

Portsmouth Personality

By TAMARA WRIGHT



In tracing the career of an attractive, personable, and successful anchorperson for a network affiliate, one might think that such a career is glorious and basically easy. However, according to Diana Morgan, Co-Anchor for "The Daily News" (WAVY TV, Portsmouth Virginia), the job is not as simple as the viewers think.

MS. Morgan grew up in the Southside of Chicago under strict parental guidance. The eldest of three children, Diana's educational background was influenced by, as she puts it, "A long line of elementary school teachers." She majored in Elementary Education at the University of Illinois. Her career goals in education were somewhat interrupted when she obtained a job at a newspaper in her hometown. This job, which was obtained strictly by accident, gave Diana insight into her writing capabilities. She worked there about a year and a half as a general reporter and columnist, until the local office moved to another location.

Morgan's next plunge in media was that of a news reporter for WCFL--a local rock radio station in Chicago. She remembers "literally begging" for this job, and she did. "The first job they sent me out on was a news conference for Mayor Richard Daley," Morgan says,

recalling her intense fear, "but he was so nice...and that sort of boosted my ego and made me a little more comfortable with the job." Diana says that this was probably the most exciting job in her career because she worked in radio in Chicago, a city where there's "all kinds of news," and the type of people that "speak their minds regardless of whether you like it or not." A little over a year later, Diana and about 3/4 of the personnel working at WCFL lost their jobs to automation.

From here, the novice reporter fell back on her Bachelor's Degree and began substitute teaching. She best described this experience as "a jungle," and became disillusioned with teaching because of lack of student interest and lack of teaching supplies. Meanwhile, her interests were still directed toward broadcasting.

Diana, realizing after mailing numerous resumes to local radio and tv stations, that she could not get a job in Chicago, began sending resumes around the country. She got a response from WFIE-TV in Evansville, Indiana, and went to the small town for her first television audition. "I was so scared that I didn't make a single mistake!" Two days later, she accepted a job there as a reporter. Being a reporter at WFIE also meant being a photographer and an

editor for her own stories. Three or so months went by, and Diana was offered an additional job co-anchoring on weekends. This caused a problem for her because the anchor who had been working there for three years by himself made her feel very uncomfortable on the set. "It was the old Barbara Walters/Harry Reasoner syndrome...But it just made me try harder to do a good job. I said 'if I can get through this ordeal with him, I can survive.' So I went out of my way to be nice...and we had a workable relationship."

But being in a small town didn't appeal to the Chicago native, and after a year and eight or so months, she sent out tapes to look for another job. However, she became discouraged after having no positive responses. "It was a job in itself, finding another job."

The television station in Evansville taped one of Diana's broadcasts and sent it to Frank Magid Associates--a consulting firm that sends tapes to their clients around the country. A station in Nashville, Tennessee saw Diana's tape through Magid and contacted her for an interview. "At that point, I was ready to go anywhere to get out of Evansville," Morgan recalled. "They flew me down there and back in a private plane and I was sick as a dog...Anyway, I ended up taking the job, even though I

didn't like one aspect of the job, and that was that. I would be a morning anchor and I had to start at five a.m....I am not a morning person at all." While in Nashville, Morgan reported five times a week, and did a talk show twice a week.

The young television personality became disenchanted after encountering problems in Nashville, which included physical illness from overworking, so she quit and returned home. Diana taught for a while, and then began to miss TV, so again she sent out tapes, this time being more selective in accepting a new position.

Champaign, Illinois was the location of Diana's next broadcasting job. There she was a reporter and weekend anchor. After about three months, she began anchoring the 6:00 p.m. news show, and then the 5:00, 6:00, and 10:00 p.m. shows. "I got a lot of anchor practice," remembers Morgan. "I was the first black woman or man that they'd ever had in the anchor slot."

Still working in a small market in Champaign, the spirited co-anchor wanted to move to a larger news market. Her tapes and resumes flooded the mail once more, and WAVY-TV in Portsmouth, Virginia contacted her. She was hired as a co-anchor for "The Daily News" on a hope that the new structure for the news shows at WAVY would bring their ratings up. Diana reported for about three months until an anchor was hired. "I was so glad when Bob Grip got here, I could have screamed!" she adds.

Diana began anchoring the noon and 6:00 p.m. shows at WAVY, and then the 6:00 and 11:00 p.m. shows after her superiors decided that she and Bob Grip should be promoted as a team. In speaking of the first airing of "The Daily News," Ms. Morgan recalls the tension involved. "Everybody was depending on us so much. I got laryngitis a week before I went on the air, and I don't know whether it was from fear or what...There was a question as to whether or not I was going to have my voice back...but I was very nervous. I was so nervous that I didn't make any mistakes again!" And the rest is history for "The Daily News." Ratings are up, and WAVY-TV is only about five points behind the leading network news show.

As for Diana, she is enjoying her current anchoring position at WAVY, and gets along well with her co-workers. She says that recognition in Tidewater is

much more prevalent than anywhere else she has worked. "I had this little kid five years old scream and tell his mother, 'Look, that's the lady on "The Daily News."' And so the frustration and sacrifice was well worth the wait for this popular Tidewater co-anchor.

As can be seen by the long road Diana had to travel, television is no easy job. She says that unlike popular belief, being a double minority now makes no difference. "There are so many talented black females in this business now that you cannot have any kind of advantage over anyone else...It's hard to get a job in this business. You can look for a job for a year before finding one...you can send out a hundred resumes at a time, and maybe 18 of those will want to see a tape, and then maybe one of them will be interested after seeing a tape. So, it's hard."

"It takes a lot of dedication and determination," Morgan adds, "because after being kicked down so many times and getting all those rejections, just an average person would probably feel insecure and say 'Well, I'm not going to try anymore cause I'm tired of being rejected.' But you have to realize from the start that you're going to be rejected." And Diana learned her new philosophy of television news; it is a cosmetic form of entertainment. No matter what kind of day you're having, or how bad you feel, you have to "Push that personality button" and keep a youthful look in order to survive, because "People expect you to look the same every night."

When asked what piece of advice she could give to potential media personalities, Diana simply replies, "Don't get into the business if you won't see it through."

And so, Tidewater has a new and exciting anchor to watch, and Diana Morgan has a satisfying career. As for the future, Diana wishes for "good things," and hopes that things at WAVY continue to progress.

