

## Bay Area BusinessWoman www.babwnews.com

April, 2008

---

# On the radio: Women are making their mark up and down the dial

—*By Kenya McCullum*

It's a hectic Monday morning in the newsroom at KGO AM. The stories of the day scroll across two news tickers on the screens above co-anchors Jennifer Jones and Ed Baxter: David Patterson is sworn in as governor of New York in the wake of Eliot Spitzer's disgrace; the nation's basketball fans get crazy about March Madness; the bickering between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama continues as they gear up for another battle in the voting booth. Finally the fifth anniversary of Iraq is this week, which also has personal significance for Jones because her fiancé — Captain Scott Lee — is stationed at Camp Victory in Baghdad.

Lee is due to call the station to discuss what is going on in Iraq and, to some extent, what is going on in his relationship with Jones. However, the phone lines aren't working, so everyone scrambles to find a way to make the call go through, as it would be next to impossible to contact him if it doesn't.

His call is particularly important for the morning team because listeners have been following this relationship from the very beginning, and Jones says she gets a lot of heartwarming responses because of it.

“My story with my fiancé has been on the air since the day we met. I was his pen pal while he was in Iraq, and we shared the story on the air only because I said, ‘Hey, I’m finally going to meet my pen pal, and if you guys want to write in, tell us where you would go if you had someone coming who had never been to the Bay before,’” Jones says. “Our entire story has been on the air, so people constantly email me to thank me for sharing our story. I have a much more emotional connection with our listeners because of it.”

Jones added that this is in part what makes it unique to have a woman at the news desk. While her co-anchor tends to focus on the questions that reporters learn in journalism school — the who, what, when, where, and why — she adds an element of human connection and introspection to her interviews. But that's not to say that Jones is not professional and does not take her job seriously.

Despite being young, she has been in radio for 15 years and has covered everything from local news to sports to national politics. During her tenure at KGO, she reported on the San Francisco dog mauling trial as well as the Scott Peterson case, alongside her older, male counterparts.

Unfortunately, Jones has not always been taken as seriously as she takes her career. With her bright blue eyes, blond hair and dimples, she simply does not fit the archetype of what a news reporter looks like, and sometimes she believes her looks have some people not taking her seriously as a reporter.

“People frequently seem shocked when you come out with a fact or you come up with an idea that maybe they hadn’t thought of,” she says. “It’s not very long before you can turn that around, but I’ve noticed you definitely have to pay your dues a little bit longer than men that come into the workplace.”

And these attitudes about women in radio are not just found on the AM side of the dial. Rosalie Howarth of KFOG relayed a disturbing story about how she was treated during her early days in radio, which was not an uncommon occurrence.

“At an FM station in the late 1970s, the general manager loved to sneak up behind me and the other female DJs, put both arms around us, and actually grab our breasts with both hands while we were talking on the air — just to hear us try not to blow it out loud,” says Howarth. “But the funny thing is, it never, ever even once occurred to us that he couldn’t do that, or that we had any recourse or right to protest. It was just something you hated and had to put up with. We told him over and over to stop, but he just tittered and skittered away.”

Although not as overtly, Laurie Sanders, who does the late afternoon show at KOIT, found sexist attitudes with men in the business. When she began her career in the mid-1970s, radio bosses tried to fit all female personalities into one of two categories: the purring kitten obsessed with sex, drugs, and rock ‘n roll who breathes heavily into listeners’ ears at night, or the perky princess helping people find their lost dogs.

“That was when women were not prevalent in radio, they were really in the more biased roles,” says Sanders. “There were women that did other things, but those were the two different roles that people saw you in. You were either going to fit into this one or that one.”

Despite her refusal to be pigeon-holed, Sanders has enjoyed a career in radio for the last three decades, including 16 years at her current station. Over the years, she has found that the sexism that was once blatant in the industry for on-air talent has become much more subtle than it used to be, and unfortunately it is women in the management positions that now bear the brunt of the discrimination.

This is not surprising considering that the opportunities for women are quickly dwindling as a result of large media companies swallowing up smaller radio stations. S. Derek Turner reports in “Off the Dial: Female and Minority Radio Station Ownership in the United States” that only six percent of commercial broadcast stations are owned by women, and if the current trend of media consolidation continues, this meager number will shrink even further.

Despite this alarming trend, however, women are still able to climb their way up the radio industry’s ladder because of their natural ability to communicate — although it may take longer. But women in this industry know that it’s important for them to support each other toward this goal.

Jennifer Jones says that if it was not for her mentor, Veronica Carter — who was once her news director and is currently at WGN in Chicago — she would not be where she is today. As a result, she is dedicated to helping young women in the business in any way she can to ensure that the next generation of women in radio can may their way like Jones has made hers.

“I’m really hopeful that at some point, some twenty-one year old is going to come into a station where I

work and I'm going to be able to help her the way Veronica helped me," says Jones. "I think it's just important that we give back and make sure that we give our younger women the encouragement that they need."

Kenya McCullum is a freelance writer whose work can be found at [www.km-com.com](http://www.km-com.com) and [www.uselessonline.com](http://www.uselessonline.com) .

---

copyright @ babwnews.com