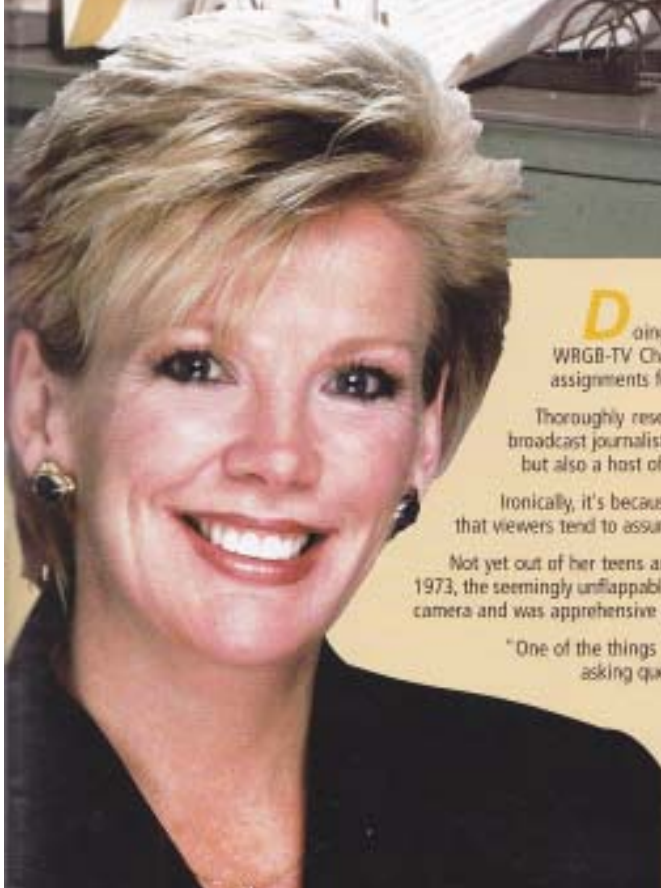


# Liz Bishop

*As anchored  
and as good a  
sport as ever!*

By Ann Hauprich



**D**oing homework may not be part of Liz Bishop's official job description at WRGB-TV Channel 6, but it's been the task she's taken most seriously when tackling assignments for the station these past three decades.

Thoroughly researching her subject matter prior to interviews has earned the seasoned broadcast journalist not only the respect and admiration of those on both sides of the camera, but also a host of professional awards and honors along the way.

Ironically, it's because the celebrated news anchor works so incredibly hard behind-the-scenes that viewers tend to assume her job is easy.

Not yet out of her teens and sporting long auburn tresses when she landed her first job at WRGB in 1973, the seemingly unflappable newscaster insists she was not initially comfortable in front of a television camera and was apprehensive about conducting live interviews.

"One of the things I learned the hard way was the importance of doing my homework before asking questions," reflects the Capital Region's top rated female news anchor.

Flashing one of her trademark smiles, Liz recalls how she burned the midnight oil reading up on hot political issues and personalities prior to a televised Q & A session with former NYS Governor Mario Cuomo.

"He had a reputation for being tough on interviewers . . . a real stickler for details. If a reporter led into a question with something along the lines of 'People say' or 'They claim', he would jump right in with 'Which people?' or 'Who are they?' He wouldn't let you off the hook . . . he'd demand to know everything, chapter and verse. Your worst fear was that he would ask you a question that you couldn't answer -- instead of the other way around!"

Other national figures who would surely also have awarded Liz an "A+" for her thoroughness in preparing for her interviews with them include Hillary Rodham Clinton, Jimmy Carter, John Glenn, Rudy Giuliani, Wilt Chamberlain and the late Bob Hope.

Having opportunities to meet Dan Rather and Walter Cronkite, two of her idols in the broadcast journalism field, also figure high on her list of career highlights. Both gents struck her as being incredibly pleasant, gracious, polite, witty and humble -- qualities that have been attributed to Liz Bishop as well.

What newcomers may not realize . . . and what old-timers may have forgotten . . . is that the vivacious lady with the poise and fashion flair of a model also has the distinction of

having been a trailblazer in the field of women's sports reporting.

While she's not sure she likes being described as a "pioneer" in this department, the fact is Liz started out as a junior sports reporter for the Times Union looking far more like a freckle-faced cheerleader than a Lois Lane sophisticate.

As the first and the only female in the daily newspaper's Sports Department, Liz was initially assigned to do trivial tasks like taking race results over the phone and typing them up for the editor. Before long, however, it became clear that she was capable of hitting home runs with readers and Liz was invited to write a column called *A Lib Look at Sports*.

"You'd never see a column with a title like that today, but The Women's Lib movement was in its infancy at the time and, hey, it was a start," she laughs good-naturedly.

For Liz the work was second-nature: in fact, the daughter of Frank and Betty Bishop of Albany knew as much about sports as any jock her age.

The reason, she says, was simple: "I grew up with a father who loved sports and three sports-loving brothers (Frank, Peter and Paul). In my house, if you didn't watch sports on TV, you didn't watch TV."

So she watched and she listened and she learned . . . never dreaming that all this knowledge by osmosis would one day help earn her the distinction of being the first female journalist to set foot in the New York Yankee locker room after the Supreme Court ruled it should be open to women reporters.

But that's just what happened in the early '70s with the result that Liz was subsequently dubbed "Venus in Blue Jeans" and photographed with the



SUNY/Albany football team for Sports Illustrated

"I wore blue jeans all right, but I don't know where they got the Venus part from," she blushes.

In fact, Liz insists, she never imagined herself being on TV, much less a media personality others would ever want to read about.

"I just loved writing when I was young and thought it would be wonderful if I could actually make a living doing what I loved," she explains while pouring a cup of freshly brewed pumpkin spice coffee for the Saratoga Living reporter seated in her Spa City livingroom.

Liz credits the Sisters of Mercy who taught her at Albany's Vincentian Institute with nurturing her love of literature and writing. "I enjoyed my years at VI very much. We had smaller class sizes than the public schools, I think, and the Mercy runs paid a lot of attention to our growth in so many areas -- not just those of an academic nature. They really had big hearts and gave so much of themselves to their students."

One nun made a particularly lasting impression -- so much so that Liz says she still often thinks of the late Sister Carmel and remembers her words of advice and encouragement.



*The players, recalls Liz, "were not exactly on their best behavior" making the experience one to remember under any circumstances, but she has something more concrete to document the moment in sports history. A photographer for Newsday just happened to be in the locker room when Liz was trying to pry a serious answer from Lou Pinella. The publication of that photo, in turn, led Sports Illustrated to contact Liz for a photo session with the SUNY/Albany football team -- with more lucky breaks to follow.*



"Sister Carmel was my high school English and Journalism teacher and I loved the challenge of working on classroom and yearbook assignments for her."

"Sister Carmel was definitely my first mentor . . . It was because of her encouragement that I entered a story about



our school track team in a contest that won a Columbia Journalism Award. That award gave me the confidence to keep writing and helped me get a scholarship to SUNY/Albany."

Years later when Liz had become an on-air personality, Sister Carmel would occasionally telephone the station and ask to speak with "Betty" (Liz's VI nickname) in order to offer feedback on reports.

Another early mentor was Don Decker -- the man who hired Liz for her first television job at WRGB as a weekend sports reporter at a time when female sportscasters were as scarce as hen's teeth.

"Don had read my column in the Times Union, apparently liked what he read, and called me up to see if I'd consider covering weekend sports for the station. The only TV work I'd ever done was at the age of around 11 when I called a square dance for The Pete Williams Show, but, as unbelievable as it may sound, Don seemed to think I was up to the task and he hired me."

No one is more aware than Liz that something like that would never happen today, but she thanks her lucky stars that she was in the right place at the right time to take advantage of an incredible break into the world of television.

Only 19 at the time, Liz became part of an all-female TV newscasting team that included anchor Sharon Smith and weathercaster Mary Caroline Powers. Martha Ingerson was the news director with Lt. Gov. Mary Ann Krupak filling the guest interview seat.

"Besides my love of sports, I had a healthy sense of adventure and in those days, that was all it took to succeed,"

contents Liz.

Flipping through the pages of a scrapbook of her career that was lovingly assembled by her mother, Liz stops in mock disbelief at the coverage that surrounded her historic moment as the first woman reporter ever allowed in the Yankee locker room.

"I was 22 at the time and again, I just happened to be in the right place at the right time. It was a big play off game for the Yankees and the Supreme Court ruling that female journalists could no longer be barred from male locker rooms had created a real media circus. Some one else could just as well have earned the distinction of being the first female to set foot in that locker room, but, as fate would have it, it was me."



*Nicest of all, says Liz,  
is the feeling of belonging.*



The players, recalls Liz, "were not exactly on their best behavior" making the experience one to remember under any circumstances, but she has something more concrete to document the moment in sports history. A photographer for *Newsday* just happened to be in the locker room when Liz was trying to pry a serious answer from Lou Piniella. The publication of that photo, in turn, led *Sports Illustrated* to contact Liz for a photo session with the SUNY/Albany football team -- with more lucky breaks to follow.

"I've always said that timing for me was everything. My career unfolded in a way that could never be duplicated today. The

only reason I was working for the Times Union was that I needed a part-time job to help pay my college expenses. Next I was hired by a guy who was simply intrigued with the idea of having a woman sportscaster. I was truly a product of the times . . . I profited from the times in which we lived, ploughing through uncharted waters."

The hardest part of her early years at WRGB was dealing with the sometimes harsh comments from horrified male viewers who phoned demanding that the station "take that broad off TV."

But, grins Liz, "I'm Irish . . . and I'm stubborn. I had a lot to learn about TV, but I decided to show them that a woman could, indeed, do the job and do it well."

Although viewers would never guess it today, Liz says one of her greatest challenges had to do with struggling to "lose" the Long Island accent she'd picked up from other students while attending college.

"When I opened my mouth, people assumed I was from out-of-town and I'd say, 'No . . . I was born right here in Albany (at Brady Maternity Hospital) . . . but sure enough, when I'd listen to the tapes at the station, I sounded like a Long Islander."

Liz credits Don Decker with allowing her to "grow" and develop her own, unique

style on the air. "He was a rare boss and I've always been grateful to him for letting me be me both on and off camera. The result was that I kind of grew up in people's living rooms; I became a part of their families -- in some cases going on 30 years."

In the early 1980s, Liz switched from sportscaster to newscaster.

What she thought would be an easy transition from one department to another instead entailed the monumental task of building credibility with a whole new audience: those who tuned in for the scoop on fast-breaking and often late-breaking local, regional and state news. "The hardest part after eight and a half years of being known as The Sports Girl and getting male viewers to accept me was entering a whole new arena and needing to prove myself all over again."

Not yet 30 at the time, Liz quickly won the confidence of viewers who appreciated her friendly professionalism . . . and her distinctly Albany accent!

At her side through much of this period was co-anchor Ernie Tetrault.

"Ernie was a broadcast legend when I met him and I was so scared at the mere thought of sitting next to him in front of a camera that my knees would knock," says Liz, laughing aloud at the memory of the man who ultimately became her favorite person to report the news with. "It was awful really . . . we'd get to giggling so. We were just the worst influence on each other, but we had so much fun and became the best of friends."

A milestone in her political reporting was reached in 1980 when Liz participated in the area's first trans-Atlantic satellite live remote -- an event she recalls with trademark humor.

"I was assigned to cover the inauguration of George Deukmajian (a native of Menands) as Governor of California . . . and I had to sit in a room the size of a tiny closet with either a black or dark blue curtain and look into a camera. I felt pretty ridiculous sitting there in San Francisco like that, but I guess it went smoothly except for (what many viewers perceived as being) lengthy delays between the speaking and the hearing."

In fact, Liz explains, it is common to experience delays lasting a few seconds in satellite transmissions because a reporter's audio and video must go up to the satellite orbiting the earth and then "bounce" back down to the receiving site. The technical term for this is satellite latency.

Since then, Liz has capably covered Presidential inaugurations, Congressional transitions, the New Hampshire Primary, national political conventions and



international stories that have led her to Germany, Italy and Spain. Other plum assignments have included covering a Papal visit in 1997; an award-winning report on a Space Camp in conjunction with John Glenn's second trip into space; a cameo appearance on the CBS soap opera *As the World Turns*; and a week at the North Pole with the Flying 109th of the Stratton Air Base for a series of reports on their scientific support missions on the ice caps.

By far the most emotionally and physically demanding stories she has covered were the refugee conditions in Macedonia in the Spring of 1999 and the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

Both, she says solemnly, dramatically changed her sense of what's important in life.

In the first instance, she and then co-anchor Brad Holbrook brought back the suffering and needs of the Kosovo refugees in conjunction with the WRGB campaign to raise awareness and relief funds.

As devastating as it was to witness those horrors abroad, nothing could prepare Liz for the assault on her senses when she



arrived at the site of the terrorist attacks in Manhattan just over a year ago.

"Our crew arrived at Ground Zero (with firefighters and rescue workers from the Capital District) around six o'clock in the evening on September 11 and people were walking around in a daze in those streets . . . everything was covered with that thick yellowish-gray dust. No one knew yet just how many had perished . . . how staggering the loss would be. There was no way to process it all . . . you couldn't try to make sense of the tragedy . . . all you could do was report what was happening around you, but it was hard not to get emotional. It was definitely a life changing experience for me."



Returning to Ground Zero a year later proved to be highly emotional as well as Liz witnessed what she calls "brave, dignified loved ones" making a pilgrimage to the place where fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers and best friends had perished.

"We needed to grieve and have that moment on the one year anniversary to try to put it all into some kind of perspective, but it was very hard going back."

Nowadays the only kind of going back Liz wants to do is going back to visit her folks in the Albany area and especially going back to her Saratoga Springs home at the end of a long work day.

"I lived in (suburban) Loudonville for 16 years, but it was becoming a somewhat isolating existence because I was heading off for work when most of my neighbors were just coming home from their jobs."



explains Liz, who anchors Channel 6 News at 5:30, 6 and 11 p.m. as well as producing and hosting a Sunday morning interview program.

At the urging of one of her brothers, Liz decided to rent an apartment in a historic section of Saratoga Springs for a year around the turn of the millennium just to see how it would feel to live in close proximity to the world famous thoroughbred race course and performing arts center she so enjoys frequenting during the summer months.

It didn't take a year for Liz to decide she wanted to stay anchored in The Spa City.

"It was an instant love affair. I simply fell in love with Saratoga . . . my neighborhood, the community. Everything here has been so enriching to my life. I love walking the streets, going into the shops, taking watercolor classes at the arts center and tennis lessons at the Y. Coming here was like a rebirth. The quality of my life has just improved so much since I moved here that I wouldn't consider living anywhere else at this stage in my life. In fact, I'm having a house built that I plan to move into in the New Year."

Nicest of all, says Liz, is the feeling of belonging.

"It used to be that when people called my name from windows it was because they recognized me from a billboard or TV. Now when somebody stops and yells 'Hey, Liz!' it's because they recognize me as someone who is part of the community – and it's a great feeling!"

*Feature continues on page 14*

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## Liz Bishop: A class act worth watching

Among the numerous prestigious awards and honors bestowed upon Liz Bishop during her career are: an Edward R. Murrow Award for the half-hour documentary "Killer Flu" and a New York Emmy for her news series on Audrey Santo, a young girl with miraculous powers. Liz has also had four other Emmy nominations, along with two NYS Associated Press Broadcast Awards for General Excellence in Reporting. In addition, she has captured AP Broadcast Awards for sports reporting, best interview, environmental awards and a National Eclipse Award nomination for her coverage of the Saratoga Race Course. She is also a recipient of the NYS National Guard's top reporting honor, the Marguerite Higgins Award for her trip to Greenland.

Over the years, Liz has taken a host of local honors including the 100 Women of Excellence Award, the 2000 Media Person of the Year Award from the Women's Press Club; the Distinguished Alumni Award from SUNY/Albany; the Women of Excellence Award in the Professions from the Albany-Colonie Regional Chamber of Commerce as well as awards from the Women's Business Council and the American Association of University Women.

Liz has hosted the Muscular Dystrophy Association Telethon since 1986 and has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Empire State Youth Orchestra since 1990.





"Over the years I anchored the news alone and with many different co-anchors. Then Liz came along. She added her own special, unique brand of sparkle and brightness. She quickly earned a reputation as the best writer in the room. For me Liz was always a lot of fun. Most important to an anchor team, we were good friends and it showed on the air. We are still good friends to this day. This area is lucky to still have her on the air locally."  
 -Ernie Tetrault-

When I think back to the young blond girl first walking into the newsroom to do, of all things back then, sports, and now see how much of a personality she's become it's been a remarkable journey. She is now one of the area's most respected journalists and I'm glad I've had the opportunity to work with her on that journey.  
 -Jack Aemecke-



Although I've only been here a few months, working with Liz has proven to be fun, educational, professional and challenging - in a good way. She brings a journalistic standard like most will never have in this business and an unparalleled command of the English language. Liz has a drive to be the best that's second to none and it's a pleasure working with someone so focused. I'd like to congratulate her on her big anniversary and here's looking forward to 30 more.  
 -Joe Pagliarulo-

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