



Assassins...Serial Killers...Corrupt Cops...: Chasing the News in a Skirt and High Heels

Mary Neiswender

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Assassins...Serial Killers...Corrupt Cops...is a rundown of the life of one of the first women to break into the male-only profession of news reporting. She spent some 30 years interviewing the famous and infamous. Some of her stories have made federal law, some have brought criminals to justice and others have sent them to death row. She has won numerous state and national awards and has twice been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. She also has been cited for her contributions to journalism by the California State Legislature, the City and County of Los Angeles, the Criminal Courts Bar Association and the Society of Professional Journalists, among others. Many of her stories have been read into the Congressional Record. Climbing over lumber-strewn wharves in a skirt and high heels, she learned the trade covering the bawdy, brawling Los Angeles waterfront. She wrote of Mafia murders and gang rapes, marine disasters and political corruption and was on a first-name basis with Mafia hitmen and corporate heavy-weights, longshoremen and beat cops. It was the best of all worlds for a reporter--male or female. ...Charlie Manson, who masterminded the killing of Actress Sharon Tate and six others in two-days of terror in Los Angeles, would talk to only one reporter during his marathon trial and she was the one. ...L.A.'s Freeway Killer, Bill Bonin, who was convicted of torturing and killing 14 young boys, handed her his detailed, handwritten confession to not only the 14 but almost twice that many. He was the first man executed by lethal injection in California. Unlike his victims, he died feeling no pain. ...Larry Bitaker, who is now awaiting execution, taped the brutal rape, torture and killing of five teenaged girls, kidnapped from the beaches of Southern California. Her interview with him, in which he confessed, was credited with his conviction. ...Sara Jane Moore, the would-be assassin of then-president Gerald Ford, telephoned and wrote to her regularly for the 32 years she waited for freedom. In her first interview, following her trial, she said she was sorry she missed. Today, on parole, she has changed her name, her home address and--she claims-- her mind. But there were many others: ...The chief embezzler in the Equitable Funding scandal was convicted and sent to spend his days in the Federal prison at Terminal Island, CA. Through sources she found he wasn't spending much time at the prison. When she first "discovered" him, he sitting in a VIP seat at the Rose Parade in Pasadena and had a seat waiting for him on the 50 yard line at the Rose Bowl game. When the story broke in the newspaper, his screams about libel came though the phone lines. But, his "temper" made him careless and he inadvertently told her he was calling from his home in the posh Beverly Hills area of the city. ...The final chapter of her journalistic career came when she came to the defense of a young Black athlete, found hanging in a cell at the Signal Hill Police station. "Suicide" said police. A Coroner's Jury said "no" and ruled it "Death at the hands of another" She found witnesses to challenge the police accounts but pressure from business interests in the city who didn't like the stigma and subsequent public outcry trumped justice. Her stories were being withheld, her sources challenged and she was "reassigned". She didn't wait to find out where the new assignment was. She walked out.

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