3. THE WOMEN

The heart and soul of this study are these thirteen in-depth interviews with California women political reporters.

Although their number is far fewer than the number of male political reporters over the years at the California state Capitol, still it would have strained the boundaries of a Master's thesis to interview all of the living women who have reported on politics at the Capitol since Mary Ellen Leary of the San Francisco News broke the barrier in 1943.[1] After Leary, there were few women until the late 1960s and early 1970s, so most of those represented here are from that period -- the era when women were breaking into news reporting (real news reporting, not "just" women's-page news) and the era of my own entry into journalism, in 1969. I have attempted here to select a representative sample of women -- those who were among the first of that period, those who are there today, and those who left -- for reasons which bear further examination and study.

They are listed alphabetically, and I have attempted to let them tell their stories with as little interference from me as possible. Their experiences offer exceptional insight into the history -- and future -- of women political reporters in California and elsewhere around the nation. All were generous with their time, and for that I am extremely grateful.

Ann Bancroft[2]

Born 38 years ago in Germany, the daughter of a U.S. Army physician, Ann Bancroft and her two sisters were raised in cities "all over the West, plus Hawaii." When Bancroft was a senior in high school, her father, an orthopedic surgeon, retired from the Army and entered private practice in San Francisco, where Bancroft graduated from Lowell High School. "I worked on the school paper. However, it didn't occur to me at the time that journalism was a career. It was something that was fun doing."

She attended the University of California in Davis for her freshman year in college, thought "vaguely of majoring in sociology and French," and was news editor of the Cal Aggie, the student newspaper. "I worked on the paper and rode my bike home at 2 in the morning." She transferred to UC-Berkeley in her sophomore year and took a basic journalism course from a professor who also taught in the famed UC-Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism.

> He encouraged me to take some graduate seminars, and that really got me started. By my late sophomore year, with his mentorship, I decided on journalism.
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> It still hadn't occurred to me that I could work in this field, and I still wasn't convinced. My mother was a housewife and there were three daughters. We were brought up with the notion that we would finish college, period. There was no real concept that we would do anything, except perhaps have something to fall back on when your husband leaves you.

She graduated from Berkeley with honors in 1974, and

continued to work, as she had her last year in college, as a "copy boy" at the Oakland Tribune. At that time, there were only two or three women in the newsroom who weren't working on fashion or "women's" news.

> I decided to stay in the hope that I could actually get a writing job. I did get a job in the fashion department of the women's pages. They sort of eased me in. I wrote some women's page features. The promising male copy boy got a job in sports, and I got a job on the women's pages. I did it for almost two years.

When the fashion editor became ill and resigned, Bancroft was named acting fashion editor.

> Even though nobody on the paper paid attention to fashion, it was really quite a hefty section, and it was good training, because I had to do everything from writing all the copy to editing, headlines and captions, and directing photography. So, while the subject matter got quite old, and I knew nothing about fashion, I don't regret doing it.

When she finally did transfer to "regular" news, she covered everything there as well -- "from night rewrite to environmental stories, and beat reporting." She left the Tribune in 1979 after five years there, and went to the San Francisco Chronicle as its East Bay Bureau correspondent. For four years, she covered Oakland and the East Bay -- "actually, I was the bureau."

Her husband, Bill Moore, news editor of Gannett's East Bay Today, was offered a job as metropolitan editor of the Sacramento Bee, and Bancroft, pregnant with their first child, asked for a transfer to the Chronicle's Sacramento bureau. Her editor, the late Jerry Burns, "said

I wouldn't want to come back to work after the baby was born." He also said that if she did want to go back to work "not to worry about it, they didn't want to lose me." Then, over the next several months, she talked to the regional editor about covering "more of a regional northern California beat, sort of an extension of the East Bay beat," but based in Sacramento.

The regional arrangement was finalized, Bancroft thought, and the Friday before the Monday in November 1982 when she was to report to work in Sacramento,

> I got a call from my editor saying, gosh, something very embarrassing has happened, the managing editor hand't signed off and when it was presented to him he said they didn't need three people in Sacramento. I guess they were all so sure I wouldn't come back. Suddenly, I didn't have a job.

Bancroft, whose family had moved to Sacramento and bought a house, consulted a lawyer, "who thought I had a good case" against the Chronicle. Her editors, meanwhile, urged her to be patient. "They said they were working on a solution. Their solution was to ask (a male reporter in the Capitol bureau) to come into the city room in San Francisco. They wanted him to move to make room for this 'girl' who knew nothing about politics." Needless to say, the male reporter was less than happy with the prospect. Then, fortuitously, the second reporter in the bureau was offered a job with the Los Angeles Times, leaving a slot open for Bancroft.

"I was intending not to be a Capitol reporter. I wasn't prepared, either by training or interest," she recalls. "But there you are, there is your job, as one person in a two-person Capitol bureau with a man who was prepared to despise you. It was horrendous."

An award-winning reporter, Bancroft knew next to nothing about covering the Capitol.

> The first year was absolute hell. Not only was it a completely new area, but I had to learn the Legislature, which most reporters say takes about a year. It's definitely more than a fulltime job, simply to get myself up to speed -- and in a less than supportive environment.
>
> It is so intensely male-dominated. It's not harassment. I got along with people. It's much more (like) the "old boys" who hang around. Or you're the only woman in a press conference with ten guys cracking jokes with Willie (Assembly Speaker Willie Brown). The guys would go out to lunch with the guys. Tips get passed back and forth. There is a football pool and the baseball pool.
>
> One day I showed up for work and (her male colleague) said it was the opening day of the Giants, and he and (an editor) were going to a Giants game. I said, "Well I guess I'll go to Macy's." Definitely, it's a man's world.

As the mother of a young child, she had to deal with the pressures of work as well as family. Although her male colleague has a daughter about the same age as Bancroft's son, "he would get into the office at 8 or 8:30 and be reading the paper, and I would struggle to get in by 9. He would look at the clock when I came in, not having read the papers because I was feeding my baby."

Increasingly, after two years in the Capitol bureau, she felt torn by her dual role.

> I spent the first year proving myself. The second year, I knew what I was doing and the bad part was behind me. I was doing my part, and they liked what I was doing, but after two years my son was about to turn three. I was getting Migraines. I was just never seeing Matthew (her son). This was not the way I wanted my life to be.

Bancroft was on the campaign trail with a state legislative candidate and his wife when when the conversation turned to families.

> You run out of small talk after a while, and I revealed that I had this small child, proudly showed his picture, and (the wife) said, "Oh, how can you leave him?" We got to their house, and she presented me with this religious tract called "A Mother First." It told about a woman freelancing at home, and the baby fell off the table and hit his head. It was a sign from God.
>
> I was both hurt and furious. That sort of said it to me: You cannot win, and you are trying to do your best, and you still get criticized. I knew the same would never have been said to a male reporter. I'd never run up against sexism, but I did when I became a mom. It was expected that was my job. It was never expected that it was my husband's job.[3]

She asked for, and received, a leave of absence, then eventually quit. "I'd been reporting for 12 years. I'd won prizes. I was so identified with my job and spent so long getting there. I did resent that somehow it had to be a choice."[4] She freelanced for various publications, including California Journal, Sacramento Magazine and the New York Times, and collaborated on a book. She taught journalism at her alma mater, UC-Berkeley, and she worked

parttime for United Press International in its Capitol bureau, which was then headed by one of the few female bureau chiefs at the Capitol, Rebecca LaVally.[5] LaVally, herself the mother of a young child, approved an unusual job-sharing arrangement for Bancroft and Jan Haag, a college journalism teacher who is now the editor of Sacramento Magazine.

Bancroft remains angry about the intransigence of the work world and the unwillingness of many employers to accommodate the needs of families.

> I feel very strongly that this culture separates family from work, because for so long work has been male and women have been family. Why should a woman have to get an education, work for 10 or 15 years, and then face the choice of truly neglecting her child or giving up her work?" [6]

Now divorced, she lives with her son in their Land Park home, where she continues to write for various publications. "It's been a real struggle to keep it together and not work fulltime," she says. "But I'm glad that I've done it." She recently went back to work for her longtime employer, the Chronicle, covering state agencies but writing at home. "I'm guaranteed a salary with flexible hours. It's sort of an interlocking of their needs and my needs. It's what I've been working toward for the past five years -- some regular income, some security, but at home."

Claudia Buck [7]

A 1976 graduate of California State Polytechnic University in San Luis Obispo with a Bachelor's degree in journalism, Claudia Buck, 36, recalls that she had "a pretty clear vision" of her desire to be a journalist early in her life. "I was editor of the yearbook, feature editor of the paper. It was intense, a lot of hours." She remains enthralled with the "craft" of newswriting:

> I didn't start with any sense of crusade or mission. I've always enjoyed writing. I enjoy the creating of a story, and I like the people aspect of the interview. I didn't have a desire to change the world. The craft of writing a story has always appealed to me. It's one of the few professions that isn't static; you're constantly exposed to new people, new events. You meet all kinds of people from all walks of life. I think it's a privilege to do that kind of work and get paid for it.

Her fascination with the technique of journalism has not diminished over the years:

> It's like putting together a puzzle. You have this notebook full of facts and quotes, and you assemble them into some kind of finished piece. There is a real sense of creation in that, obviously in a factual and objective way. There is a real sense of accomplishment, as opposed to some job where you're laboring on some report for weeks on end.

After graduation from college, she worked for a radio station in Santa Barbara, KIST, where her coverage of local

events -- including a major fire -- won several awards. She also covered the local board of supervisors. "I was on the air every half hour on the morning drive and the afternoon, six days a week, for abysmal pay."

After two years, she "craved writing a story longer than three paragraphs," and she rankled at the radio emphasis "not on looks (as in television), but on your voice. There was a lot of emphasis on making your voice sound correct. It was not what I wanted to do professionally."

So she moved back to northern California (she is from Stockton, California) and interviewed with several different newspapers, including the Sacramento Bee. She was hired by the Lodi Sentinel, a small newspaper in an agricultural community between Sacramento and Stockton. The job lasted two months, when she was hired by the Bee to do parttime copy editing for its "California Life" home and garden section. Within a month, she was writing stories, and did a lot of traveling for the section. She wrote a regular energy column, but soon tired of the repetitive nature of the weekly publication: "You can only do so many swimming pool issues. I wanted desperately to get out of there."

Her chance came after four years, in 1982, when she was transferred to the Bee's metro section, starting on general assignment working nights. Then the city hall beat became

available, and she was assigned there, starting as a feature writer, again working nights and Sundays. She covered city government for a year, when a new position was created in the Capitol bureau, for a feature writer -- Buck -- to cover "more of the human side of the Capitol," where editors felt "there was a lack of the personal, featurized aspect." Another woman reporter, Amy Chance, who would later succeed Buck at the Capitol, was hired to fill the vacated city hall beat.

In 1984, Buck took six months' maternity leave to have her first child, and returned to the new parttime position in the Capitol bureau.

> The parttime thing was new, and it was ideal. I think you work harder. I got the biggest bonus in the Capitol bureau and possibly the city room. . .But you're propelled by this guilt. The bureau chief said I was working three times as hard as anybody else. I produced as much in three days as other people did in a week. You don't have the luxury of shooting the breeze and taking long lunches. On the flip side, I was the only one who had to be home at five, the only one with small children. I think that's why I had to work so hard, but I always did feel funny. You feel less professional. We (women) will probably always experience that.

She said she experienced no sexual harassment from legislators, and her work environment within the bureau was supportive, especially from Bureau Chief William Endicott.

> My situation was unique. I was dropped into the Capitol parttime with no previous legislative experience. I didn't have a beat. That was a handicap. It took me a long time to get up to

> speed. I had feature stories that were in and out. I kept telling people I wanted to do more news. There were times when I didn't have enough to do. In time, I started covering the Assembly and press conferences. I needed the grounding in the basics of committees. I felt very naive because I didn't have the background. It's a very clubby world. But I didn't feel harassment.

In 1987, she took another maternity leave to have her second child, and found after the one-year leave that she did not want to go back. A Bee reporter for nine years when she resigned, she agonized over the decision.

> I felt I was not doing either world justice. It was not an easy decision, not made without a great deal of agony. I went back and forth on it for a year, weighing the pros and cons. Any woman who enjoys her career faces that struggle -- which comes first? [8]

She had struggled with the dilemma when she was working parttime after her first child was born.

> There were a lot of days I wondered why I was working, what am I missing, why am I doing this to myself? On the other hand, I loved my job. It's very scary to leave a career -- in some ways it's a home away from home. But juggling two children and two schedules and the needs of two and the time demands -- I just didn't see how I could handle it all. Then there is the guilt, the superwoman myth that's been floating around for all those years, and you ask yourself why you can't cut it. But I decided I only have these years once. There will always be a job out there. It may not be the same job. But I only have these years with my kids once.[9]

She continues to write freelance articles for several publications, including the Bee, and does copywriting for

clients of the graphic design firm owned by her husband, Paul Page. Eventually, she plans to go back fulltime to her journalistic career: "I enjoy writing, and I enjoyed my career, both professionally and socially. You have to have a certain amount of confidence in yourself. Staying home isn't the end of the world."

Amy Chance [10]

Amy Chance, 31, began her journalistic career early: "My mother has newspapers I did when I was in elementary school, around the neighborhood." Raised in San Ramon, Contra Costa County, she graduated from California High School there and worked during high school "typing for the women's page" of the Contra Costa Times.

> I got into it because I could type, and I could edit news releases. I could actually rewrite a sentence from a news release. So that's what I was doing in high school. Then they let me go to a Gerald Ford-for-President rally, not to do a story but to do color pieces on how people dressed, what they looked like.

She attended San Diego State University, where she was news editor of the student newspaper, the Daily Aztec. She also held internships at the Daily Californian in La Mesa and in the San Diego bureau of the Los Angeles Times. While at the Times, chance was asked to fill in for a reporter on maternity leave from the north San Diego County bureau in Oceanside. She stayed on with the bureau after graduation.

"I wrote heavily. I covered everything -- the city council, a county sheriff's deputies' strike, school board races, where you go out and interview all 16 candidates. I started to get a lot of experience with local government."

She was then offered a job with the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, a large daily in Texas, and was assigned to a small bureau in the small town of Mansfield, Texas, then to a larger bureau in Arlington. She continued to develop experience covering local government. She applied to cover county government.

> The Fort Worth paper was incredibly diverse. They had black editors, the city editor was a woman. It was not this white male hierarchy like in California. I was told through the grapevine that I was not "aggressive" enough to cover county government, and the editor doing the hiring was a woman.

Feeling her advancement path in Forth Worth was effectively blocked, she applied to McClatchy Newspapers, publishers of the Sacramento Bee, and was hired by the Bee to cover city hall in 1984, when Claudia Buck went on maternity leave. "The maternity leaves of other women have been incredibly helpful to my career," Chance quips. Her husband, Dean Chance, who was also a reporter in the Arlington bureau of the Forth Worth paper, decided he didn't want to stay in the newspaper business ("we decided we didn't both want to be in the same career"), so he quit to come with his wife to Sacramento, where he now works in the local advertising business.

Chance covered Sacramento city government at a time of unprecedented growth and controversy in the region. Especially controversial were plans to build a major stadium, and promote other development, in the Natomas area of the city -- and she covered it all. Then, in 1986, she was asked to come to the Capitol bureau and began almost immediately to cover Governor George Deukmejian's re-election campaign. Chance, who is a diabetic, was also pregnant with her first child at that time:

"I continued to travel, I had this incredibly rigid program -- eating, injecting, and blood glucose testing. I got a really big purse, with food, injection supplies, and a tape recorder." She was threatened with miscarriage on election night and had to rush home. "I was so mad." She developed toxemia, a life-threatening disorder for pregnant women, and had to quit a month before her due date. Her daughter, Sarah, was delivered early by Caesarean section. Sarah weighed five pounds -- "she was tiny, but she was okay."

As is the case for so many women reporters in the Capitol, having a child changed Chance's perspective and, to a certain extent, her schedule. But she and her husband cope, and Chance recently concluded coverage of the grueling 1990 California gubernatorial campaigns:

> I have an incredibly supportive husband. He does half or more than half. I just got back from eight days on the road, and it's hard for him like it would be hard for me, but it doesn't require

> the major shifts that it does for other families. The separation feelings are very difficult. I remember vividly traveling in the year that I returned to work in 1987. I was in Burbank, and I was driving a rental car. I had this incredible desire to be pregnant again and have her with me. I remember traveling when that little girl fell down the well in Texas. It was on TV in all the airport bars, and I couldn't even watch it. . .The separation stuff has gotten easier as she has gotten older. My husband really copes with it. We talk about how it's really hard.

Her daughter attends a well-known local nursery school, the Busy Bee, in midtown Sacramento, "which is part of the reason I'm so sane. It's a great place, and Sarah is so happy there. If I didn't feel she was happy, that would be hard for me."

When this interview was conducted, just before the November election, Chance was preparing to travel for three solid weeks. She says her colleagues, especially her bureau chief, William Endicott, are entirely supportive:

> They're really sensitive, but I'm also sensitive to the fact that I can't be treated differently because I happen to have a child. So I try to pull my share of the workload, or more. And I know this is the last month of a very tight governor's race. But this is such a great opportunity.

Numerous women covered the governor's race in the 1990 California elections -- in part, many people believe, because a major contender was a woman, Democratic nominee Dianne Feinstein. "You should see it on the campaign," Chance said. "If you only have a Sacramento perspective,

you really don't see how much it has changed."

Among women reporters assigned by major California newspapers to the campaign were Chance for the Bee, Sharon Spivak from the San Diego Tribune, Cathleen Decker from the Los Angeles Times, Susan Yoachum for the San Francisco Chronicle. "There are so many women on the campaign trail," Chance said, "we joke that we don't go drinking, we go shopping."

Chance is now confronted with difficult decisions about future prospects for advancement in her career -- which for a promising state political reporter would most likely be a move to Washington, D.C., to cover the national scene. Laura Mecoy, a former Capitol bureau reporter, transferred to Washington several years ago for the Bee, and Chance knows that move is a possibility. Mecoy is single and has no children.

> Laura went to the Washington bureau -- that's the progression you would make, or you would do an increasing amount of presidential campaign travel. I'm not comfortable with that. Even when I was single, I didn't enjoy travel a lot. But having a child helped me see that I like being home with my family.
>
> If I were (a prominent male political reporter) in my career, I would be moving to Washington. But because I do have a family, I think there are still challenges I can do that won't conflict.

Like most women political reporters, she believes women bring a new perspective to political coverage of so-called "women's" issues such as abortion and child care. She

remembers an important child care story being downplayed by the Bee when she was covering local government -- and the Bee being chastised by editors in an American Press Institute seminar, who said that story should have received better play. "Before I had children," Chance said," I didn't know to push. Now I'm more interested."

"What this speaks to is the need to have a variety of people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds and sexes out there asking the questions and helping to shape what news stories get in the paper," she added.

She does not recall any major incidents of sexual harassment.

> When I started out, in Mansfield, Texas, I'd get questions like why does your husband let you out at night, when I was covering city council meetings. I got hugged. Frankly, it didn't particularly bother me. I didn't expect more. As a Californian going to a small Texas town, I was prepared for that.
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> What I was not prepared for was seeing it on other levels of politics. Truthfully, the only time I felt really bothered was an experience I had with (Republican Party Chair) Lee Atwater, the night George Bush spoke to the party convention in New Orleans. Atwater was on the floor, and he was very interesting to watch. He came over to Governor Deukmejian, and he was trying to get Deukmejian to do something. Deukmejian kept shaking his head. I wanted to know what it was. Atwater was waiting for a network standup interview. I walked up to him, and I had my credential on. I told him I wanted to know what he was trying to get the governor to do. He said they were just talking politics.
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> Then he looked me up one side and down the other and said, "You look so cool, calm and collected, I bet you have a wild side people have never seen." I felt like I'd been slapped in the face. It wasn't a come-on. It was get-out-of-here. It was terribly sexist. It was so strange.

> We printed it. He's dying, and I feel bad about that. But it was part of him, no doubt about it.[11]

Chris Chrystal [12]

Chris Chrystal, Capitol Bureau chief for United Press International in Sacramento since 1989, is one of the few female bureau chiefs in the Capitol Press Corps. She succeeded Rebecca LaVally, longtime UPI Capitol Bureau chief, who left to become Capitol bureau chief for Gannett News Service (LaVally is now a freelance writer and parttime editor in the Senate Office of Research).[13] Chrystal, who would not give her age, initially declined to be interviewed. "Very frankly, I find it very hard to go into personal background," she said. "I'm not fascinated with myself."

Chrystal has been with UPI for ten years, in San Francisco, Washington D.C., Los Angeles and now Sacramento. In Washington, D.C. for five years, she covered the Congressional delegation for the ten far Western states on Capitol Hill for UPI, as well as federal agencies and the U.S. Supreme Court.

She started in journalism as a television reporter in Nevada in the early 1970s. She says she was the first fulltime woman reporter in television news in Nevada. It wasn't easy.

> I wasn't treated very well. I was told flat-out they wouldn't help me carry the cameras. Lucky for me, I happen to be quite tall and I'm quite strong, and I was able to do it. I had a friend who was daintier and couldn't handle it. Now the women walk around in pretty outfits, and other people carry their gear. I was laden with gear like a packhorse.

She worked for three different stations, and at one came "face to face with discrimination" when she applied for a job in Las Vegas in 1971.

> If they'd just told me they didn't want to hire me, but they told me they couldn't have a woman doing the news in TV. I said why is that, and he said women aren't credible. I said what does he mean. He says, people just don't believe them. He said it's not his view but that's what the viewers think. I was dumbfounded, stunned. I got up and walked out.
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> I was out on the street, and I said, this is discrimination. I knew what it was for blacks, All this discrimination had been going on around me all the time. I had accepted the fact that women couldn't do certain things, and that's just the way it was. It didn't bother me. I didn't care about it. But that (job) was something I personally wanted to do, and I was being stopped because I was a woman.

Eventually, she did go to work for the station that didn't want women. She was a reporter and did some anchoring, some camera work.

> I carried around all my own equipment, when we were still in film, no videotape. It was <u>hard</u>. You had to load all the magazines -- it wasn't automatic -- you had to carry the lights and the sticks and the camera box and the extra gear. You had to plug everything in, plus carry your tape recorder, notebook and microphone. And you had to ask the questions at the same time. I would have done anything just to be able to do it.
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> The men weren't going to carry anything around, and I don't blame them. They resented it , that

> women were barging in. I figured if I carried my weight and didn't ask for special favors, I'd be accepted. I was. The women who came after didn't have to go through what I went through. . .I get a secret thrill when I see women camera crews, that they have the right to do it.
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> These gals today don't know what it was like. The idea of going through all that stuff is so future generations don't have to. People don't thank you for it, and I don't expect them to. Do young blacks thank Rosa Parks? I doubt it.

Chrystal recalls that she was "angry in those days, lashing out. . .People would come in and say, 'Oh dear, are you the weather girl?' And I would get angry and say, 'No I cover murders! We have a guy who does the weather'."

She believes female reporters covering government and politics tend to "ask more questions" about certain subjects, such as abortion and child care.

> Until very recently, those were considered women's issues, and men were not interested. Male legislators have not been interested, and neither have the budget-makers, and that's why we have the serious problems we do because we haven't put money into (those issues).
>
> Women legislators were completely outvoted and overidden by male legislators. If you're always beating the female drum, they (women legislators and feminists) felt they couldn't be part of the action. Women didn't want to be considered a "women's libber." It was a compliment to be not considered a women's libber. Women couldn't get elected if they were too radical. Voters were shy and skittish, so they had to be more moderate and not go after women's issues too prominently. Now you hear Pete wilson talking about prenatal care.
>
> Of course, they're absolutely right. These are fundamental issues, and it's gratifying that they're being taken seriously, finally paying attention to human things and not considering everything to do with babies as strictly a women's issue. There is a sum of ingorance that's being overcome, and women in the media have helped to bring this about by paying attention to it.

Chrystal, who is not married and does not have children, says women are hampered in their careers when they have children. "Not all women are hampered, but many in the media and other careers are hampered because they have kids. They began to realize their children are suffering. I know women who have put their careers on the back burner or quit."[14]

Claire Cooper [15]

Claire Cooper, 51, is currently a legal affairs writer for the Sacramento Bee, based in San Francisco where she covers the federal courts and the California Supreme Court. She joined the Bee in 1979, after more than four years with the Rocky Mountain News in Denver, Colorado, where she covered state and federal government. She was only the second woman to be assigned to the Bee's state Capitol bureau, shortly after she joined the Bee in 1979.

Originally from Weehawken, New York, she was co-editor of "the single issue of a grammar school newspaper in the eighth grade." In 1956, she was co-editor of her high school newspaper (which presumably published more than one issue). "Wherever we went, I started a newspaper." She is a 1960 graduate of the University of Florida, with a Bachelor's degree in journalism, and she received a Master's degree in communications from New York University in 1965.

She has also worked in advertising and public relations in New York and was a magazine editor for Prentice-Hall in New York.

While in the Bee's Capitol bureau for six years, she said she experienced no sexual harassment from legislators, but disliked the "fraternity house" atmosphere of the largely all-male Capitol press corps:

"Much of it was supposed to be fun. Most of it was insignificant. I consider them to be my friends. The male reporters have a certain clannishness and exclusivity -- it's kind of a boys' club there, an atmosphere not unlike that of a boys' fraternity."

In her first week on the job at the Capitol, Cooper recalls, the "boys" went out for their usual Friday "drinking lunch," and left her minding the store, which on that particular Friday meant covering a boring demonstration at the Capitol:

"They had these long drinking lunches every Friday, and later they would invite me. Sometimes I would go, but I hated them. They got drunk and boring. They didn't get falling-down drunk, but they drank enough to get silly."

She said there were other instances of subtle (and not-so-subtle) harassment. Once, she went to the office of the press secretary for a major state official, to inquire about the time of a hearing or some such routine information. The

male press secretary, who had been a reporter for a major paper, was talking with two reporters, also male, when Cooper interrupted to ask her question. One of the reporters, she recalls:

> turned on me as if I had committed the worst crime in the world, and he made an extremely cutting remark. It had no sexual content, but (my interruption) was something "the boys" would have ignored from each other.
>
> There was just this prevailing attitude that girls don't count.

Because of the male camaraderie, female reporters were often excluded from conversation in which news tips were exchanged, and the women frequently found themselves isolated and alone. "Willie Brown tried to freeze me out at a press conference, by ignoring my questions," Cooper said. "They (male reporters) could have asked the questions for me, or insisted he answer, but they did nothing."

She also believes she did not receive adequate recognition -- and money -- for her work.

> I always felt I would have received more recognition if I had been a male reporter. I pretty much stayed ahead of the stories, both in the Bee and other publications. I beat those guys a couple of times a week, and got very little acknowledgement. I broke stories before they happened, and I always felt that if a male reporter had performed as consistently as I did, there would have been more acknowledgement.
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> I was really bringing in the stories, and the paper played those stories on A1, so they got good play, but no money to speak of. It never really showed up in merit raises, maybe $10 a week. I busted my ass. I worked like hell, and I really produced, and I don't feel I got the recognition

a male reporter would have.

In retrospect, she said "there were a lot of really nice thoughts and bonuses in my files, but the experience didn't seem to be cumulative. When I asked for a larger beat, it was denied. When I asked for more money, it was denied."

Cooper worked under three bureau chiefs, and at least one, she said, "trusted only his few close boyfriends," as did the news editor, who on one occasion, she recalls questioned her "legitimate overtime request."

But there are many positive memories from those days. She still has a note in her files from a male colleague in the bureau, who wrote: "You have written the first reapportionment stories I have ever read that I wanted to read past the third paragraph. They have been uncommonly well-done."

"P.S.," the reporter, a well-known Capitol wag, added. "don't get a big head. You have spinach in your teeth."

Cooper also recalls an incident when the other reporters in the bureau (all were male) rallied behind her when the bureau chief chastised her for being "too aggressive."

> He confronted me and said everyone was complaining about me -- the people I covered in the governor's office and elsewhere -- because I was being too aggressive. Furthermore, he said, I wasn't getting along with the people in the office.
>
> I talked to the other reporters in the office, and they assured me there was no truth to it. They said if I were a man, nothing would have been

> said. There was general agreement among the men in the bureau that it was not only not true, but it was sexist as well.
>
> I thought it was extraordinary, reflecting on it. They raised the issue of sexism, I didn't." [16]

She believes, as do other women reporters, that women bring new perspective to Capitol reporting.

> Before I went to the Capitol bureau, they did not cover abortion. They did not see it as a significant issue. I covered it as a budget issue.
>
> You tend to have different sources. There's overlap, but I have a helluva lot of women sources, people who are comfortable with me, female legislators. I didn't deal with the same old boys' club, and I had less willingness to buy into the established pecking order. I'm also less authoritarian, less respectful of power. I don't know if that's a function of my sex or my political makeup.

Virginia Ellis [17]

Virginia Ellis, 47, started her journalistic career early. In the small town of Stuart on the east coast of Florida, she "did what a lot of kids do -- I published my own little newspaper, a neighborhood child's newspaper." Her stepfather was a reporter for the New York Times, and she used to follow him around on stories. "I knew I didn't want to sit down at a desk all day."

In high school, she worked for the school newspaper, then went to college at the University of Florida in Gainesville, where she worked for the local paper, the Gainesville Sun, while in college, and during the summer,

for the Palm Beach Post. After graduation, she got a job with the Tampa Times, which then sold for a nickel (the paper folded about ten years ago).

"I was so young," she recalls. "When I graduated from college I was only 21. Women's issues hadn't really begun. I didn't have enough sense to know if I was being discriminated against."

The sister paper to the Times was the much larger morning paper, the Tampa Tribune.

> It had a tough, stereotypical editor named Red Newton, and he wouldn't allow women in the newsroom. When I went to work, there had been this great breakthrough where he had allowed this woman named Norma Jean Hill to work on the reporting staff. Women had to work for the women's section. She was the first (who didn't). That had just happened as I was breaking in.
>
> We weren't aware of (discrimination). We were just so grateful to get the jobs. Women were getting the opportunities because we would work cheaper. You were so glad to get in that you didn't question that the guys were making more. They (women) would do a good job and get paid half as much.

Ellis said she did not experience discrimination in assignments at the Tampa Times. At 21, she was covering the military, "which was not a normal thing for women to cover," and federal courts. "I was working in the South. And in the South, there is a way of life that you don't necessarily label discrimination, but it might be. In the South, to be called honey is not offensive. To be called honey in California would be offensive."

She spent two years in Tampa, and then went to the St.

Petersburg Times, covering state courts, city hall and the county commission. She was then sent to Tallahassee in 1973 as the first woman in the Capitol bureau of the St. Petersburg Times. She spent nearly eight years in Tallahassee, the last five as bureau chief -- another first for her paper.

> I was not the first woman bureau chief in Tallahassee, although I was the first for my paper. UPI had a woman named Barbara Frye, and she was something of a legend. She went to Tallahassee (for UPI) in 1943 to cover state government, and in the 50s UPI did something that was unheard of -- they made her the bureau chief. Several of their clients immediately cancelled, including the Florida Times-Union, the Jacksonville paper. There were several cancellations, but that was the biggest one.
>
> UPI, to its credit, stuck by her. That sounds funny now, but back then, who cared about women? Barbara was a real trailblazer. She was the only woman (covering the Florida Capitol) for decades.

Although nobody cancelled their subscription when Ellis went to Tallahassee in 1973, she found an atmosphere not entirely receptive to women -- either as reporters or legislators: "Most of the legislators were men, and after the session they would head for the men's room. All the men would pile into the men's room, and I guess (the male reporters) all stood around the urinals taking notes. There were a couple of times I would stick my foot in the door."

Ellis was sent to Tallahassee after a momentous meeting in the city room of the St. Petersburg Times, a liberal newspaper with a good record on the hiring and promotion of

women, a paper with a maternity leave policy then far ahead of many of its brethren in the news business.

One of Ellis' closest friends at the paper was Eleanor Randolph, now a nationally known political reporter with the Washington Post. In 1972, the St. Petersburg Times, despite its reasonably solid record on women's issues, nonetheless did not allow women to cover political campaigns. Randolph and Ellis and other women at that 1972 meeting in the newsroom wanted to know why:

> There was this deadly silence. Then we got a whole lot of -- it would be too rigorous, we thought you wouldn't want to leave your families, you know how the boys talk on the bus. It went on and on. The editors then came back and announced there would be a big breakthrough. That year I covered Henry Jackson in the primary, and Eleanor covered George Wallace.
>
> I remember feeling this tremendous pressure on me because if I screwed up. . .I remember one of the chauvinist editors saying now don't do anything to embarrass the Times. I don't know what they expected us to do -- take off all our clothes? I felt this terrible burden. I had to behave perfectly, write perfectly.

It was after the 1972 campaigns when Ellis was sent to the state Capitol. "I think they realized it was awful of them to have let women go that long," she said.

During her nearly eight years covering the Florida statehouse, she recalls no personal incidents of harassment: "There were stories, but they just didn't happen to me. One woman was picked up by a legislator and carried somewhere. She wrote about it, and he was finished. I suppose there

was a time when we wouldn't have written about it." When she was bureau chief, she recalls discovering that one of the male reporters she supervised was making more money than she was. "I went berserk, and they fixed it."

When her husband's work took him to Texas, she applied for a position with the Dallas Times-Herald, which at that time was owned by the Times-Mirror Corporation, which also owns the Los Angeles Times.

> I remember when I was being interviewed. I loved the St. Pete Times and didn't want to leave it. Later I didn't want to leave the Times-Herald. The (interviewer) asked what makes (the St. Petersburg paper) so great? Trying to think quickly, I said they have some very good policies toward women. They give them a great maternity leave -- six months. With vacation, my maternity leave became seven months. And I remember the editor at the Times-Herald saying, well, women there didn't have babies, and he meant it.

She said the Dallas paper "changed dramatically in its attitude toward women" in the years to follow, but her perception at the time she was hired was that management was less than sensitive to the notion of women reporters having babies.

> When I went to Texas, I had a few months off between jobs. The week before I started, I discovered I was pregnant. I was apoplectic. I remembered what they said in my interview. Of all the horrible things in the world, not only was I pregnant but I was starting a job pregnant. The pregnancy was an accident. In my early months, I get morning sickness. I was sick a lot of the time. I felt like teenagers must have felt I don't know when. I hid it. Here I was a married woman in my mid-30s in the 20th Century hiding the fact that I was pregnant and throwing up in the bathroom.

Ellis had a miscarriage after about three months. "Who knows whether anxiety caused it, or who knows what would have happened if I had told them? There were some women who said they would have fired me, some who said they wouldn't have."

Ellis' and her husband, Paul Schitt, a business writer for the Sacramento Bee, have a son, 14. In all three big papers where Ellis has worked, she has held demanding positions, covering state government and politics in the state capitals of Florida, Texas and, now, California. In Florida, where her son was born, "I am the only person I knew of, the only woman who had a baby while she was working covering state government."

The hours, like much of journalism, were often unpredictable and grueling, particularly in the smaller bureaus of two and three people. "You would go in at 8 or 9 in the morning and work until 9 or 10 at night, particularly when the Legislature was in session."

Like so many mothers who are also reporters in high-pressure positions, Ellis remembers the multiple babysitters, the turnover among the babysitters, the nightmare of scheduling them, and the cost. "If I had been single, I couldn't have done it. I couldn't have afforded it. I never had another child, and the main reason I didn't was that I couldn't have afforded it -- financially or physically."

She recalls a conversation with a woman reporter who came to Tallahassee to cover the Equal Rights Amendment:

> She called me up. I was home. My son was a baby, and she called me at home to get background (for a story), and she asked about the baby. She said for the next twelve years you'll either feel guilty for not spending enough time with your son, or you'll feel guilty for neglecting your work. I thought, <u>who is this woman? -- the next twelve years!</u>"
>
> Covering the Capitol, you take what working women normally have to deal with for child care, and multiply it by six -- having to set up babysitters who will come in at a moment's notice. Your day can look absolutely clear, and at five o'clock something breaks and you have to be there. It's a nightmare. I never could figure out how to do it with two children.

Did she ever consider another profession? "There have been times. In the early years, the diaper years, when I was absolutely exhausted. The night when you're up all night, going in putting in a 12-hour day, moving around as a zombie. Going home at night and trying to cope."

Ellis thinks the news business has improved its attitude toward working mothers. "I think it's improved. When I was in Austin and Tallahassee, I had women working for me who had children. I sure went out of my way to accommodate them in a hundred different ways."

But even as little as two or three years ago, she recalls an incident involving a woman who had been hired as an editor at a prestigious California paper, when the woman discovered she was pregnant:

> I remember her agonizing as to whether the (paper) would want her to come on pregnant. She asked me what to do. Look, I said this is the 20th century, this is a big newspaper, just act like it's perfectly all right. It was an accident and it happened and this is the way it is. She did tell them, and it was no problem. And there may have never been a problem. . .but the perception was there.
>
> You sort of feel pregnancy is something that longevity entitles you to. Good heaven forbid that you start off that way.

Ellis worked for the Times-Herald for nine years, covering state government in the capital in Austin, Texas. She became bureau chief after two years. As the Texas economy deteriorated in the mid-1980s, there were cutbacks at the paper, and it was sold by Times-Mirror. For a time, in 1987, Ellis was also the bureau chief for the Houston Post, which had also been purchased by the same owners who bought the Times-Herald.

> I was afraid the Times-Herald was going to go under. It didn't, but it had to cut back so much. I never left anyplace to seek another job. I've never mapped that out for myself. I was more interested in what I was doing than who I was doing it for. I moved to Texas because of my husband's job and decided to leave because of the Texas economy.

She began an intense campaign to land a job with the Los Angeles Times in its Capitol bureau, which at that time (1988) had no women reporters among its twelve-person staff. Bureau Chief George Skelton, a longtime Capitol reporter and nationally known political writer, was impressed by Ellis'