Footnote, p. 123.

¹⁶ Waller, The Fifth Estate, p. 114.

Caught in a balancing act, women were expected to project friendliness without perfection, cheerfulness without sophistry. Alvord successfully walked the tightrope, even as a young woman. Hiding her age behind the microphone, she emanated warmth and maturity as Julia Hayes. One fan was so captured by Julia Hayes that she brought a homemade cake to the station for Alvord. The listener was stunned to see such a young Julia. "She was just broken-hearted because here I was this kid," she said.¹⁷ One friend remembered her voice as "friendly, under control. She seemed organized, but not intimidating."¹⁸ In one interview with Adolphe Menjou, the character actor, she sounded clipped and fast-paced, but in command. During her World War II days of newscasting, Harris said she put a smile in her voice to project warmth. "When you smile, your voice smiles. So I was grinning all over the place," she said.¹⁹

In Alvord's case, her voice took precedence over any newscasting ability before the war. Indeed, she was not even given the chance to try newscasting, although at least one man of dubious professionalism was in the slot. He was demoted from the Detroit News to a position as newscaster at WWJ-radio because of a love affair with his liquor bottle in the early 1930s. Harris recalled

¹⁷ Ritchie interview, p. 15.

¹⁸ Interview with Marion Corwell Shertzer, Flat Rock, Michigan, 6 July 1994.

¹⁹ Ritchie interview, p. 22.

that he would clip stories from the Detroit News, Detroit Free Press and Detroit Times that served as the basis of his newscast. He would then go to the office of Ty Tyson, the station manager. "If he could say 'statistics', he could go on the air," she said. "If he couldn't, then one of the radio engineers would read all the news clips."²⁰

Although women's voices were expected to be cheerful and friendly, there was a move in the early 1930s toward creating the perfect voice for listeners during prime time -- that of a man. Historian George H. Douglas believed there was a bias at work against women in radio as the industry grew from its infancy in the 1920s. Their voices were just used as an excuse to keep them in traditional homemaker shows.

One interesting difference between the twenties and thirties was the almost complete disappearance of women as announcers after 1930. In the 1920s, a fair number of women announcers were working in radio, but during the golden age of the thirties and forties they almost completely disappeared from the scene. Doubtless there were many people who made the argument that women's voices are not as pleasing over the air as men's voices; that the male voice is intrinsically more pleasing, more resonant, more mellow. The sonic superiority of the male voice is debatable, however, and it seems more likely that the disappearance of women from key announcing duties

²⁰ Ritchie interview, p. 19.

during the thirties was due to the fact that males simply muscled in on what had become a very lucrative profession and taken all the spoils for themselves.²¹

During this time, radio announcing evolved into a career. In 1924 when women announcers were not uncommon, announcers were not considered the stars of radio and the pay was low. Station bosses sought to keep it that way, but announcers slowly found a following and their pay rose. By the mid to late-1920s attention was being paid to standards of diction and pronunciation. The English Department of New York University analyzed "various popular announcers" to make a scientific determination of what voices were most pleasing, most representative of American speech.

The Columbia Broadcasting System's School of Announcers, designed to turn out authoritative-sounding voices, was in operation by the 1930s. Instrumental in this movement was Professor Frank H. Vizetelly, born in England, who came to the United States as a young adult. He promoted American English for airwaves, saying:

Those who have been there tell us that only an Oxford man can understand a man from Oxford and that neither would want to understand anyone

²¹ Douglas, The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting, p. 65.

else....Thank God that we talk to be understood, and that in the aggregate the voices of our announcers are clear, clean-cut, pleasant, and carry with them the additional charm of personal magnetism, which cannot be said of the delivery of the Cockney-bred announcers.²²

The unwritten and accepted rule was that announcing and news were men's territory because women's voices carried little or no authority.²³ This notion was so cemented that Alvord, even with her warm, mature, controlled voice, was not given the chance to audition for a news position for more than a decade.

Mrs. Harris

While Alvord was giving scripted household hints as Julia Hayes, she took time out to marry in 1932. As might be expected, she moved through courtship and down the aisle in an unconventional manner. She met Hugh William Harris, who worked in the publicity department of the Detroit News, in the early summer that year. He asked her for a date to play tennis three days

²² H. L. Menken, The American Language, Second Supplement (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 34.

²³ David H. Hosely and Gayle K. Yamada, Hard News: Women in Broadcast Journalism (New York: Greenwood, 1987), p. 21.

later; three days after that they were engaged. Three months later, they married at St. Joseph's Episcopal Church. Instead of a wedding dress, a practical Fran wore a formal gown she could wear to other events. A reception with two large wedding cakes was held at her family's home in Highland Park.

Married on a Saturday, the new Mrs. Harris was back at the microphone on Monday. The couple could not afford a honeymoon. Before marrying him, Harris said she had asked her husband-to-be if he had any objection to her continuing with her job. He said no; he thought it was a great idea. When her husband was asked later by friends why he was letting his wife work or they were making comments about his inability to support his wife, he wryly explained that Harris was impossible to live with and it was better that she was busy and off the streets.

As the Depression deepened, Harris' husband lost his job at the Detroit News and the couple was forced to move from their Highland Park apartment to her parents' home. "Comparatively, it was all right at our house," Harris recalled of the financially tight years. "We did an awful lot of staying in instead of going out."²⁴

²⁴ Eberly interview.

She continued with her job as Julia Hayes while her husband went to work for his father, who owned a customs brokerage house in Detroit. He eventually inherited this business, making it his career. But as the Depression dragged on, WWJ pulled the plug on Julia Hayes and Harris found herself at home in 1934 as a fulltime homemaker -- a title she wished to relinquish.

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CHAPTER III

The Depression Hits Home

At first glance it would seem that Fran Harris, given her walking papers during the Depression, was just another casualty of the economy. For many women in the media, it had been only a matter of time. The number of women entering print journalism had grown at an incredible rate from 1880 onward. During the 1880s, the number of women in editing and reporting jobs jumped from 288 to 888.¹ By 1900 that figure more than doubled as 2,193 women reporters and editors accounted for 7.3 percent of the profession, according to the U.S. Census. At the start of 1910 the tally almost doubled to 4,000.² The number of women in these jobs increased to 7,105 by 1920 and at the beginning of the next decade, their count doubled once more to stand at 14,786.³ Clearly journalism represented an interesting alternative to traditional careers for women.⁴

¹ Marzolf, Up From the Footnote, p. 21.

² Marzolf, Up From the Footnote, pp. 32, 52.

³ Beasley and Theus, The New Majority: A Look at What the Preponderance of Women in Journalism Education Means to the Schools and to the Professions, p. 25.

⁴ Maurine H. Beasley, "Women in Journalism Education: The Formative Period, 1908-1930," Journalism History, Spring, 1986. p. 17.

That newspapers had grown four-fold between 1870 and 1899 helped open the doors to women journalists. With women adding to the burgeoning readership, newspapers catered to their interests through the creation of women's pages. These pages played up the women's angle in several ways, with advice columns, society news and Sunday feature sections becoming standard fare. Women reporters, it was surmised, could best fill the space and meet the needs of its female readers. At the same time, the growth of such magazines as the Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's and the Saturday Evening Post gave women freelancers a place to showcase their talent and earn money.

But talent and gender were not enough to continue the explosion in jobs. For women in the print media job opportunities slowed to a trickle during the Depression, when their numbers increased by only about six percent.⁵ The decades of one hundred percent growth ceased in the 1930s. Not until the 1940s and the war years were opportunities again as good for women as they had been in the 1920s.⁶

In an effort to discourage female journalism students who might aspire to hard news reporting, some textbooks in departments and schools of

⁵ Beasley and Theus, The New Majority: A Look at What the Preponderance of Women in Journalism Education Means to the Schools and to the Professions, p. 25.

⁶ Marzolf, Up From the Footnote, p. 52.

journalism offered the view that women were biologically unsuited for reporting. One book asserted that "Most women are incapable of covering police and court news." The authors, a city editor and journalism professor, asserted that the general tempo -- "with the deadline-fighting element always present -- is such to bar many women because of nervous temperament."⁷

Many women who kept their jobs during the Depression were asked to take a pay cut. In a 1938 survey of graduates of schools of journalism, one woman alumna reported she had applied to 175 other newspapers after her pay was slashed in 1934 to \$10 a week from its 1930 level of \$25. She finally found a job as society editor for \$18 a week and after eight months became wire editor at her old salary of \$25 a week.⁸ With household circulation declining "somewhat more rapidly during the depression" than in the previous decade⁹ and advertising revenues dropping,¹⁰ women became casualties of the downturn.

⁷ Philip W. Porter and Norval N. Luxon, The Reporter and the News (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1935), p. 8.

⁸ Beasley and Theus, The New Majority: A Look at What the Preponderance of Women in Journalism Education Means to the Schools and to the Professions, p. 26.

⁹ David Pearce Demers, "Structural Pluralism, Intermedia Competition, and the Growth of the Corporate Newspaper in the United States," Journalism Monographs, (June 1994), p. 6.

¹⁰ George E. Lott, Jr., "The Press-Radio War of the 1930s," Journal of Broadcasting, Vol. XIV, No. 3 (Summer 1970), p. 276.

Meanwhile, radio was booming. Although it had existed since the 1920s, it did not become a major medium until the Depression.¹¹ In 1930 network stations totaled 170; by 1940 that number had grown to 454. The number of radios in households continued its stunning growth from 13.75 million in 1930, or 45.8 percent of all households, to 28.5 million, or 81.1 percent of all households, by 1940.¹² Sales of radio sets climbed from \$200 million in 1932 to \$350 million in 1934.¹³

Radios were also on the move. Paul Galvin, a born tinkerer and founder of Motorola, discovered how to use a car's metal frame as an antenna to pull in signals instead of blocking them out.¹⁴ Sunday drivers liked the entertainment, and radios were on their way to becoming standard equipment in automobiles. About 7.5 million vehicles sold contained radios in 1940, compared with 30,000 in 1930.¹⁵

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt recognized the value of the medium by initiating the first of his fireside chats on March 12, 1933, just eight days

¹¹ Lott, Journal of Broadcasting.

¹² Sterling, Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting, p. 634.

¹³ Broadcasting Yearbook (1939), p. 11.

¹⁴ Jon Anderson, "Harvard on the Move," Chicago Tribune Magazine (July 31, 1994), p. 14.

¹⁵ Sterling, Stay Tuned: A Concise History of Broadcasting in America, p. 656.

into his presidency. Up to that time one White House aide had handled all the mail, but after the first chat half a million unanswered letters piled up and an assistant had to be hired.¹⁶

Pepsodent, which advertised on the popular "Amos 'n' Andy" show, saw its sales soar. Lucky Strike began a campaign to double its market by enlisting foreign opera stars to sell its cigarettes as a throat balm. The Lucky Strike Orchestra was created as part of the project.

In 1940 sponsors spent \$215.6 million for time, talent, program, commercial and agency commission costs to reach radio's vast audience. This accounted for ten percent of all advertising dollars spent in the United States. By comparison, in 1930 radio accounted for just \$40.5 million, or two percent, of all advertising dollars.¹⁷ At CBS alone in 1935, William S. Paley's network grossed \$19.3 million, yielding a profit of \$2.27 million.¹⁸

In the area of news, radio was proving itself to be more than a toy as it took advantage of the immediacy it provided. A prophetically titled article, "The Coming Fight Over Radio News," in 1933 said:

¹⁶ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Coming of the New Deal: The Age of Roosevelt (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958), pp. 571-2.

¹⁷ Sterling, Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting, p. 638.

¹⁸ Erik Barnouw, The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Volume II - 1933 to 1953 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 62.

Radio is beating the newspaper almost daily, whenever it sees an event which it deems of sufficient importance to broadcast....Incomplete, to be sure, abominably reported, often, by radio's student newscasters. But first by radio, and second by newspapers.¹⁹

And so with radio advertising dollars on the rise, accompanied by a decrease in circulation and advertising revenues in newspapers, the stage was set for the newspaper-radio war of the 1930s.

Radio's challenge in news represented the first serious competition the printed media had faced.²⁰ And the fight was not only in the news departments. It spilled over to entertainment and features, including those aimed at women. Radio programmers promoted a new way to assuage the loneliness of homemakers caught in disheartening, make-do situations brought on by financial insecurity -- soap operas.

The household hint shows continued, although it would not be until 1939 when Harris would once again speak over the airwaves. Part of the reason was shows such as "Julia Hayes" were surpassed in popularity and air time by the soap opera -- a product of the Depression. "It was the great economic collapse

¹⁹ Allen Raymond, "The Coming Fight Over Radio News," The New Outlook (June 1933), p. 13.

²⁰ George E. Lott, Jr., "The Press-Radio War of the 1930s," pp. 275-286.

of the 1930s that created the social environment in which soap operas could first survive," wrote radio historian J. Fred McDonald. "The Depression put men and women out of work, it broke apart families, and it threatened the confidence which held together the entire society."²¹ But the soaps allowed women to temporarily escape their ordinary lives of cooking, sewing and changing diapers -- not to mention economic uncertainty -- into the world of romance and adventure. Women could count on "Backstage Wife," "Life Can Be Beautiful," or "The Romance of Helen Trent" as constants in their lives. The characters came to life Monday through Friday, struggling with their own troubles or helping those already in trouble, seeking happiness in the midst of pain and anxiety.

Soap operas carried a relevant message in the 1930s: everyone -- even the rich, adventuresome and glamorous -- wrestled with the basic problems of holding their lives together. Historian Erik Barnouw suggests that the soaps seemed dangerous to some observers. These sociologists argued that listeners sealed themselves in a world built around their own frustrations and fantasies

²¹ J. Fred MacDonald, Don't Touch That Dial: Radio Programming in American Life, 1920-1960 (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1948), p. 240.

with diminishing contact with reality. Others, however, saw the daytime dramas as a source of emotional support, friendship and guidance.²²

But whatever the sociologists thought, soap operas were a success. In 1933 twenty quarter-hours were devoted to women's serials on commercial networks. By 1935 the figure was up to forty-eight. In 1937 the number hit 154 and in 1940 the figure stood at 305. The sheer volume of "women's serials" accounted for more than half of all radio programming in 1940 compared with about 10 percent in 1933.²³

Since soap operas were broadcast during daytime hours, it was apparent that other women's programs had to be eliminated to provide the air time. The cut came in talk shows. The number of talk shows dropped from a peak in 1932 of 134 quarter-hours, about half of all programming, to seventy-nine quarter-hours the following year, about one-third of all programming. This occurred just as soap operas were beginning to make their appearance.²⁴ And women who listened to soap operas were not likely to listen to women's

²² Erik Barnouw, The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Vol. II - 1933 to 1953 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 94-97.

²³ Sterling, Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting, pp. 644-45.

²⁴ Sterling, Stay Tuned: A Concise History of Broadcasting in America, pp. 644-45.

reality-oriented programs. The two groups seemed to inhabit different environments.²⁵

By the mid-1930s radio blossomed into a medium from one that had relied mainly on music and talk shows to one that offered a diversity of entertainment and information. The household hints shows became more sophisticated with programs such as the General Mills sponsored "Betty Crocker Hour" setting the pace. Cooking tips for inexpensive, yet nutritious and tasty, meals were provided while the sponsor's products were promoted.²⁶ Recipes for such dishes as Green Tomato Mincemeat and Poor Man's Cake that showed women how to stretch their food dollar were standards. Julia Hayes, with her cosmetics, had simply run its course. By 1934 it was time to pack up the tubes of Paquin's Hand Cream and go home.

In the meantime, Harris' role as a fulltime homemaker lasted only a few months. In 1935 she went to work as a secretary at Kern's Department store in Detroit. Her typing skills were learned in a corner of the office of her mother, who was then executive director of the International Institute, an organization that helped immigrants assimilate into American culture.

²⁵ Barnouw, The Golden Web, p. 94.

²⁶ Susan Ware, Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), p. 3.

Mrs. Alvord's secretary taught Harris the basics of typing for the job. She never did conquer shorthand. Instead she faked the skill until, finally, Harris suggested that her boss just tell her what he wanted to say and she would write the letter. She shortly became secretary to the personnel director in charge of training new employees. "I'd sworn never to be a secretary and there I was," she said. Then the personnel director had Harris teach employees how to handle sales clerks and customers. "So there I [was] a teacher," another occupation she had vowed never to enter.²⁷

In 1936 Harris bore the first of her three children, a daughter, Patricia Anne. One household hint she neglected to pass on was that it cost money to have children in a hospital. When advised that the bill was more than \$100, Harris told administrators she and her husband didn't have money like that. "Some jerk at the hospital said, 'Well, we'll keep the baby. You go home, but we'll keep the baby.'"²⁸ Eventually Harris's parents came up with the money and the new parents whisked Patricia out of the hospital.

Harris intended to stay home with her child because "ladies didn't work after they had [a child]," she said. "However," she admitted, "I just about lost

²⁷ Eberly interview.

²⁸ Eberly interview.

my mind" staying home. She believed there were two kinds of women -- those who loved staying home and were willing to devote their lives to their families, and those who needed to be active in the work force. Harris loved her family but "it was not enough," she said. "I was just going mad [at home]. One day my husband said on one of our walks, 'You better get a job. You're being impossible.'"²⁹ Obviously Harris was the second kind of woman.

In 1938 Harris went to work at Winkelman's, a women's specialty shop chain in Detroit, as assistant personnel director and secretary to I. Winkelman, the personnel director. "So there I was, but thank God I had a job and it was \$25 a week and that was pretty good," she said.³⁰ She was the only Protestant in her department and during Jewish holidays she was the only person on duty. During those times, she was required to collect sales receipts for the day from all the stores and check to see if all employees were at their jobs -- chores she found tedious. Overall, she liked her job, but not enough. Bitten by the microphone bug, she longed to return to the airwaves. One day as Harris was wrapping Christmas gifts Winkelman was giving for the holiday, wondering why her Jewish boss was giving Christmas gifts, her break came.

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²⁹ Eberly interview.

³⁰ Eberly interview.

CHAPTER IV

Nancy Dixon, Shopper

Fran Harris was out of the house and working in 1938, but she was less than enamored with her job. Following the excitement of working in radio, secretarial work seemed monotonous and boring. Even disguised as Julia Hayes, Harris longed for the drama and attention radio brought her. After all, who ever heard of a secretary who was a star?

Fortunately, her mother and father, still active in the community, crossed paths with a man from the Detroit Board of Commerce in 1938 and discovered information that interested their daughter. The Young and Rubicam Advertising Agency was looking for a woman to do a radio program. The person they had in mind would shop the stores, telling listeners of the latest in fashions and home furnishings. Three or four days before Christmas in 1938, Harris quit work early and auditioned for the part of "Nancy Dixon," shopper. As she wrapped her boss' Christmas packages at work, Hugh Harris called. "You've got a telegram here that says you are to report to work on the first working day of the next year for Young and Rubicam," he said.¹

¹ Eberly interview.

The main sponsor of Harris's fifteen-minute daily program, broadcast on both WWJ and WXYZ radio, was Cluet Peabody, which manufactured men's Sanforized shirts. At that time, Sanforization, which minimized shrinkage in clothing when washed, was a new process and not well-known to the public. When the company decided to expand the process to women's cotton dresses, they approached Young and Rubicam about buying radio time throughout the nation, using "Nancy Dixons" to pitch the products. In addition, Detroit department and speciality stores bought time so Nancy could promote their wares. So everyday Harris went to the major stores such as the J.L. Hudson Company, Kern's, Crowley Milner's, B. Siegal's or her first employer, Himelhoch Brothers & Company. She then described to her listeners what was new in fashions, toiletries and home furnishings. It was her job to report on sales or highlight merchandise stores wanted moved. She also had to promote at least one Sanforized product daily.²

Unlike Julia Hayes in 1931, Harris had more freedom as Nancy Dixon in 1939. She wrote her own copy, putting in all the little comments she wanted. She was also making more money -- \$50 a week.

² Eberly interview.

While Harris bucked the tide of soap opera popularity, there was money to be made by radio stations and advertising agencies through programs devoted solely to pitching products. Harris did most of the work involved in putting together the show, doing all the footwork herself. No extra money was spent by the station or advertising agency in gathering information. The agency was not burdened with the expense of having copy scripted for her -- as was the case with Julia Hayes. Male announcers, who made more money than female hosts, were not involved in pitching Nancy Dixon's products. The station had less production expense than with the costly dramatic and entertainment programs. Overall, the arrangement was profitable to both the agency and radio station.

It was so profitable nationwide that in 1941, local advertising dollars accounted for \$69.5 million in revenues, or 28.1 percent of radio advertising income. While network and national spot revenues provided the lion's share of wealth with a total of \$178 million,³ the local dollar was still important. One way to get this dollar as cheaply as possible was to broadcast Nancy Dixon-type shows.

³ Sterling and Kittross, Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting, p. 638.

Young and Rubicam chose an ideal time to launch Nancy Dixon. Nationally in 1939, business had undergone a gradual decline from 1938 levels in the early months, but a slow recovery took place in the late spring and summer, followed by a spectacular upsurge in the fall. As unemployed or underemployed workers returned to work fulltime, prosperity seemed just around the corner. Products that Harris promoted were within the budget of many people who would not have been able to afford them during the darker days of the Depression. The economy was beginning to feel the effects of the outbreak of war in Europe as large volumes of orders for military supplies flooded the nation's factories. It was a good time for Harris, Nancy Dixon, WWJ, the stores and Young and Rubicam.

Once again the visual anonymity of life behind the microphone worked to Harris' advantage. This time invisibility became important because she was pregnant in 1941 with her second child, Hugh Jr., known as Bill. Women were required in many media jobs to quit as soon as it was apparent they were pregnant. It was not unusual for women to voluntarily leave reporting jobs at newspapers, but often they were fired. Many times the day a woman announced she was getting married, much less having a child, was the day she, in effect,

resigned from newspaper work.⁴ It was naturally assumed that a woman would quit her job to stay home with her child. But Harris already had one child at home. She proved she could be Harris, the mother, and Nancy Dixon, the shopper, simultaneously. However, she had no way of knowing how Harry Bannister, general manager of the station, would handle the news.

"I didn't want to quit and had to tell someone. I went to see Harry Bannister, a big, burley guy -- a World War I veteran -- who was a most warm and practical man. I said, 'I find that I'm pregnant and I don't know how it happened.' He got up and went to the window and stared out of it and said, 'The last time I heard that, there was a star in the East.' I hurriedly explained we used all the proper things not to have a kid. He then said, 'You can stay as long as you want. It's radio, no one will see you.'"⁵

Harris worked until three weeks before Bill was born, which was two days before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. She returned three weeks afterward, her time away so short that even some people who could see her did not know she was pregnant. "One announcer who was especially dumb

⁴ Kay Mills, A Place in the News: From the Women's Pages to the Front Page (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 41.

⁵ Eberly interview.

said, 'Gee, I missed you. Were you on vacation? Where did you go?' He probably thought I just got fat. I don't know."⁶

Unlike many mothers, Fran had an extended family which provided relief from many child care burdens. Her parents stepped in to raise her two children, leaving her free to pursue her career. "Without them, it would have been impossible," she said.⁷ Harris's mother, who retired at age sixty-five from her job at the International Institute, was home taking care of the babies. "This was a break for me, I'll tell you," said Harris.⁸ In addition, her father had retired from dentistry and was available to help out when he wasn't busy with his acting.

Assured that her children would be cared for, Harris dove into her work as Nancy Dixon. It was a good time for her. She had no way of knowing that events overseas would change her career plans in Detroit. The United States' entry into World War II in December 1941 had an extraordinary impact on women, including Fran Harris, in the work place.

At WWJ Harris faced her own ordeal. It would take a blow to her career to get her into a "man's" position in broadcasting. It came in the form of a wire from Young and Rubicam two days after Christmas in 1942 telling her Nancy

⁶ Eberly interview.

⁷ Eberly interview.

⁸ Ritchie interview, p. 21.

Dixon was being retired. The agency gave as the reason World War II, saying it was not the right time to be pushing consumer products. They told Harris to come back after the war. Feeling "burned," she sat in her office, wrote her last copy for Nancy Dixon and thought, "What in the Sam Hill are you gonna do now?"⁹

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⁹ Ritchie interview, p. 19.

CHAPTER V

Fran Harris, Newscaster

or

The Station Runs Out of Men

Women in the work force endured great pressure during the Depression to turn over their jobs to men, particularly in male-dominated factories and businesses. If the working woman was married, she was generally viewed as a selfish menace to society who took a job away from a breadwinner. Women's magazines extolled the virtues of being a "real" woman; one devoted to her husband and children as a housewife. In an article titled "How Not To Get Married," Clarita de Foreaubille maintained that "working for a living and financial independence...is a fine deterrent to marriage."¹ A 1936 Gallup Poll found that more than four out of five Americans believed wives should not work if their husbands were employed.

George Gallup said he had never seen respondents "so solidly united in opposition on any subject imaginable, including sin and hay fever."²

¹ Clarita de Foreaubille, "How Not To Get Married," Ladies Homes Journal (October 1930).

² National Poll of Opinion, 15 November 1936.

A rapid turn-about in public attitudes occurred as the United States entered World War II. The draft took many men away from vital factory jobs, leaving gaping worker vacancies. Plants that converted to producing war machinery and materials needed laborers to support the defense effort. The government and media urged women to don their goggles and overalls. And women responded, with six million of them working during the war for the first time.³ At the close of the war, almost twenty million women populated the labor force. The proportion of women in the labor force increased from 25 percent in 1940 to 36 percent in 1945, outstripping the pace set for the previous four decades combined.⁴ "Rosie the Riveter" symbolized the female patriot. Government programs and propaganda championed the working woman. Magazines and newspapers carried articles reinforcing the image.

Hollywood churned out movies showing Bette Davis and Katharine Hepburn-type strong, can-do women tackling jobs, professions and problems. Newsreels not only showed the fighting men overseas but also featured women at home brandishing welding irons and riveter guns.

³ Lois W. Banner, Women in Modern America: A Brief History (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), p. 218.

⁴ Chafe, The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century, p. 133.

Many factories provided such enticements as day-care centers and clean, comfortable locker rooms to accommodate women. No longer was a woman in the work place viewed as selfish. No longer was her husband seen as somewhat suspect in his ability to support his wife and family. War had changed social values in a few short years.

War also changed the face of the mass media. Women slid into jobs formerly held by men; a few worked as foreign correspondents as opportunities opened. Many highly-regarded newspaper women made their mark in areas formerly closed to them during this period. Women such as Helen Thomas, Eileen Shanahan and Marguerite Higgins got their start or blossomed during the war years.⁵ Previously stuck in the women's page ghetto, newspaper women were allowed to cover hard news, edit copy and make assignments. By 1943 women made up fifty percent of the staffs on some small city dailies. The United Press bureau in Washington, which retained only one woman reporter

⁵ Helen Thomas, whose job was rewriting news for the radio wire at United Press, went on to cover politics for UPI. Eventually she became dean of the White House press corps, the first woman to hold that position. Eileen Shanahan, also worked rewrite for United Press during the war. She has worked at the New York Times as an economic reporter. At that paper she put her career on the line in 1974 by being the big name in a sex discrimination suit against the newspaper. Marguerite Higgins, a war and foreign correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune, was among the first group of reporters to cover the liberation of the Dachau concentration camp and became the paper's Berlin bureau chief. She won the Pulitzer Prize for reporting during the Korean War. She died at age 45 in 1966 after contracting a tropical disease while covering the early days of the Vietnam War for Newsday.

before the war, increased its number to eleven on beats, while several others worked in its office. Senate and House Galleries accredited ninety-eight women, compared with thirty only six years earlier.⁶

At radio stations and networks, the shortage of men opened the gates for women in all phases of the business. Radio became more important than ever for its ability to disseminate information to news-hungry Americans through instantaneous reporting from war zones. A few of these reports came from American women already living abroad.

Sigrid Schultz, the first woman to broadcast regularly from Europe, joined the Mutual Radio Network in 1939. A Chicago Tribune correspondent, she was an acknowledged expert on the Nazis, having interviewed Adolph Hitler in 1931 and dined with Joseph Goebbels. In 1941 Schultz contracted typhus and was forced to return to America, where she returned to newspapering rather than broadcasting.

Betty Wason was down to her last twenty-five cents in Stockholm as a freelance journalist when the Nazis invaded Norway. With a perfect observation post in Stockholm, Wason filed her first report for CBS. Wason came up with scoop after scoop trekking across Europe, but CBS executives insisted that she

⁶ Marzolf, Up From the Footnote, p. 69.

find men to broadcast her reports, saying her voice was too young and feminine to report war news. She returned to the United States to host a weekly round table program on WINX in Washington.

At home, the war afforded women the occasion to comment on the international affairs. The best known female journalist on radio was Dorothy Thompson. The central European bureau chief for the Philadelphia Ledger and New York Post in the 1920s, her career as a news commentator took off in the 1930s, with her "On the Record" appearing on the New York Herald Tribune's editorial page. In 1937 she became a commentator with the National Broadcasting Company, concentrating on wartime issues as Hitler moved across Europe. By the late 1940s, however, her views were considered too controversial and her commentaries were dropped.

Lisa Sergio, born in Florence, Italy, became a commentator for WQXR in New York during the war. She interpreted events overseas because, as the daughter of an influential family, she knew many of the major players. She had once worked with Benito Mussolini on a radio project before she turned from fascism. After the war, her career as a radio journalist faded.

Other firsts and breaks awaited women in broadcasting. Elizabeth Bemis became Columbia Broadcasting System's first female newscaster. Helen Sioussat hired on as the first woman network news executive as director of the Talks

Department for Columbia Broadcasting System. Alice Weel Bigart took over as the first fulltime woman writer for a network evening news program, also at Columbia Broadcasting System.

With personnel sorely needed, the Columbia Broadcasting System allowed women to work as assistant directors and producers. Three women apprentice engineers were added at WABC in New York.

Columbia Broadcasting System's worldwide news staff was headed by Paul W. White, who wrote that with the manpower shortage came the discovery that women were "good reporters" and "able at rewrite." He said it was an unfair cliché that women had no news judgment and he was "proud of a number of newswomen whom it was [his] privilege to supervise." They easily held their own in a male-dominated field. Also, White believed that the presence of women in broadcasting cut down on slovenliness and increased serious discussion of one's work and study of the news. He observed this was so because there was less concern among the staff about "what happened in the Fifth at Aqueduct" and less gossip with women around.⁷

While women made inroads at the networks, they also moved into formerly forbidden territory at local stations across the country. From

⁷ Paul W. White, News on the Air (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1947), p. 364.

Philadelphia to San Francisco, 'women tackled international affairs and sports programming.'⁸

It was into this cultural and job climate that Fran Harris stepped when Nancy Dixon, shopper and Sanforized-product hustler, was terminated. Refusing to leave radio and knowing the employment situation, Harris approached Harry Bannister in December of 1942 with a novel idea -- hire her as a newscaster. She wanted to stay in radio but ruled out writing scripts or directing. She liked being before the public, just as she had liked acting with her father on stage. She enjoyed the limelight.

"So I said, 'Now look, I'm out. But I understand that most of the boys in the newsroom have gone, too, so why don't you put me in the newsroom and let me do the news?'" She emphasized her journalism experience, leaving out that it started and ended with her high school newspaper.⁹

But Bannister replied, "The hell I will. Women don't do news, they just don't. They don't have the authority in their voices. They're too shrill. They're just not acceptable to do the news."¹⁰ Fran warned Bannister that he may get

⁸ Marzolf, Up From the Footnote, p. 144.

⁹ Eberly interview.

¹⁰ Ritchie interview, p. 19.

desperate with his manpower depleted by the war. But he only said, "Women don't do news. Think of something else."¹¹

The recently retired Nancy Dixon glumly retired to her office to think of some other means of staying in radio. She was there about an hour when the phone rang. It was Bannister telling her to make an audition for a news program. Harris rounded up an announcer and a recalcitrant engineer who did little to hide his disgust for a woman auditioning for a newscasting position. For the audition disc she interviewed the announcer, asking what effect the war had on Christmas at his house. She then capped it with the news. She gave the record to Bannister. On January 3, 1943, Harris became the first woman newscaster in Michigan.

She took over the 6:45 a.m. newscast since few people listened at that time. Bannister thought he could ease Harris in at that time without too many complaints about a female voice reporting news on the radio. The sponsor of that time slot -- Nate Shapiro of Cunningham Drugs -- was out of town for three months and therefore would be unaware of the woman newscaster. The station manager decided that by the time the sponsor returned, Harris would be an established fact. Besides, the other newscasters were happy to give up the

¹¹ Eberly interview.

crack-of-dawn assignment. As it turned out, the complaints Bannister steeled himself for never materialized.

Harris took the bus to work at 6 a.m. for her first newscast. At the station, she put together a five-minute newscast from wire copy and flimsies, onion-skin carbon copies of stories provided nightly by the Detroit News. With about ten minutes to spare, Harris left the basement newsroom and pushed the button on the elevator for the third floor on-air studio. She waited and waited, with 6:45 fast approaching. She then remembered the station did not start the elevators until 7 a.m. to save electricity.

"So I dashed up all those stairs. I got to the studio with about one minute to spare," she said. "I remember doing the first part of it -- 'the soldiers (huff, puff) did such and such (huff, puff).' I gasped and panted all the way through."¹² After that day, Harris's duties were expanded to several five-minute newscasts throughout the day. The longer newscasts at noon, 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. were still reserved for the male newscasters.

In addition, Harris put together an interview program at 1 p.m. The Detroit News announced that the new program, "Fran Harris Reports," was created to "keep women informed of their part in the war effort." "Fran Harris,

¹² Eberly interview.

the only woman newscaster in Michigan, will report on activities of women at the battle fronts, in war plants, in the home and in volunteer jobs."¹³ And so Harris interviewed people who hoped to recruit nurses, WACS and WAVES or gave explanations of GI Bill benefits.¹⁴

Her first interview, however, was not with a recruiter or factory worker, but with Eleanor Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt had returned from the South Pacific, where she had checked on hospital conditions. On her way to Washington, she stopped off to visit relatives in the Detroit suburb of Birmingham. With an engineer beside her in the car, Harris had doubts she could pull off the interview. "I'm not going to be able to do this," she thought. "Then I remembered what my father once told me. 'People are people. They get up in the morning. They eat like people. They go to bed at night. They behave like people. So what's the difference who they are? They're just people.' So I thought, 'Okay, maybe I can do this.'"¹⁵

Harris recalled Mrs. Roosevelt as "charming and absolutely wonderful." The First Lady must have known Harris was a "nouveau," the interviewer surmised, because she was so gracious and accommodating. The interview took

¹³ The Detroit News, 8 February, 1943, p. 11.

¹⁴ The Detroit News, 26 November, 1944, p. 4.

¹⁵ Eberly interview.

place in a first floor sun room surrounded by windows. With the microphone placed on a table and Mrs. Roosevelt's back to the windows, the interview began. Then they heard a strange noise, a scratching sound. "She turned around and here were all these little kids watching through the windows," Harris said. "It was a delightful little picture." The women rearranged the seats so they could continue the interview while watching the children. The questions were serious ones, but Mrs. Roosevelt answered them looking as though she were talking to the children to keep them entertained. "What a way to begin," Harris said.¹⁶

But what really impressed Harris was a small item at the bottom of the front page of the Detroit News saying that WWJ-radio was interviewing Mrs. Roosevelt. It didn't give Harris' name, but just seeing the blurb was a thrill.

Harris interviewed Mrs. Roosevelt on subsequent visits to Detroit. But by then Harris was a seasoned interviewer and her nervousness had disappeared. Once Mrs. Roosevelt walked into a suite at the Book Cadillac Hotel so crowded that the engineer and Harris sat on a stool at the bar. When the engineer spotted

¹⁶ Eberly interview.

her, he hopped behind the bar and said, "What'll you have, lady?" Harris recalled.¹⁷

Although Harris was chosen to do the interviews, she believed it had nothing to do with her gender or Mrs. Roosevelt's well-known support of women in the media. During the Depression, Mrs. Roosevelt banned male reporters from her weekly news conferences to ensure that at least some women would retain their media jobs. And since, at times, she offered news of substance, her conferences needed to be covered.

Indeed, Mrs. Roosevelt became one of the first important woman broadcasters herself in 1934, earning up to \$500 per minute, the same amount as the highest-paid radio stars. She delivered radio commentaries on such issues as family relations, child care, and gardening during the Depression. Her programs shifted to topics that ranged from food rationing to defense installations visits during World War II. Such sponsors as Pond's, Sweetheart Soap, the Simmons Mattress Company and the Pan-American Coffee Bureau paid for her shows. Although Mrs. Roosevelt said she donated the money to the

¹⁷ Eberly interview.

American Friends Service Committee, she insisted on payment since money represented a tangible measure of her worth as a worker.¹⁸

But even with Mrs. Roosevelt's support of media women and her personal work in it, Harris had a simpler explanation for drawing her first assignment. "I think the station just ran out of people," she said.¹⁹

During the war Harris, accompanied by an engineer, conducted many interviews on site. In Detroit, of course, that meant going into factories. At one facility converted to war-time production, Harris interviewed a woman who worked a noisy punch press machine. It was so loud that the women moved into a separate room for the interview. Even then the noise still rattled through the door.

"I remember asking her why she was there, and I expected the patriotic answer and the money answer -- because her husband was away and she had to have money," said Harris. "But none of that came. She said, 'Well, I came to work because I have thirteen children and they're all home and I needed a rest.'"²⁰

¹⁸ Maurine Beasley and Paul Belgrade, "Eleanor Roosevelt: First Lady As Radio Pioneer," Journalism History (Autumn-Winter, 1984), pp. 42-45.

¹⁹ Eberly interview.

²⁰ Ritchie interview, p. 25.

Another factory worker, Madame X, was a Polish Jew who refused to give her name. The woman still had family members in Poland and feared the Nazis would track them down if she gave her identity. Madame X told Harris that "the Nazis put people in ovens when they don't like them. I didn't believe her," Harris said. "I said, 'Ovens? What are you talking about?' She then said again that Nazis put people in ovens and burned them up. And I just never believed her until it became apparent that that's what happened."²¹

Another interview was with the manager of a Detroit corset company that had converted to making parachutes. Because the company hired many deaf women, Harris congratulated the manager on his thoughtfulness. He replied that the company preferred deaf women because they concentrated on their jobs and didn't fritter away their time with gossip.

When servicemen began returning home, teletypes carried the numbers of the units. Harris had a special show where she did nothing for five minutes but read the numbers of the units arriving. "It must have been terrible to listen to, but if you heard your dear one's unit, boy, that made the day. I did that for a number of months."²²

²¹ Ritchie interview, p. 26.

²² Eberly interview.

But with the men returning to their jobs, Harris faced the same problem as many other women -- employers were no longer running out of people. The push was on once again, as during the Depression, for women to return to the home. Women in the media were not immune from the pressure.

Even before the fighting ceased, an ominous article in the Saturday Evening Post described women wartime journalists as incompetent. It ridiculed the backgrounds of what it projected as some 8,000 women journalism replacements. Overlooking those with formal journalism training, the writers said:

Editors are prone to forget that the majority of their new paper dolls were secretaries, file clerks, telephone operators, receptionists or copy girls a short time ago. They have been thrown into jobs demanding special training and know-how without the basic training given men reporters in normal times.²³

The message was that most women working in the media lacked the professional skills and backgrounds to do be where they were. The subtext read that once the war was over, things would return to normal -- men to the newsrooms, women to the home or, at least, to traditional jobs they could handle.

This was not to be the case with Fran Harris.

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²³ Stanley Frank and Paul Sann, "Paper Dolls," Saturday Evening Post, 20 May 1944, p. 95.

CHAPTER VI

Chasing Speeders

Following World War II, Rosie the Riveter was expected to reclaim her apron fulltime and become Harriet the Homemaker. Women's magazines ran articles with such titles as "Don't Be Afraid to Marry Young," "Cooking to Me is Poetry" and "Femininity Begins at Home." By the end of 1949, a career woman accounted for only one out of three heroines in major women's magazines -- and she renounced her work upon discovering that she really wanted to be a housewife.¹ Popular television shows, such as "Father Knows Best" and "Ozzie and Harriet," reinforced the theme of woman as housewife. She exuded happiness in her white-picket fenced home surrounded by her children and all-knowing husband. In the movies Bette Davis and Katharine Hepburn were replaced with such cheerful, dependent and innocent types as Debbie Reynolds and Doris Day.

Mannish suits, trousers and shoulder pads were exchanged for constrictive higher heels with pointed toes and baby doll styles with layers of

¹ Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York: Dell Publishing Co, Inc., 1963), p. 38.

crinoline petticoats pouffing out bouffant skirts, a cinched-in waist and a full bosom. The ideal style was the maternity outfit.

Marriage rates soared with 1946 marriage license bureaus doing more business than in any year of American history. The average age of first marriages for women dropped from 22 years in 1900, to 21.5 in 1940 and 20.3 by 1962. Along with the marriages, came babies -- preferably soon and in abundance. For half the 1946 newlyweds, the first baby appeared within sixteen months of marriage. In 1945, thirty-one percent of white women thought the ideal number of children was four. A decade later, forty-one percent of the women believed that four children made for a perfect family.² One woman summed up the baby craze in a Ladies' Home Journal article: "Ray and I are just crazy about new little babies. And I love being pregnant."³

Popular books reinforced the homemaker theme. Sociologist Marynia Farnham and historian Ferdinand Lundberg published Modern Women: The Lost Sex in 1947. They argued that the problems of modern American society -- including war and depression -- could be laid at the feet of women who had left home to pursue a career. Child care expert Dr. Benjamin Spock authored

² Filene, Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America, pp. 165-66.

³ Betty Hannah Hoffman, "We Live by the Journal," Ladies' Home Journal 68 (November 1951), p. 190.

the 1946 book Baby and Child Care, which recommended that mothers stay home with their pre-school children and be available when their older children returned from school.

In short, "More than at any time since the Victorian era, the American woman became a domestic being."⁴

But a closer examination of what went on with women in the work place revealed another facet to the suburban, barbecue, station wagon portrait. In 1930, twenty-two percent of the total labor force consisted of women. In 1940 the number rose to twenty-five percent. By 1950, the number climbed to twenty-seven percent. More interesting, however, were the figures for married women. Their numbers leaped from twenty-nine percent of the female labor force in 1930 to thirty-six percent in 1940 and fifty-two percent in 1950.⁵

Most observers expected that women would go back home when the war ended, but once in the labor force, many female workers remained on the job. Women's experience in the work force during the war years amounted to a revolution, with the war acting as a catalyst that broke up old modes of

⁴ Banner, Women in Modern America: A Brief History, p. 240.

⁵ Filene, Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America, p. 237.

behavior, to forge new ones. As a result, work for middle-class married women became commonplace.⁶

By removing cultural barriers against middle-class married women working outside the home, the wartime experience allowed women to find their place reconciling roles both within the family and the work place. Some women stayed on the job or, if fired for returning GIs, found other work as a response to the rapid inflation which followed the war. Some worked to augment the family income in an effort to participate in the good, and expensive, life of materialism. Others remained at their jobs, as women always have, to support themselves or their families. While some of these women found their work place experiences fulfilling and desired to establish an identity outside the home, the impression continued that women went to work out of necessity.⁷

Unlike the war years when government and industry enticed married women into the work force through special accommodation and high-paying jobs, incentives dried up. Day-care programs were eliminated. GIs received preferential treatment in the labor market. And, in general, there was a shifting of women from high-paying industrial work to low-skill, low-paying, dead-end

⁶ William H. Chafe, The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970 (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 148, 247.

⁷ Chafe, The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century, pp. 168-69.

jobs in traditional women's categories such as clerical and sales work.⁸ Nonetheless, a record number of married women populated the job market.

Women working in the media reflected the same trends as society as a whole. Some stayed on jobs they were brought in to fill during the war; many were demoted to lower-paying, lower-status ones. But the fact was, many stayed. This occurred despite warnings from publishers even during the war that women would have a difficult time keeping their jobs in peace time.

Results of a 1944 survey by the Inland Daily Press Association showed eleven percent of respondents planned to release women workers after the war. Only 4.5 percent hoped to retain all women who wished to stay. In the survey of sixty-six newspapers was the finding that 48.4 percent of the publishers intended to give GIs first preference at a job, although they were willing to retain "any girl who wishes to continue and who can deliver in competition with men." Also, 19.7 percent planned to eliminate women from the copy desks and "tough" reporting assignments as well as some advertising accounts.⁹

⁸ Karen Anderson, Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 173.

⁹ Beasley and Theus, The New Majority: A Look at What the Preponderance of Women in Journalism Education Means to the Schools and to the Professions, p. 30.

After a survey of twenty-seven daily newspaper editors and fifteen journalism schools, Mademoiselle's job editor concluded that 1949 was "a bad year" for women in newspapers.

Four years ago, before the men came back, you could have had a crack at a beginning job, even on a big-city daily, and it might have led into the metropolitan reporting most women aim for when they enter journalism. But the girls who started then and have been handling straight news now find themselves shifted to departments with a women's angle, and when they drop out of news jobs, men replace them.¹⁰

Once again, women settled into the women's departments or wrote about such "female" issues as education or child care. Many women shared the fate of Dorothyurney, acting city editor at the Washington News during World War II. Following the war, she was told she would not be considered for the position on a permanent basis. Not only that, but she trained the man brought in for the job. However, she stayed in the news business, hiring on as women's editor for the Miami Herald. Nevertheless, women in newspapers, magazines and book publishing increased their numbers by seven percent during the 1940s.

¹⁰ Marzolf, Up From the Footnote, p. 75.

They were in the field to stay even if it meant retreating to the women's pages.¹¹

Women in radio experienced much the same pattern of discrimination and sex stereotyping as their sisters in the print media. It was not uncommon to hear women announcers during the war. Indeed, one survey found one female announcer for every twelve men.¹² Women newscasters and correspondents had found their voices. But the inroads were short-lived when men returned to broadcasting. Women who sought careers in radio were warned that announcing opportunities for them were almost nonexistent. Men overwhelmingly held the decision-making positions and routinely discouraged women from entering broadcasting because "women's voices were poor, hours were irregular and operation of the equipment was difficult."¹³

Once more, the quality of women's voices was the central issue that kept women out of newscasting. "This school of thought believes that a woman's voice doesn't carry authority, especially on international affairs; that a feminine voice immediately suggests a woman's program or strictly the sewing and

¹¹ Marzolf, Up From the Footnote, p. 74.

¹² David H. Hosley and Gayle K. Yamada, Hard News: Women in Broadcast Journalism (New York: Greenwood, 1987), p. 79.

¹³ Marzolf, Up From the Footnote, p. 145.

cooking departments of life," remarked Pauline Frederick.¹⁴ This was in the late 1940s when Frederick had proven her "authority" after a relentless struggle to become American Broadcasting Company's network United Nations correspondent. She also broadcast her own early morning news program. But old ideas die hard. More than a decade and a half later, Elmer Lower, president in charge of news, special events, and public affairs at the American Broadcasting Company, discredited women's voices. He said they were "not as appropriate for reporting crucial events. For hard-core news, the depth and resonance of the male voice are indispensable."¹⁵

If women wanted to continue in radio, updated women's programs and children's shows -- radio's version of the print media's female "women's page" ghetto -- remained available. Interview programs tantalized some women, but there was a catch. As competition heated up between radio and the hottest new medium, television, radio underwent a reformatting away from soap operas, comedy shows and drama toward news, music and commercials. Under the umbrella of news fell interview programs where women often were given the freedom to interview and develop program ideas. But, even though a woman

¹⁴ Hosley and Yamada, Hard News: Women in Broadcast Journalism, p. 24.

¹⁵ Hosley and Yamada, p. 22.

may have done the interview and coordinated the show, frequently her voice was rubbed off the tape so that an on-mike male announcer could ask the questions.¹⁶

Fran Harris was no different from most other women in radio in that she was relieved of the newscasts throughout the day as men filled the WWJ newsroom. But she was luckier than others in two important areas.

First, she managed to hang onto the 1 p.m. slot, "Fran Harris Reports," which still contained news, interviews and features. A major portion of the program was devoted to interviewing newsmakers and celebrities who passed through Detroit promoting their latest Hollywood efforts.

Included in her list of more than four hundred interviewees were such film stars as Gloria Swanson, Burt Lancaster, Charlton Heston and, her least favorite, Joan Crawford. Crawford, she recalled, was something of a drama queen even in real life. She traveled with a painting of herself "looking the way she wished she looked"¹⁷ surrounded by flowers. She stayed at the presidential suite in the elegant Book Cadillac Hotel. She also threw herself to the ground,

¹⁶ Marzolf, Up From the Footnote, p. 146.

¹⁷ Eberly interview.

pounding her fists when she objected to changing clothes for a newspaper photo shoot. "She was something else," Harris recalled.¹⁸

Harris developed a ten-step technique on interviewing. It included not doing too much research. She knew who her guests were and why they were there. Beyond that, she waited to hear their stories unravel along with her radio audience. Her favorite opening line was, "Tell me about yourself. And they'd go on and on. And then, 'Oh, a-ah, no-o.' That's all you have to say, just let them run." She let her guests do most of the talking. "I have a passionate feeling that interviewers talk too much," she said. Harris then summed the interview up to conclude the segment.¹⁹

But at least as important as her show, was the encouragement Harris received to pursue ideas of her own. To Harris, creative and independent, this was an ideal working arrangement. One program, called "Highway Patrol," got her out of the office in a fast-paced way. Disturbed by thirteen deaths on the highway during the 1950 Memorial Day weekend, she sought to do something about it. So every Friday she and an engineer cruised the highways with two "gorgeous" state policemen looking for speeders.

¹⁸ Eberly interview.

¹⁹ Ritchie interview, p. 37.

"We would go out into the suburbs and follow the traffic and when there'd be an offender, why we'd hurry up and haul them over," she said. "Then one of the state policemen would say 'Now do you mind, we will forget--you won't have to have a ticket for this if you will be on this program.' So then I would interview them and then the state policeman would scold him on the air. We did three or four of those a day on a Friday afternoon."²⁰

Harris heard all sorts of excuses, including one from a man who said he had an asthma attack and had to get up North in a hurry. The only time they were refused an interview was when an amorous man and woman coming from a race track turned out to be married to other people. Fran loved the program so much that when she vacationed with her family north of Grand Rapids, she drove halfway to Detroit on Fridays to meet "the Highway Patrol boys and we'd do our regular stuff."²¹

The program lasted about eighteen months until her husband wanted to buy more auto insurance. "And they wouldn't give it to him because I was doing this crazy program -- because we would chase some people at close to

²⁰ Ritchie interview, p. 128.

²¹ Ritchie interview, p. 26.

a hundred miles an hour," she recalled. So she quit the program and they got their insurance.²²

The program for which she received the most professional accolades grew out of the speedy rescue of a kidnaped seven-year-old girl from the auto of an accused sex offender. Harris helped orchestrate a dramatization of the kidnaping in 1949 and then moderated a panel discussion of professionals who worked with sex deviates.²³ It was so popular that she instituted a thirteen-week late-night series -- to prevent children from hearing the program -- highlighting the issue. Psychiatrists, lawyers, case workers, physicians and other professionals appeared on the show, "Protect Your Child." Advocated on the program were such ideas as establishment of new mental hospitals and clinics, and substitution of the term "mental illness" for "crazy." For her work, Harris won a George Foster Peabody Award, broadcasting's version of a Pulitzer Prize.

Harris devoted much of her time developing programs which promoted safety for children. She admitted this was due in large part to safety concerns as a parent for her children. When her oldest child turned ten years old and wanted a bicycle, it suddenly became a lethal weapon in her eyes. As a

²² Ritchie interview, p. 26.

²³ The Detroit News, 29 November 1949, p. 7.

response, Harris created the "Safety Show." Taped from various schools during 1945-56 in the Detroit area, the program called attention to safety patrol boys and their work. It also helped police find hit-and-run drivers in an effort to reduce child accidents. In the weekly show, moderated by Harris, children answered safety quiz questions and the Detroit Police Youth Bureau officers entertained with puppets and animals. Bicycles were awarded for information leading to the arrest and conviction of hit-and-run drivers. About twelve bikes were given away.

As a promoter of safety, Harris put her words into action when she hauled into court a hit-and-run driver who side-swiped her car in 1949. After being hit, Harris hailed a passing policeman and caught up with the driver. He turned out to be Alex E. Berendt, managing director of the College of Advanced Traffic, where truck operators were taught road safety. Traffic Court Judge John D. Watts found Berendt guilty and ordered him to pay a \$20 fine. A headline in the Detroit News over an article detailing the incident read: "Expert on Safety Guilty in Accident: And His Accuser Is a Woman Traffic Ace."²⁴

²⁴ The Detroit News, 3 March 1949.

Blue Makeup & Fencers

Harris worked to localize radio by integrating it into the community. She interviewed newsmakers. She tracked down speeders (or side-swipers). But by the mid-1940s, she also found herself fascinated with WWJ's latest medium -- television. Her interest took her, literally, to new heights. On October 23, 1946 she became the first woman broadcaster to appear on a Michigan television station.²⁵ She and the others involved in the WWJ-TV production got off the elevator at the forty-fifth floor -- the elevator's top stop -- of Detroit's Penobscot Building. They climbed the last two flights, carrying equipment and props. The twenty-minute show was crude and boring by today's standards. Harris interviewed a French singer, a friend of her boss. One announcer read the newspaper in front of the camera. Another one produced a TV version of an audience radio show -- with no audience. Finally, there was a fencing match put on by students from Wayne State University. No local major league sports figure would agree to be on the show because team managers and handlers

²⁵ Catharine Heinz, "Women Radio Pioneers," Journal of Popular Culture 12:2 (Fall 1978), p. 311.

believed "television wasn't going to last anyway. It wasn't worth the effort to get their people down there."²⁶

The on-camera cast wore blue makeup to cover any red tones in their skin since the early television cameras, "as big as all outdoors," did not pick up the color red. "We were a gruesome group," Harris said.²⁷ Gruesomeness aside, Fran became caught up with television while continuing her daily radio programs and interviews. As with radio, her superiors let her run with her ideas. "There were so many shows. Television was just waiting to be filled with something. It was such a temptation. It got to a point after a while I didn't even ask; I just told the program manager to put this in at such and such a time to see what happened."²⁸

In 1947 she created an after-school children's program, Junior Jamboree, which featured skits with puppets, puzzles, a magician and interviews with sports celebrities. Harris got many ideas for the show from three experts -- her children, who were ten, five and one-and-a-half years old. She sat down with them and brainstormed, using children's magazines as a guide to see what captured their imaginations. Following the advice of her children, Harris lined

²⁶ Eberly interview.

²⁷ Eberly interview.

²⁸ Interview with Fran Harris, 20 October 1993.

up a puppeteer from the Detroit Public Library, a magician and sports figures such as Ted Lindsay of the Detroit Red Wings and Dizzy Trout of the Detroit Tigers.

In 1950 she created one of the most popular programs on WWJ-TV, "Traffic Court," consisting of re-enactments of court cases involving traffic accidents and mishaps. Fighting both the Detroit Bar Association and the American Bar Association to stay on the air, the show was the forerunner of today's courtroom programs. The program used a real traffic court judge, John D. Watts, policemen and witnesses. The defendants were played by policemen eager to be on television and earn the \$15 fee. Harris thought the real defendants would be too embarrassed to appear on the screen. The program was televised from a set at the WWJ studios.

After the first show, the Detroit Bar Association "rose up in horror. Terrible. A real judge, in a real program, in something like television. It was dreadful," recalled Fran of the thinking of local attorneys.²⁹ Watts, a thick-skinned extrovert, didn't let such criticisms bother him. "He kept saying, 'Now, wait a minute. This is a matter of public record. These are open cases.'³⁰

²⁹ Ritchie interview, p. 130.

³⁰ Eberly interview.

The Bar Association went to the head of the Detroit News in an effort get the program pulled. When the News refused to back down, association members asked two Michigan Supreme Court judges from Lansing to see what was going on in Detroit. It so happened that one of the two judges who appeared was a friend of Harris' family. She greeted him with open arms and explained the educational value behind the program. The two returned to Lansing supporting Harris' venture. The association then appealed to the American Bar Association. At its annual meeting, Harris said, Watts was to be reprimanded. Instead, he took the offensive, saying the contents of the show was a matter of public record, and the program was designed to cut traffic deaths and accidents. Association members believed the program was a good idea and threw their support to Watts. The Detroit Bar Association gave up its fight and the show stayed on for ten years with Harris as producer. Harris won an Alfred Sloan Safety Award for the program's educational value in promoting auto safety in 1950.

Not all of Harris' ideas, though, were winners. She admitted that some radio and television programs stayed on the air for only a day or two, sometimes a week or two. Rather than fight a losing battle to keep a show on

that management did not like, she would withdraw it and move on to something else. "I would rather quit [fighting] than be fired," she said.³¹

And losing her job was not an option for Harris. She was having too much fun. She also did not find the alternative of becoming a fulltime homemaker appealing. Although she contributed to the baby boomer population by giving birth to her third child, Robert Alvord in 1946, she was 50,000 watts away from believing cooking was poetry. She gradually spent more time with television in the 1950s, although she still anchored her "Fran Harris Reports" show on radio. She was, as she put it, "having a ball"³² in both media.

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³¹ Eberly interview.

³² Eberly interview.

CHAPTER VII

Kicked Upstairs

In 1964, life changed dramatically for Harris. Harry Bannister had moved on to an executive position with the National Broadcasting Company network in New York, leaving Harris to deal with a series of bosses, each with his own agenda. Most continued to give her autonomy in her work, supporting her ideas.

However, in the mid-1960s, someone else had a different idea. Her then-current boss pulled Harris into his office and announced that because of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, women had to be in more visible positions. She countered that being on the air was about as visible as you could get. He suggested that Harris think about spending the last years of her career in management as features coordinator, with promotional and public relations duties included. She agreed to think it over. On the way from her boss's office to the radio studio where she was to interview Gregory Peck for her one o'clock show, she reached her decision. In the elevator Harris realized this would be her third or fourth time talking on the air with the handsome Hollywood star -- and she was bored by the prospect. Maybe it was time for a change.¹

¹ Eberly interview.

With her move to management, Harris was given a title, a company car and high visibility. "They put me upstairs so I'd be obvious. I became an instant token."²

In her new job she worked on programming, promotion and publicity, but she was no longer on the air. Also, she was not allowed to attend Monday morning meetings where department managers reviewed the past week and planned for the following week. She was told, "You wouldn't be interested in that. You don't need that. It's a bore. You don't want to go to those." Harris saw it differently. She believed she didn't play a role in ultimate management decisions because "I was a woman, you know. You're not supposed to know management. I wasn't invited to the meetings; I wasn't welcome."³

Her value to the station materialized every three years at license renewal time. Station managers singled her out to Federal Communication Commission officials and Civil Rights Act watch dogs as their woman in management. Harris remembered that when a group from the National Organization for Women came in saying there were not enough women in management, her boss

² Ritchie interview, p. 131.

³ Interview with Fran Harris recorded by Carole Eberly, 23 May 1993, Westland, Michigan.

pointed to her and said, " "What do you think she is?' You know, just crude like that."⁴

Although no longer on the air nor allowed a decision-making place on the management team, Harris received some perks in her new position. She was provided travel money and the time to expand her professional and community activities as part of the community service outreach of the station. She took full advantage of the funds and the freedom.

In one of her first moves she became the American Federation of Advertising's regional governor in 1965 for the organization's north central mid-western states. This position assured her a seat on the previously all-male national board. Once there, she "conned the board into accepting the concept" that there should be a permanent spot for women on the board.⁵ She did this at the request of fourteen Women's Advertising Clubs, loosely affiliated with the American Federation of Advertising. Since Harris was already on the national board, she was appointed the first female national vice president for women. "I got myself into trouble a lot of times that way, by just popping off."⁶

⁴ Ritchie interview, p. 132.

⁵ Ritchie interview, p. 87.

⁶ Ritchie interview, p. 133.

As the first woman in that slot, she was asked to introduce the Federation's chairman at a luncheon in Miami. The chairman, who was not a supporter of women in the advertising business, waited while Harris spoke. Harris, an admirer of the chairman's accomplished wife, wound up with: "Behind every successful man stands an amazed woman. Everybody just roared and he hated it. I thought, yeah, I got him!"⁷

While WWJ supported her activities with the American Federation of Advertising, the cash drawer slammed shut for an organization close to her heart. The refusal of WWJ executives to finance her travel to Theta Sigma Phi meetings motivated one of her most far-reaching moves in a media organization. This was to be the name change of the association, a 7,400-member⁸ women's honorary journalism society, to Women in Communication, Inc.⁹ It irked Harris that WWJ picked up her expenses to attend meetings of the American Federation of Advertising or American

⁷ Ritchie interview, p. 87.

⁸ According to a State of the Society speech given by Harris in 1973, this was a number of members in 1972.

⁹ It is ironic that Harris went on to become national president of Women in Communication, Inc. since as a junior at Grinnell College she was told she did not receive one of five bids to join Theta Sigma Phi. It turned out that this news, which had Harris weeping all day, was a hoax concocted by friends in her dorm. When told she really did receive a bid, she had only minutes to change into a dress and meet the rest of the journalism group in the dining room. (Eberly interview.)

Women in Radio and Television but declined to pay her way to functions of Theta Sigma Phi, which management considered a social group. Serving as vice-president of the organization from 1969-71, Harris laid the groundwork for the change by encouraging chapter members to drop the sorority connotation in favor of a professional sounding name.

Elected national president in 1971, a determined Harris resolved: "We're going to change that name, we're going to change it and let's not argue."¹⁰ A motion to do so narrowly passed at the 1972 national convention in Houston. Convention delegates submitted numerous names to replace Theta Sigma Phi. They were listed alphabetically, beginning "with the Academy of Journalism Science or something weird like that."¹¹ Hours of debate passed. Votes came and went. Names were rejected. Harris' feet hurt. At the end of the list languished Women in Communication.¹² Harris finally said of the last name, "Look, we're going to change the name. Are we going to do it now or are we going to never do it?"¹³ A vote was taken and the new name won approval.

¹⁰ Ritchie interview, p.83.

¹¹ Ritchie interview, p. 84.

¹² The Inc. was added after the discovery that a group of workers in the telephone communication industry in Seattle also held the Women in Communication name.

¹³ Ritchie interview, p. 84.

But Harris was not through yet. Sensing that most everyone was exhausted and had little fight left in them, she pushed through a dues increase that nearly doubled the annual fee and a motion to admit men who supported women working in the media. "I made it clear that the only kinds of men that we wanted were the men who were in a position to help women progress," she said.¹⁴ Allen H. Neuharth of Gannett Newspapers and Edward Bernays, the public relations pioneer, were two of the first male members. Either of these issues normally could tie a convention up for hours or days. But Harris, who had sharpened her political skills in the work place, knew to strike while the iron was hot.

Harris' freedom from the constraints of daily radio and television work also allowed her to serve in positions far removed from her career in the media. One such place was the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS), a civilian advisory committee established in 1951 to promote public acceptance of military service as a career field for women. It was the organization's job to make recommendations for improving military life for women by advising the Secretary of Defense on policies relating to effective use of women in the services. Harris volunteered for DACOWITS from

¹⁴ Ritchie interview, p. 83.

1971-73 and was appointed by Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird. She chaired the committee in 1973. The group, consisting of thirty-three women from across the nation, represented industry, education and civic affairs. The women met twice a year at Army, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Marine Corps facilities.¹⁵

One of Harris' first observations was that WACS looked ridiculous marching in skirts. "It was unbelievable," Harris said.¹⁶ She mentioned this to other committee members, and they lobbied military brass to put women in trousers. At the same time, Harris and others noticed that women wore men's shoes for training. "It was the rationale they could use whatever smaller men would use," she said. DACOWITS was successful in pressuring the military to issue women their own shoes.

¹⁵ DACOWITS was initially established during the Korean War as an effort to recruit women into the military by promoting the service as a suitable place of employment for young women. By the 1970s it became known for supporting feminist causes. For instance, in 1967, its members pressured Congress to remove the two percent limit of women's numbers in the services. In 1974, they supported the integration of military academies. Between 1976 and 1980, committee members supported appointment of women to the court of military appeals and their assignment to Minuteman and Titan missile crews, criticized the lack of privacy in barracks and campaigned against the ban on abortions in military hospitals. A good examination of DACOWITS and its role in military policy is offered by Mary Fainsod Katzenstein in "Feminism Within American Institutions: Unobtrusive Mobilization In The 1980s," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 1990, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 46-54.

¹⁶ Eberly interview.

The women took on the Navy as well. At a Pentagon meeting, Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt suggested that since women wanted to be on ships it would be a good idea for the Navy to launch a destroyer totally run by women. "We booed him, absolutely booed him," said Harris. "You should have been able to hear the boo from here to there. I can see that that ship, if it ever had developed, would have been the last one in a regatta."¹⁷

Harris' community and professional activities while at WWJ took her from the White House to Hawaii, from Mexico to Israel. However, she continued to focus most of her work in Michigan. Among other organizations, she served on the Michigan Status of Women Commission, the Ferris State University Board of Control, and the Women's Advertising Club of Detroit. She was a charter member of the Women's Economic Club and a co-founder of the Homemaker Service of Metropolitan Detroit, Inc.

A supporter of women, Harris found time to do things to support individual women. The first woman promoted to management in public affairs at the Ford Motor Company recalled one such incident. Marion Corwell Shertzer said upon her promotion, "Fran wrote a letter to my boss

¹⁷ Ritchie interview, p. 113.

congratulating him on his good judgment."¹⁸ When Shertzer was new to the community, Harris suggested her name to a number of organizations to make her feel at home. "She was not a back stabber in the days before sisterhood when that was all too common," said Shertzer. "I have been fortunate to have known her. She was the tops."¹⁹

The shift in Harris' duties from the day-to-day rapid pace of radio and television announcing and production to her duties in management offered her the chance to expand her influence beyond WWJ's radio and television air waves. Although the management position contained some negative components, such as tokenism and the direct communication that she was not welcome at decision-making meetings, she used these years to promote women working in the media as well as community and government issues. In 1974, after ten years of traveling, doing promotional work and coordinating features at WWJ-AM-FM-TV, Fran Harris, a.k.a. Julia Hayes and Nancy Dixon, retired -- as required -- at the age of 65.

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¹⁸ Interview with Marion Corwell Shertzer, 12 July 1994, Flat Rock, Michigan.

¹⁹ Shertzer interview.

CHAPTER VIII

Driving Around Principalities

Harris worked in radio almost from the time she graduated from college, but she never viewed herself as a female media trailblazer or a career woman. "I didn't know it as a career. I just thought it was a good job," she said.¹ But she was not above putting people who would diminish her work in their place.

One evening she and her husband arrived late to a dinner-bridge party because she had to interview Vice President Alben Barkley at 5 p.m. She apologized for her tardiness to the "rather pompous" host, who asked, "And what did you do at your little office today?" She was about to tell him when her husband said: "'She just finished interviewing the vice president of the United States; that's why we're late.' I got a kick out of that. That kept [the host] very quiet all evening."²

Harris, confident in her own abilities, refused to let others put her down -- or out. She literally opened doors that no woman had before. In the 1960s when women were forbidden except at mealtimes to walk in the front door of

¹ Interview with Fran Harris by Carole Eberly, May 23 1993, Westland, Michigan.

² Ritchie interview, p. 54.

the Detroit Club, Harris drew an assignment to cover a news conference held by Stan Kresge, son of the founder of the five-and-ten-cent stores. When she discovered the side door -- the women's entrance -- locked, she walked in the front door. One of the janitors tried to stop her, but she kept on going. A man in the lobby asked what she was doing and she said she was going upstairs to see Mr. Kresge because he invited her to a news conference. "No, you can't use those stairs," Harris recalled the man saying. "You shouldn't even be here." The man ushered her down the stairs, out the front door and around the corner to the women's entrance where he unlocked the door and escorted her up in the women's elevator. He took her into the news conference room, keeping his eye on her. The man was stunned when Kresge saw her because the business magnate greeted her with, " 'Fran, hello! I'm so glad you're here.' And the little man just vanished."³

Another forbidden front door she walked through belonged to the Detroit Athletic Club, also closed to women except at mealtimes. A member of the Metropolitan Young Men's Christian Association board of directors, Harris was the only woman on a committee that scheduled a breakfast meeting at the club. The side door was locked so she walked to the front where she strolled in with

³ Eberly interview.

the vice president of the Young Men's Christian Association and the board president. "We walked past all the men reading their papers. One of them looked up and he dropped his paper. We got in the elevator and went up. That was that. The walls did not tremble."⁴

Harris phlegmatically refused to get irritated about such rules or become a crusader. "I thought to myself, 'What's the point? They're going to have to come around sooner or later.' I wasn't about to fight a one-woman war at that time. I had youngsters to bring up. I had a husband to keep happy. I was too busy with other things."⁵

Despite her hard work and ability, Harris still experienced discrimination in pay and work assignments. All through her career she was aware of her lower salary compared to her male colleagues. She paid union dues beginning in the late 1950s, but even that didn't help at one point. "The newscasters union forgot to put my name on the list for salary raises. I was working in the newsroom, but they didn't think of me as a newscaster even though I was doing news."⁶

⁴ Eberly interview.

⁵ Ritchie interview, p. 54.

⁶ Eberly interview.

Her top salary, even when she was promoted to management level, was \$15,000 a year. She knew that was "about half of what the rest of the people were getting."⁷ She admitted that the situation bothered her somewhat, but she didn't let it affect her work or life. "My husband was working. I was having a ball. I probably should have been more circumspect about that but I wasn't."⁸ Harris acknowledged, however, that the large salaries some women in the media now make "just churns me up. I think why, why was I so early?"⁹

She never had a contract at WWJ. She obtained raises by approaching the general manager, suggesting he give her a little more money. "And he would say, 'Hell, no!' And then the next thing I'd know, in a future paycheck I'd have more money."¹⁰

Although Harris shuffled from job to job in broadcasting in the 1930s and 1940s, she maintained one large advantage over her sisters in the print media: she worked in a fledging industry trying to discover its place in the world of communication. As late as the 1950s, women in journalism schools and departments were advised to head for the women's pages in print journalism

⁷ Eberly interview.

⁸ Eberly interview.

⁹ Ritchie interview, p. 28.

¹⁰ Ritchie interview, p. 95.

rather than "butt their heads against a stone wall of male-dominated city desks."¹¹

Yes, Harris served her time as Julia Hayes and Nancy Dixon. But she broke out of radio's "women pages" during the war and never looked back. She possessed the energy, independence and flexibility to ride with the changes in radio, to view each twist in the road as an opportunity to try out new concepts. Her bright ideas were encouraged at WWJ. While restricted by such stereotypes as the one which promoted male voices for their "authoritative quality," she worked around the obstacles by dreaming up ideas that allowed her to track speeders at one hundred miles per hour or put together a Peabody Award-winning program on sex offenders.

Some of her ideas were so good that she found them stolen at news conferences. She said she routinely asked questions that were passed over only to be picked up later by male colleagues who received answers.¹² Being ignored and having ideas stolen, she discovered, came with the territory of being a woman broadcaster.

¹¹ Maurine Beasley, "Women in Journalism Education: The Formative Period, 1908-1930," Journalism History 13:1 (Spring, 1986), p. 16.

¹² Eberly interview.

"I've never tried to dwell on the discrimination I experienced because what's the point? It happened in those days," Harris told a Detroit Free Press reporter in 1984.

She told a story which summed up her philosophy of survival in the male-dominated radio business. It came in the form of advice early in her career from a friend at Young and Rubicam.

"Did I ever tell you about the traveling man in Europe?" And I said "No." He said, "Well, he had his great case full of a great many things and at each border in Europe he would have to unload and show everything, pack it back up again, cross the short border and do the same thing all over again. And he did that until he was tired to death. He finally came to a very small principality...and he said to himself, "I won't do it, I'm not going to do that, I'll drive around the damn principality." And he said, "You've got to remember to drive around the principalities." So, I've kind off hung onto that one, too.¹³

She considered herself fortunate to have a supportive boss in Harry Bannister. She named him as her mentor and chief navigator around broadcasting's land-mines throughout the decades. "Many women were shown the door after the war ended," she said. "I was lucky to have a boss who

¹³ Ritchie interview, p. 133.

wanted to keep me on, who supported me. Of course, he didn't have to train another person with me on the job. But I still consider myself lucky."¹⁴

And, of course, her parents' political connections and childcare support cannot be overlooked in her success. The family operated much like a corporation with Harris being groomed to carry the Alvord gene-pool on to public prominence. The family, who "spoiled her rotten,"¹⁵ expected something for their efforts and used all their political associations to ensure their daughter would fulfill their ambitions. Whenever Harris ran into a substantial roadblock, her mother or father appeared most of the time to offer assistance. During her school years, young Fran's mother signed the teachers' paychecks, all but assuring her daughter would receive good grades. When Harris was out of work, her mother found her employment as a secretary even though Harris lacked the necessary shorthand skills. Her parents, active in the community, steered her back into broadcasting -- and the limelight -- through their connections with the chamber of commerce. Harris' difficulties with Bar Associations in producing "Traffic Court" were taken care of through her parents' friendship with a justice of the Michigan Supreme Court.

¹⁴ Eberly interview.

¹⁵ Eberly interview.

And Harris was relieved of the routine childcare burdens that many other women faced. She admitted that her career would have been impossible if not for her parents' intense involvement in raising her three children. They walked the children to school, were on hand for after school activities, and saw to it that everyday needs for clothing and meals were provided. Harris was allowed to focus on her job.

Nonetheless, Harris, in the end, was responsible for her actions in the world of broadcasting and savvy enough to use her family support system and innate sense of diplomacy to get what she wanted. She drove around the principalities to establish her name in Detroit radio and later in television. She used her position in management to implement changes that would help other women in the media and her community at large. Her awards covered all four walls of her home-based office. One, from the City of Detroit's Common Council, commemorated Fran Harris Day on January 22, 1957. In the resolution she was cited as the first woman to appear on television in Michigan and for her work in highlighting various city departments, most notably those connected with parks and recreation. In 1959 she was given a Distinguished Alumni Award from Grinnell College. In 1980 she received a Doctor of Humane Letters from Ferris State University. In 1986 she became the first woman inducted into the Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame. In 1987 she received a Governor's

Award from the National Academy of TV Arts and Sciences (a Michigan Emmy) for her body of work. The following year she was inducted into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame. In 1991 the American Women in Radio and TV gave her an Outstanding Woman of Lifetime Achievement Award.

Harris retired from broadcasting in 1974 but continued her community activities, serving on such boards as the Camp Fire Girls, Inc., the Children's Center of Metropolitan Detroit and the Visiting Nurse Association. In 1977, she wrote Focus Michigan Women, 1701-1977, brief biographies of notable Michigan women.¹⁶ In 1982, following the death of her husband, she began a new career as president and CEO of the I.C. Harris & Company, Hugh's custom house brokerage business. She retired as chairman of the board in 1985.

And yet, with all her awards and achievements, Harris was just plain mom at home. Like many other women of her times, family was an important part of her life. At one time, she was offered a job at the National Broadcasting Company network in New York City but turned it down. She thought: "What's going to happen to the kids and what's going to happen to my husband with his business. And I thought, it isn't worth it, forget it. I'm happy where I am." She

¹⁶ Fran Harris, Focus: Michigan Women, 1701-1977 (Lansing, Michigan: Michigan Coordinating Committee of the National Commission on the Observance of Women's Year, 1977).

said it was more important to bring up her children with a sense of safety and security than it was "for [her] to get a little extra glory."¹⁷ She never discussed her decision with her husband.

In an interview with the Detroit Free Press in 1958 Harris said that when "you're working, you make even more of an effort to be with your family. We plan dinners together. Sunday is always our day. The whole family seems happier when I'm working."¹⁸ While they may have planned dinners together, however, her children recall that seldom were the plans carried out. It was an event for Harris, her husband and all the children to eat together in the evenings. One of the parents, or both, were usually missing. Instead, Harris' parents served as surrogates. And Sundays together was a myth, observed Harris' daughter Patricia Metz. "Our father were seldom around," she said. "He was always working or doing something."¹⁹ But Harris may have been correct that the whole family was happier when she was working. It was apparent early in her career when she "almost lost her mind" by staying home that she needed the stimulation and challenge that a life outside her home provided. That Harris'

¹⁷ Ritchie interview, p. 134.

¹⁸ "Fran Harris Juggles Life With Three Kids, Microphone," Detroit Free Press, 14 December 1958, TV-11.

¹⁹ Interview with Patricia Metz, 29 June 1994, Novi, Michigan.

parents actively worked on her behalf to promote her goals provided her access to important people support in her maternal role.

If she felt stress juggling her roles as working wife and mother, she was too busy elsewhere to recognize it. "It just didn't occur to me," she said. "But I did have the support of my family, I had the support of my husband, and my kids were turning out alright."²⁰

Harris' work was just part of life to her children, although they perceived their home life as uncommon. Harris' three children -- Patricia, Hugh Jr. (known as Bill), and Robert -- remember their family as not being the "typical" American family. There were the long hours Fran put in at WWJ radio and TV. Bill Harris recalled it was not just forty hours a week but more like eighty. "Her career was very demanding. She worked every day, made a lot of community appearances and gave a lot of speeches," he said.²¹ In addition, their father worked six to seven days a week at his export business, said Robert Harris. Often he was only home for dinner on Sunday afternoons or an occasional evening.²²

²⁰ Interview with Fran Harris, 20 October 1993, Westland, Michigan.

²¹ Interview with Hugh W. Harris, Jr., 28 July 1994, Jackson, Michigan.

²² Interview with Robert A. Harris, 20 July 1994, Lombard, Illinois.

Her children, especially the two older ones, recall being brought up by Fran Harris' parents. "I remember spending hours during summer vacations sitting around on the back porch playing cards with my grandmother," said Metz. "Every night I'd play cribbage with my grandfather. Three games every night for years." She said it was her grandfather who walked her down the block to school and met her at the corner when she came home. It was her grandmother who did the cooking, which was probably a good thing because Fran Harris "was a terrible cook."²³ Metz said the couple acted as "more than" surrogate parents until 1957, when her grandfather died.

Although Harris was busy with her career, Metz said she was always available by phone and "there was never any problem about me calling her."²⁴ Bill Harris said he could call his mother at work, but he tried not to do that.²⁵

When Harris was home, she was just a mom, said Robert Harris. "I remember her ironing in the basement. I remember her planting her garden." She kept her home life strictly separate from her work life.²⁶

²³ Patricia Metz interview.

²⁴ Patricia Metz interview.

²⁵ Hugh W. Harris, Jr. interview.

²⁶ Robert A. Harris interview.

Later in Harris' career when television consumed much of her time, she recalled Bill Harris bragging about his mother being on television to a neighbor girl. The girl didn't believe him and asked to see his mother. "So he brought her home. Unfortunately it was Saturday when I did the family washing and ironing. I was in the midst of doing the wash, which was getting stuck in the machine. And this girl looked at me and said, 'Hey, that's the maid. I want to see your mother.'"²⁷

Bill Harris said that she so jealously guarded her home life that "you had to pry information out of her. As a teenager it got to be kind of a game. I would watch these stars on TV and at the movies and I would ask: 'Did you ever meet Gertrude Lawrence?' and she'd say, 'Oh, yeah.' 'What were they like?' 'Oh, nice enough.' And then she would ask about something that happened at school that day. I think it was because she felt her job as a mother was real important and she didn't want to have that overshadow her home life. She didn't want to come home and sit there telling us endlessly all these glamorous and exciting things she did."

Robert Harris said most of her speaking engagements were extemporaneous about the people she interviewed and met. "She could just do

²⁷ Eberly interview.

that off the top of her head. So she was very interesting to listen to. [But] she didn't bring her work home."²⁸

None of the children thought it unusual that their mother was working or that she held a high-profile position. Metz said nobody made a big issue of it around the house, partly because her grandmother also had worked outside the home. The children simply were used to women holding jobs. "I just never thought about it," she said.²⁹ Harris was working long before Robert Harris was born, so he never thought it odd that she held a job.³⁰

Harris' children rarely heard her on the radio. Metz remembers hearing her only twice, when she was home from school ill.³¹ Bill Harris had only vague recollections of hearing her. "Once you've [heard her] a few times, it's old hat," he said.³² Robert Harris said that later in Fran Harris' career when she was on television, his schoolmates would get her mixed up with Fran Allison from "Kukla, Fran and Ollie."³³

²⁸ Robert A. Harris interview.

²⁹ Patricia Metz interview.

³⁰ Robert A. Harris interview.

³¹ Patricia Metz interview.

³² Hugh W. Harris, Jr. interview.

³³ Robert A. Harris interview.

Harris was described by her son as "a smart and extremely brilliant woman. [She had] a very strong personality in many ways. [She was] a very tough woman." Harris and her husband imbued a vigorous sense of work ethic and moral responsibilities into their children, Bill Harris emphasized.³⁴ Metz echoed this, saying the children were expected to adhere to strict codes about work and morals. "You just didn't do some things. You didn't lie, you didn't run from responsibility."³⁵ Robert Harris added that his mother held high expectations for her children. "There was the assumption you would do the right things." He said she succeeded in teaching her children solid feelings of right and wrong, knowing what the rules were.³⁶

Recalled as both independent and distant by her children, Harris expected independence in her children. Robert Harris said she was "impatient with people who sort of hover about and wring their hands and say, 'Oh dear, oh dear.'" He remembered her saying she always wanted her children to grow up to lead good lives of their own. "It's the old saying of giving your kids roots and giving your

³⁴ Hugh W. Harris interview.

³⁵ Patricia Metz interview.

³⁶ Robert A. Harris interview.

kids wings. She is an 'I can do it' kind of person -- not pushy or aggressive. But she expected people to stand up on their own and do the right things."³⁷

Being the offspring of a local media celebrity can have benefits. One was the free tickets to almost every Detroit Red Wings home game, thanks to Harris' friendship with Bud Lynch, the hockey broadcaster. "She would get passes to everything in town," said Metz. "So I could always get movie tickets. And I went to the opera. I did a lot of theater kind of stuff that nobody else got to do."³⁸

All the children agreed that their father was distant and hard, if not impossible, to communicate with. "He was very handsome, very bright, tall," said Metz. "And he was very difficult to get along with. He had an opinion and that was it. He was right. He was very demanding of her (Fran Harris) and dependent on her."³⁹ Robert Harris described him as Victorian, "not a warm, demonstrative guy."

³⁷ Robert A. Harris interview.

³⁸ Patricia Metz interview.

³⁹ Patricia Metz interview.

Together, Robert Harris said, they presented a unified front. They believed parents had to stand together. "They had shared values," he said. "They saw things very much the same as far as rearing children."⁴⁰

Harris summed up her theory of raising children with, "You don't hang on."⁴¹ Whether in her career or her home life, she was not a coddler. She held high expectations for herself and her children. She saw her mother and father as independent people, sought this independence for herself, then passed it along to her children.

Harris' independence contributed to her view of women's place in American society. It was an uncomplicated view that there were two types of women. One wanted to stay home and tend the fires; the other wanted to get out into the world. She belonged to the latter group.⁴²

At the same time, Harris bridged the gap between home and the world with the emphasis she placed on children's educational, entertainment and safety shows. She looked to her children for inspiration in conjuring up ideas. When she noticed her children were afraid of policemen because of their uniforms, Harris instituted a program to introduce officers as friends to school children.

⁴⁰ Robert A. Harris interview.

⁴¹ Eberly interview.

⁴² Eberly interview.

When her children began riding bicycles, she dreamed up a show promoting bike safety. She also carried these interests into her community activities by membership on such boards as the Children's Museum Friends and the Children's Center of Metropolitan Detroit.

That Harris happened to be on the scene when radio was in its growth stage was luck. That she had a supportive employer was good fortune. That she was born into an influential and supportive family was also luck. That she took advantage of and created opportunities within broadcasting took ability, intelligence, flexibility, determination, independence and professionalism. To paraphrase Marion Marzolf, Harris was often the first woman to handle a specific job and was often alone in a field dominated by men.⁴³ She took a new medium called radio and claimed her place in it.

"Fran was really something," said Stan Kapetansky, a co-worker from 1951 on. "Whatever she tackled, she did well. She was delightful, capable. She just worked hard. She was a great person."⁴⁴

Sonny Elliot, who began working with Harris in 1947, said she was such a hard worker that she made her job look easy. "Because she was so competent,

⁴³ Marzolf, Up From the Footnote, p. vii.

⁴⁴ Interview with Seymour Kapetansky, 15 October, 1993, Southfield, Michigan.

I had a great deal of respect for her." Harris freely recognized and applauded the accomplishments of others. She recommended Elliot for awards and honors without his knowledge. Elliot declared that the media business needed more people like Harris because "it really needs honesty and sincerity more than any other business I know. This is a business that needs someone like Fran. And it's too bad she's not in charge somewhere, somehow."⁴⁵

Harris is no longer in charge somewhere, somehow, but she did make an impact as a pioneer. Her fellow workers agreed that she did her job well, with enthusiasm and creativity. In a 1973 interview with the Racine Journal Times, Fran summed up her career attitude with advice to members of the National Federation of Press Women:

If you are the first woman in a new job, do it better than anyone has done it before. Know your profession, the basic skills, and practice to the best of your ability with accuracy and honesty. Do it whether you feel like it or not. Health is a blessing and ties in with your attitude toward your job. You should have pride, serenity, love for what you are doing, or get out of it.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Interview with Sonny Elliot, 30 June, 1994, Southfield, Michigan.

⁴⁶ "Femininely Friendly," Racine Journal Times, 7 November, 1973.

She once wrote that someday the urge would grow irresistible to write a book about remarkable women "who have acquired spotlight value -- acquired it by hard work and perseverance." She believed successful women have three things in common: "a strong feeling for the adventure of each day, a masculine point of view in accepting and bridging losses, and a deep sense of humanity."⁴⁷

In addition, she said outstanding women share one other trait. Each is convinced that life is worth the effort.

Each one knows that without a sense of fairness to business associates, without thoughtfulness for those about them and, above all, without a blessed sense of humor, she'll never stay at the top. And it's staying at the top that matters, not just the climb up.

Each one of these gracious people knows, too, that it is still a man's world, and whenever a woman does make a success of herself, it's because she has worked twice as hard as a man would have to under equal circumstances. That's why the really acknowledged leaders in the women's world are so genuine.⁴⁸

Harris didn't know what to expect from the "job" she held other than the hope it held to become part of a larger world. As a trailblazer in a new medium, she followed in no one's footsteps. No precedents existed. The

⁴⁷ Fran Harris, "Women in the Spotlight," Detroit Women's City Club Magazine, December 1949, p. 15.

⁴⁸ Fran Harris, "Women in the Spotlight," Detroit Women's City Club Magazine, p. 23.

standards she set were her own. She did not view her role as one of a pioneer because she was too close to the frontier. To her, she was simply doing a job. In doing so, Harris proved that women in broadcasting could be relied upon to deliver the news, produce programs and come up with interesting ideas. To suggest that Harris had a direct impact on the rapid increase of women in broadcasting in the years that followed her tenure is an overstatement. And yet as among one of the first women in the industry, she provided at least some road map for others to follow. She opened the door for other women by performing professionally and competently under the watchful eyes of management.

The numbers of women at 330 commercial radio stations where newswomen were on the air more than tripled at the end of Harris' career, from 15 percent in 1972 to 49 percent in 1976. The number of women radio news directors also climbed during that period from 4 per cent to 8 percent.⁴⁹ It is true that affirmative action created many opportunities for women in the media. But the fact remains that some women had to be among the first, to set the pace. Harris was one of them.

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⁴⁹ Vernon Stone, "More Women Reporting News on the Air," RTNDA Communicator (February, 1977) pp. 7-10.

CHAPTER IX

Conclusion

Harris in Perspective

Fran Harris could be criticized today for refusing to fight head-on the gender discrimination she experienced. But the key word is today. Harris must be studied in the societal and cultural context of her times. Mary Beth Norton writes that one of the primary goals of women historians is to present American women of the past as they saw themselves. We must "comprehend and analyze them on their own terms rather than accept the assessments of their male peers or apply more recent feminist standards of judgment."¹

When examined in context, Harris emerges as a survivor, not a victim. In this light, Harris' comment about her lack of fighting for inequities she faced working in a male-dominated business -- "What's the point?" -- takes on new meaning. Rather than being a defeatist statement, it was a realistic one. For Harris to demand pay equity along the way may have worked, but it also could have gotten her fired. It was a gamble she was not willing to take. Instead, she periodically suggested that a pay increase may be in order. The rest of the time,

¹ Mary Beth Norton, "Is Clio a Feminist? The New History," The New York Times, April 13, 198, Section F, p. 2.

she looked the other way. In addition, as journalism historian Marion Marzolf documents pay inequity was a given in media jobs during her working years.² It simply did not occur to Harris to ask for what men were receiving.

More importantly, many women, while aware they were being discriminated against, accepted that discrimination as normal treatment. As journalist Kay Mills points out, it just did not occur to many women in the media to question why their pay was lower than that of their male colleagues, why they did not get the plum assignments, or why they were stuck on the women's pages. Gender discrimination in the work place was so embedded in American culture during Harris' working years that it was acceptable behavior. Not until years later could one woman journalist pin a name on the acts of discrimination she experienced.³

Harris was offended when her boss pointed to her and said, "What do you think she is?" as an answer to where women in management were hiding at WWJ. Further, as their token woman in management, she was not allowed to attend decision-making meetings. If she had demanded to attend the meetings, would it have made a difference in the discrimination she felt?

² Marion Marzolf, Up From The Footnote.

³ Kay Mills, A Place In the News: From the Women's Pages to the Front Page (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990 p. 4.

Probably not. Her voice most likely would have been ignored and her ideas stolen by someone else. She already experienced that at news conferences. And, once again, Harris was brought up in a time when women did not directly confront management. When told what to do, she retreated. Harris, like so many other women working in the media and elsewhere, was socialized to not openly challenge men.

The interesting part of Harris' story is that she managed to flourish in the face of subtle and blatant discrimination -- before there was even a word for it. She was skillful in advancing her career and stature outside the office, and diplomatic in letting things slide inside her work place. She knew when to boldly walk through the front door of the Detroit Athletic Club and when to just silently slip the "woman's paycheck" in her purse.

While Harris had a strong female role model in her mother, she did not have the benefit of a Betty Friedan or Gloria Steinem pointing out the injustices done to her or possible remedies. Besides, it was not illegal to pay her less than men or to leave her out of management meetings. It was not equitable, but it was not against the law.

True, she could have left WWJ at any time. But then what? It's highly unlikely she would have found another job in broadcasting where she did not suffer the same discrimination. She would have been trading her known

problems for unknown ones. In addition, Harris easily could have become branded a trouble-maker by demanding her "rights." The media business, for all its vastness, can be small-town when it comes to gossip. Reputations, deserved or not, follow. Trouble-makers were not, and are not, welcome in the media. Ask many of the women involved in the sexual discrimination suits against the media during the 1970s.⁴

Harris fit in by accommodating. It was her method of coping. She loved her job and was willing, at times, to look the other way at what contemporary feminists would consider despicable treatment. She was clever enough to pounce on opportunities that came along. She talked her way into the Julia Hayes job when her youth was against her. She pushed to get into newscasting during World War II. She generated new ideas for programming after the war to keep her job. But she was not a one-woman battalion when it came to fighting sex discrimination. That was not her style. In the context of her times

⁴ Many women feared getting involved in the 1978 suit against the Associated Press, with good reason. One woman was immediately "made invisible" by being put on the overnight. Male sympathizers also were not immune to corporate pressure. Ken Freed, who championed the women's cause, blamed the start of career problems at the AP – and his resulting exit – on his activism. He was told by management getting involved in the suit was the worst thing he had ever done to the AP. All women named in the suit left the AP. Mary Lou Butcher and three other women sued the Detroit News in 1976 for discrimination. Although the paper agreed in 1983 to pay \$330,000 to about ninety employees, Butcher left for a job in public relations in 1977, knowing her own advancement at the News had been effectively blocked. (Kay Mills, A Place In the News: From the Women's Page to the Front Page.)

she did what was necessary to stay in the radio business. She did what many other ambitious working women had been doing for centuries -- she kept her mouth shut when cultural norms deemed it appropriate.

Zillah Eisenstein writes that the structuring of society through the sexual division [of labor] limits the activities, work, desires, and aspirations of women.⁵ In a broad sense this was true of Harris. Underpinning her activities and aspirations was the knowledge that she still was expected to perform certain roles and, at times, accept unequal treatment. She became Nancy Dixon at a time when women's roles revolved around the home. She acted out her role as a token in management. She accepted less pay than men for her work. And yet, Harris drove around the principalities, slipping around the rules, bending them when possible to suit her needs. She fought her way out of the secretarial pool into a male-dominated profession. She created her own shows, including the popular "Traffic Court." She used her parents' political connections to further her career goals. She accepted their willingness to act as surrogate parents to her children. When it suited her needs and when possible, Harris circumvented prescribed patriarchal policies to achieve her goals.

⁵ Zillah Eisenstein, Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), p. 18.

In many respects, Harris was selfish and single-minded about her career. As a woman in her times, these were negative qualities. That a man could be selfish and single-minded about his career without risking cultural sanctions highlights the sharp differences in gender roles. She sought to temper her public image through such things as emphasizing in the Detroit News interview that Sundays were a family day -- a statement her children questioned. And although she separated her professional life from her family life, it was apparent to her children that their mother possessed a burning need to showcase her skills outside the home if she was to function inside of it.

She achieved her professional goals without becoming a queen bee in her male-dominated industry. As Mary Daly puts it, token women are trained to kill off feminists in patriarchal professions.⁶ They are useful tools of the patriarchs for a divide and conquer strategy. Daly maintains that tokenism saps women by giving the illusion of partial success while at the same time making success appear to be out of reach. But Harris was not fooled by a title on her door. She turned what could have been a frustrating experience into the best option at hand. Rather than sit and whine about closed-door management meetings, she took full advantage of the station's travel funds to boost her own reputation and

⁶ Mary Daly, Gyn Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), p. 8.

to promote the welfare of other women. She cleverly used management's money to beat the patriarchs at their own game.

In the broadcasting industry, Harris could not escape the patriarchal bind that man was the hidden referent in language and culture. At a deep level, changes in language are threatening because they signal widespread changes in social mores.⁷ Similarly, women's voices -- traditionally held worthy if silent -- could be labeled as threatening. Women broadcasting news during World War II, for instance, signaled a cultural change. If they remained as announcers after the war, where socially-accepted roles had changed, they could be considered a threat to the status quo, to the male voice of authority.

But for Harris, the tie between language and culture were not just theoretical spinnings. She lived them daily. The male referent in language was so close that beliefs about women's lack of authority in their voices directly impeded her progression into newscasting. On the other hand, she also used the language bias to her advantage. Many of her program ideas, geared toward women's and children's issues, would not have worked with a male announcer. Her laconic interviewing style allowed her guests to reveal themselves.

⁷ Casey Miller and Kate Swift, The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1980), p. 3.

The culture at the station led Harris to advise women to adopt a masculine point of view to survive. She knew, as Dale Spender points out, that "women can only aspire to be as good as a man, there is no point in trying to be as good as a woman."⁸ But that is not to say Harris lost sight of women's concerns. She celebrated women's culture by addressing their special needs both through her radio programs and her professional and community work.

It is not easy to pigeon-hole Fran Harris. Some feminists could argue she was a sell-out, a tool of the patriarchy who bought into the patriarchal line, particularly in management. Some could argue she was wishy-washy because she didn't fight harder for pay equity. Some traditionalists could argue she was selfish because she didn't stay home raising her children, getting dinner on the table. But she didn't live her life for anyone's ideology but her own.

Harris was a victim of patriarchy in the sense that all women are. To portray her solely as a victim is to lose sight of her story. As Gerda Lerner writes: "The true history of women is the history of their ongoing functioning in that male-defined world on their own terms."⁹ She chose her own way within the parameters of her culturally-defined roles. She picked from the implements

⁸ Dale Spender, "Defining Reality: A Powerful Tool," Language and Power (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1984), p. 201.

⁹ Gerda Lerner, The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 148.

she carried in her tool kit to build her own house. If some were missing, she improvised. She eagerly accepted her parents' political and childcare support. She used the management system, which left her out as a decision-maker, as a means to her ends. She chose her way in life. She loved her job, "had a ball,"¹⁰ became a mover and shaker. She was convinced life was worth the effort.

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¹⁰ Eberly interview.

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

Awards

American Women in Radio/TV, Outstanding Woman of Lifetime Achievement, 1991.

Michigan Women's Hall of Fame, 1988.

Governor's Award from the National Academy of TV Arts and Sciences, Michigan (Emmy), 1987.

Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame (first woman), 1986.

National Association of Business Women, commendation for work and continuing support, 1985.

Michigan Association of Women Business Owners, award for community service, 1982.

Women's Economic Club of Detroit, commendation for service, 1982.

Doctor Humane Letters, Ferris State University, 1980.

National Federation of Press Women, Honorary Member, 1973.

Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, commendation for service, 1973.

Women's Advertising Club of Detroit, Detroit Advertising Woman of the Year, 1958, 1973.

Homemakers Service of Metropolitan Detroit, commendation as president of the board, 1967-69.

Michigan Women's Commission, certificate of appreciation, 1967.

Broadcast Pioneers, certificate of membership and recognition for work in broadcasting since 1931, 1967.

Advertising Federation of America, citation for service, 1967. (First woman AFA vice-president, 1966-68.)

Grinnell College Distinguished Alumni, 1959.

Common Council, City of Detroit, Fran Harris Day, Jan. 22, 1957.

Spirit of Detroit Award, 1957.

City of Detroit, in recognition of work at WWJ and public service, 1953.

Women in Communication, Inc. (Theta Sigma Phi), National Headliner Award for distinguished service in the field of journalism, 1952.

Women in Communication, Inc. (Theta Sigma Phi), Michigan's outstanding woman in journalism, 1951.

Alfred Sloan Safety Award, for "Traffic Court," TV's live re-enactments of traffic violation cases, 1950.

George Foster Peabody Award, for "Protect Your Child," a series on sex deviates, 1949.

Automobile Club of Michigan, award for outstanding child radio safety program, 1946.

Professional and Community Service

Children's Center of Metropolitan Detroit, board 1985.

Better Business Bureau, Southeastern Michigan, arbitrator, 1983.

Women's Economic Club, charter member, 1963, board 1978-92, president 1981-82.

Friend of Children's Museum, president, 1981-82.

Women in Communication, Inc., Detroit chapter president, 1959-60; national board, 1968-74; national vice president, 1969-71; national president, 1971-73.

Michigan Association of Governing Boards, 1976-78, vice president, president.

Ferris State University, board of control, 1968-78.

State Coordinating Committee, International Women's Year: 1976-77; authored Focus: Michigan Women 1701-1977.

Camp Fire, Inc., national board and executive committee, 1969-70; Detroit Council president, 1976-78.

Metropolitan Detroit Visiting Nurse Association, 1964; president, 1974-75.

Third World Conference of Women Journalists and Writers, U.S. delegate, 1973.

Michigan Status of Women Commission, 1962-70.

Homemaker Service of Metropolitan Detroit, Inc., co-founder, 1964; board, 1964-71, president, 1968-70.

Conference of the Americas, Detroit chair, 1968.

American Federation of Advertising, Detroit president, 1960-61; state governor (first woman) 1965; national executive board and chair of women's council, 1965-68; national vice president (first woman) 1966-68.

United Community Services, women's committee 1961-66, board, 1964-68.

Asian-American Conference of Broadcast Women, U.S. delegate, 1966.

Metropolitan YWCA, board member, publicity committee member

Zonta Club

Wayne County Commission on Aging

Citations

American War Amputees

National Conference of Christians and Jews

Metropolitan Detroit United Foundation

Red Feather

National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis

Univeristy of Michigan Chapter, Theta Sigma Phi

Michigan State University, Theta Sigma Phi

Lions Club Council of Greater Detroit

Kiwanis Clubs of Greater Detroit

Boy Scouts, Detroit Area Council

Leader Dog League

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

Fran Harris interview with Adolfe Menjou, 1949

Harris: Last year Adolfe Menjou came to town for an autographing party for his book, "It Took Nine Tailors." We missed an interview with him and it was a great book. This time we did not miss. So we'd all like to have you meet the man behind the book, Menjou. Of course, the obvious thing to ask is how did you happen to write the book?

Menjou: Well, I was approached by a writer friend of mine who thought it would be a good idea. And I thought it was a pretty good way to make an honest dollar. So we sat down and wrote it.

Harris: And why not?

Menjou: It was 1913 when I first started pictures, 36 years ago. And I've made some 250-odd pictures since then.

Harris: Uh, huh.

Menjou: And it's going very well. I'm very happy. I sold about fifty copies at noon today.

Harris: Oh, as a matter of fact. Good!

Menjou: Wonderful.

Harris: We would tell you it's a very good book. It's entertaining like mad. You must have had a very enjoyable time not only writing it but remembering all the wild things that have happened to you.

Menjou: Well, I keep notes on everything.

Harris: Uh, huh.

Menjou: I'm one of those thrifty characters. I save rubber bands and pens and paper clips and everything.

Harris: (Laughs) Oh, terrific. Un, I don't remember in the book if you said anything about the Tabor picture?

Menjou: Well, of course, I happen to have been awfully, awfully lucky. And I happen to be in some very good pictures. "Woman of Paris," I think, or "A Woman of Paris" was

the first. That was my favorite silent picture. Now, of course, in the talkies we have "The Front Page," "Little Miss Marker," "Stage Door" -- a lot of good pictures.

Harris: Uh, huh.

Menjou: And the last one, of course, was "Dancing in the Dark."

Harris: Yes, how about that?

Menjou: Twentieth Century Fox's picture. I play the manager of the studio...Bill Powell, Betsy Drake and Mark Stevens. And in technicolor. It dropped twenty years from my age.

Harris: Oh, brother. That is beautiful. We started out talking about books though, and tailors. How about men's wear and clothing?

Menjou: Well, people don't realize how important good conservative dressing is in their daily lives. Those people that face the public should be more careful in their dressing. Because that and proper speech are the two most important things that a man can have facing the public. That is a salesman, I don't care who he is. And I only have a few hints. Wear suspenders. And keep your shoes shined and show some white cuffs.

Harris: (Laughs) Oh?

Menjou: Show at least an inch of cuff. Of your shirt. Otherwise why spend money on a shirt and only show the collar? That would be stupid.

Harris: Well, that's a very good choice. How about the trends though in men's wear?

Menjou: Well, I don't notice any trends. They're starting now to try to put peacock feather colors on men and I don't think they'll be very successful with it.

Harris: Why not?

Menjou: The American man is too conservative for it. He'll wear a loud shirt for sporting and out-of-doors, but when he's in business he is most conservative. That is, intelligent men are.

Harris: Uh, huh.

Menjou: A tailor in New York some twenty-odd years ago started to try to introduce colors such as maroon dinner jackets and lavender full dress. And he got nowhere.

Harris: Well, you know you always associate that sort of thing with Hollywood instead of New York.

Menjou: You see, there goes Hollywood again, maligning Hollywood.

Harris: On, not at all.

Menjou: It's just as normal and sane a community as Detroit.

Harris: Now, come prove that one.

Menjou: Well, I don't have to prove it excepting among the people that I know — that I associate with. And most of them have been married for more than fifteen years. And I see none of the wildness and indecent behavior that I see in other parts of the country. And if you want to hear some horrors, pick up your Jackson, Michigan paper or your Tupelo, Mississippi, and you'd see some horrors, believe me. Hollywood is blamed for many things for which it is not at all responsible.

Harris: Ah, yes.

Menjou: A decent and hard working community. And if you don't work hard you get nowhere. When a man has to get up at six in the morning and a woman at five to go to work, you imagine they haven't got any time for fooling. There are a few wild characters, of course. We've got a lot of race tracks out there, a lot of gambling. It's not a bit different than Detroit. Not one corner.

Harris: Well, that sound very good because after all we've got a whole lot of excitement always in the papers. It's always good copy.

Menjou: Well, you've got four hundred newspapers competing out there writing about Hollywood everyday. And you've got columnists and they're forced to write something, you see.

Harris: Uh, huh.

Menjou: So they write that one man wears the top of his pajamas and the other wears the bottom and he eats spaghetti for breakfast and all that sort of nonsense. But the people seem to love it.

Harris: Uh, huh. And when a book like "It Took Nine Tailors" comes out of Hollywood, everybody seems to read it.

Menjou: Well, not everybody. If a new more million could but it, I'd be very happy.

Harris: Well, we just had to get that plug in. Thank you, very, very much for coming in, Mr. Menjou. And, just for the record, why thirteen letters in your name?

Menjou: I am an incredibly superstitious gentleman. I am full of fetishes. I've got a rabbit's foot and I've got a little pig in my pocket that's made from marble from my mother's home. And I've got a Chinese coin my brother gave me. And I don't have them all with me. They just don't work, that's all.

Harris: Today it worked. Thanks a lot.

Menjou: Thank you, Miss Harris.

APPENDIX C



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