

Chung makes her mark in man's world of TV news

By Suzanne Gill

Last month, while Connie Chung was readying her latest prime-time news magazine show, "Eye to Eye With Connie Chung," for its Thursday, June 17, debut, CBS News president Eric Ober made her an offer she couldn't refuse; a position as co-anchor of the network's weekday "Evening News" program. She now works side by side with Dan Rather and is only the second woman in TV history to hold a weeknight co-anchor spot. (Barbara Walters was Harry Reasoner's partner at NBC for two uneasy years in the 1970s.)

"I was shocked," Chung says. "I really was."

"Actually, the 'Evening News' job really is an offer I could never refuse. I have to admit it's what I've been working for for 24 years. Walter Cronkite is someone I watched ever since I was little and it was sort of an impossible dream."

"I didn't think that anyone would replace Walter in the first place. he was just an institution. But then again, as I got into the business, I could see it was something I could work toward. But I honestly didn't think that it would happen. I've always said that I didn't think a wom-

an would be in that job in my lifetime."

Why not? "Because it's been such a male-dominated profession, and because the evening news anchor job has always been (held by) men, and even though women have infiltrated in great numbers over the past 20 years, it just didn't seem as if there would be a crack."

"I'm a little pessimistic that way, I think."

Perhaps Chung finds pessimism more becoming than cynicism. She certainly has the qualifications for the top anchor job, as she is quick to point out, reciting a litany of experience in weekend, morning and late evening slots. It's the "same desk, same chair," she points out, adding "and I've been substituting for Dan so very much."

In other words, she's earned the job, yet the real test of her theory will come when the 61-year-old Rather retires and management determine whether to let Chung become the first woman to go solo in the top job in her field.

For her part, it's clear enough where Chung wants to be. Asked if she considered turning down the co-anchor spot in favor of devoting her-

self full time to "Eye to Eye," her third prime-time series, Chung offers a response that indicates how much more she values the weeknight anchor job.

"I know (CBS News management) too well," she says with a laugh. "They would never have said, 'But you don't have to do the other program anymore because we know you would be working too hard.' I just know them! It would never occur to them. I knew it was my responsibility. I had signed on to do the program, and I knew it wouldn't go away."

TRIVIA

Actor and art collector Vincent Price bought his first piece, a Rembrandt etching, when he was 12 years old. His allowance at the time was 5.50 per week.

HIGHLIGHTS



The first lady who worked to "beautify America," is profiled in the one-hour documentary "A Life: The Story of Lady Bird Johnson," airing Friday, June 18, on most PBS affiliates. The program combines photographs from the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library with interviews of family members, friends, contemporaries and Lady Bird herself to provide an intimate portrait of the hardworking wife of the late president. Shown here as a child in rural Texas, Lady Bird championed many causes during the LBJ administration, including the Head Start program.

