

**BFFWomenJournalists-VII:** Inspired by the words of award-winning journalist and popular television host Christiane Amanpour, on November 1, 2018, who spoke of how the free press is, “the BFF of the people and not the enemy of the people.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nd0Blxbgpuw>, prompted me to suggest she author a book expanding her friendly rhetoric to a larger audience. Then, awaiting Ms. Amanpour’s book, I wrote my November, 2018 column recalling historic women journalists from my previous columns, to support them, their profession and the free press. It has turned into a series of which this is my seventh column.

**Nancy Dickerson (1927-1997)** was the first woman to be hired as a major network news correspondent in America in 1960.

Born and raised in a suburb of Milwaukee, Nancy Connors Hanschman attended Clark College, a Catholic women’s college in Dubuque, Iowa, for two years. In her continued college studies at the University of Wisconsin she concentrated in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, and earned her BA in 1948. She then taught school in Milwaukee until 1951 when she went to New York to find stimulating employment. Not finding much to her liking, she, much like Mr. Smith, went to Washington, D.C.

There, in the Institute of Languages at Georgetown University, she worked as a registrar and took courses in speech and drama at Catholic University of America to improve her skills to pursue her goal of becoming a broadcaster. When a more interesting job of doing research for the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations availed itself to her, she took it. In this position, she developed a passion for the inner workings of government, which would define her career of more than four decades.

A new position created by CBS in 1954 to produce a radio show about the political scene in Washington called "Capital Cloakroom" became her next job when she was hired as its producer. Connors Hanschman excelled in her first position as a radio producer and was named associate producer of another new interview program begun by CBS in the middle 50’s titled, “Face The Nation.”



However, the male dominated national on-air news broadcasting workforce of the era, including CBS, did not include women of the era in on-air broadcasting. That said, while on a European vacation in 1959, with a proclivity for news broadcasting, she took the

initiative of combining business with pleasure by recording a commentary on the peacetime activities of the Women's Army Corps and offering it for on-air radio time to CBS. CBS officials used it on "The World Tonight" show, then a mainstay of CBS radio, and a female's voice broke into national, on-air news broadcasting.

In February 1960, after the NBC and ABC networks already had named women to their news staffs, CBS decided to cover the Presidential elections and named Nancy Hanschman its first woman correspondent. She covered Senator Lyndon Johnson all the way to the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles that July where he became John F. Kennedy's vice-presidential running mate. Later that year, she received her own CBS weekday radio show, "One Woman's Washington," in which she discussed Washington topics thought to be of interest to women around the country. But she preferred not to be involved only in women's programming.



Nancy Conners Hanschman married C. Wyatt Dickerson in 1962, left CBS the following year and joined NBC News in Washington where she remained until 1970 reporting on general national news and politics.

Nancy Dickerson covered the 1963 "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom" in which Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech and was part of NBC's coverage of President Kennedy's assassination and funeral. Her female voice narration is heard on the NBC videotape at the Andrews Air Force Base arrival of the late president's remains and the statement made by the newly sworn in President Lyndon B. Johnson in Washington, D.C.

In 1971, she became an independent producer and broadcaster syndicating a daily news program, "Inside Washington." In 1980, she founded the Television Corporation of America through which she produced documentaries for PBS and others. Most notable was her "784 Days That Changed America—From Watergate to Resignation" for which she received a Peabody Award and the Silver Gavel Award from the American Bar Association.

Other documentaries she reported and produced include: "Nancy Dickerson, Special Assignment: The Middle East," in which she interviewed President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel; "Islam: The Veil and the Future," about women in the Arab world; "Nancy Dickerson and the New Woman," an examination of the women's movement in the United States; "A House Divided," about the U.S. House of Representatives; and "Being with John F. Kennedy," on the personality of the late president.

She wrote in her 1976 memoir *Among Those Present* that *The Washington Daily News* once offered her a job as women's editor but that she turned it down because “it seemed outlandish to try to change the world writing shopping and food columns.”

Nancy Dickerson did change the world as the first woman hired as a major network news correspondent in America in 1960. She also gave the world formidable female news and a formidable news broadcaster, her son John, who hosted (her) *Face the Nation* from 2015-2018.

Sources:

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