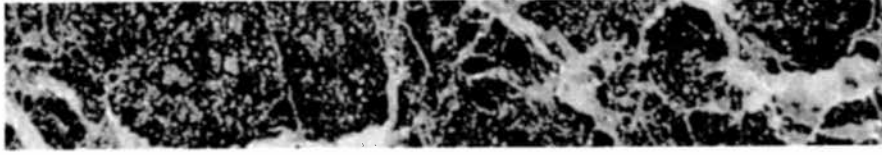


BARBARA WALTERS



I really do wonder what makes people tick," Barbara Walters says. "I want to know what's behind the facade. What are someone's motivations? I am curious about people."

The daughter of Lou Walters, the Broadway and Palm Beach nightclub impresario, Barbara Walters grew up in a show-business environment, and as a young girl, she grew accustomed to seeing celebrated figures up close.

"I would see them onstage looking one way and offstage often looking very different," she says. "I would hear my parents talk about them and know that even though those performers were very special people, they were also human beings with real-life problems. I can have respect and admiration for famous people, but I have never had that sense of fear or awe."

Walters began her career in television journalism shortly after graduating from Sarah Lawrence College in 1953, when she joined the publicity department of WNBC in New York City. Six months later she began writing and producing local news segments for that station.

In 1961, after several years on the production staff at CBS's *The Morning Show*, Walters joined *Today* as a writer and producer, but was repeatedly denied on-air assignments. Unexpectedly during the summer of 1964, Walters was given an opportunity to prove herself in front of the camera.

"They'd never taken anyone from behind the scenes before; they [had always chosen] celebrities," Walters says of the thirteen-week tryout that placed her in direct competition with two other women for the regular-cast position.



Hugh Downs, who joined *Today* as its anchor in 1962 and who now cohosts with Walters on the popular ABC public-affairs program *20/20*, recalls working with Walters during his early days on *Today*.

"From the first interviewing I ever saw her do," Downs says, "I realized that she was very direct and always

had the knack of asking the right follow-up questions.

"The viewer can see somebody ask a question and then somebody else answer it, but in the viewer's mind another question pops up. And that is what Barbara asks next. I think that is what makes her such a good interviewer. She understands



CBS Television

the viewer's perspective."

Unlike her female predecessors on the show, Walters had a keen interest in political and social issues.

"The times were different," Walters says. "There were very few women interviewers in those days and very few female reporters on the air at all. Many people didn't expect a woman to have that kind of authority or even to be doing those kinds of interviews. They expected her to do just fashion shows.

"We used to say that if a man asked a tough question he was considered authoritative and if a woman asked the same question she was considered a bitch."

In 1970 Walters wrote the best-seller, *How to Talk with Practically Anybody About Practically Anything*. Starting in 1971, Walters also began hosting *Not for Women Only*, a daily syndicated program that featured a studio audience and a wide variety of guests.

Three years later Walters was named a *Today* cohost, a position she held until 1976. Downs says, "When Barbara and I worked on the *Today* show, I had the feeling she would wear well. And she has, because she's constantly self-correcting. She's quite remarkable in that way.

"As good as she's been, and as successful as she is, I don't think she



NBC Television

Walters was one of the panelists on the CBS News Special "Eye on the Media: Private Lives, Public Press," top. Above, Walters did her first on-air work for NBC's *Today* show in the sixties.



ever feels, 'This is it. I'm not going to change anything, and nobody better criticize me.'

"Even today," Downs continues, "if she sees something played back and she doesn't like what she did, she sets out to correct it. I think that explains her longevity."

Walters says, "I've been on the air for twenty-six years, and I hope I've changed somewhat over the years. If someone doesn't, then there's something wrong with him."

In 1976, after fifteen years of 5 a.m. wake-up calls, Walters became the first woman to anchor a nightly network-news program. When she signed the controversial five-year contract with ABC for a reported \$1 million a year, Walters became television's highest paid news anchorperson.

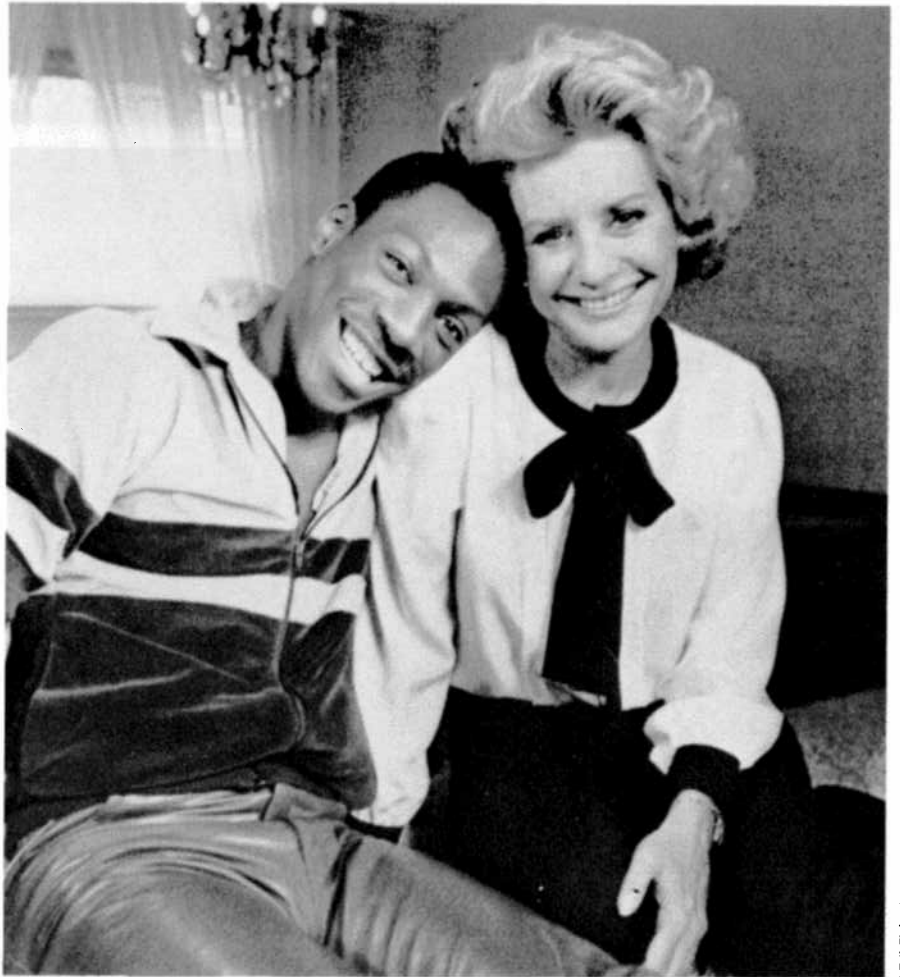
Walters says, "I think there was a great deal of anger on the part of many people in the media—and some of my peers—that I had dared to leave one network for another, that I was going to be the first woman anchor, and that the salary was huge."

Despite the enormous publicity generated by her new visibility, her tenure on the evening news lasted only nine months.

"It was really a terrible time for me. I felt I was drowning, with no life raft. Sometimes in this business you think, 'Oh, I was very lucky. I was there at the right time or the right place. How lucky I am, and I don't deserve this. But then I had to start all over, like learning to swim. I had to prove myself all over again, perhaps to myself as well. In a way, it may have been the best thing that could have happened to me.'

In 1977 she arranged an historic joint interview with Israel's Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egypt's President Anwar Sadat during the latter's state visit to Israel.

In 1984 Walters became the co-host of *20/20*. At the same time, her incisive interviews on the *The Bar-*



ABC Television

Walters conducted a 1983 interview with comedian Eddie Murphy on a rug—he still had no furniture in his Long Island, New York, home.

bara Walters Specials continued to attract high ratings, an Emmy Award, and significant press attention, with Walters alternately praised and criticized for her probing questions. The list of her guests includes prominent newsmakers, a Hollywood *Who's Who*, prime ministers, first ladies, and every American president since Lyndon Johnson.

"I sort of joke now and say that if one more person cries on a *Special*, I'm going to cut it out of the interview," Walters says. "Perhaps they become emotional because we do have time to sit back and go through childhood experiences and some of the things that have made them what they are. It's not just come in, plug your movie, and good-bye."

With the current airwaves generously represented by high-profile female journalists, Walters is proud of the role she played in achieving parity for women. "There was a time, certainly in the early days of the *Today* show, maybe even in the later days of the *Today* show, when it was a disadvantage to be a woman. I don't think it is today.

"I didn't start out waving a banner and saying, 'I'm going to change things for women.' But I think my work, my example, and some of the struggles I went through—and some of the terrible, terrible criticisms aimed at me—did change how women are perceived on television."

—T.L.