

HALTON'S PEOPLE

Reporting the best job for insatiably curious

By MAGGIE HANNAH
Herald staff writer

One of the best jobs around for the person who is insatiably curious has to be reporting. Says the top reporter for Brampton's CHIC radio:

"I was always nosy," Fran Niblock says, "and going into journalism is the easiest way to know what's going on. It gives you a legitimate right to ask all sorts of questions and find out what you want to know."

Mrs. Niblock landed her job with CHIC by being the right person in the right place at the right time.

Harry Allan, one of the two brothers who owned the station, contacted Ben Rose, one of the journalism course instructors at Sheridan College, asking for a second year student who was interested in a part-time job covering night meetings for the station. Mr. Rose told his students but no one was interested. When he got no response from second year students he mentioned it to first year students and Mrs. Niblock decided to try it.

ON MY OWN

"I phoned Tom (her husband) and told him I've got a job and went over to the station for six o'clock," she says. "Everyone was going home so no one told me anything about what I had to do. They just handed me a tape recorder and a map of how to get to Caledon East. They didn't hear my voice on tape or anything. I was on my own."

That was in April of 1977. Today she is the only reporter at the station who is full-time in the community attending meetings and carrying the special assignments that crop up.

"I like my job," she says. "It's a small station but I'm their prime reporter. If I went to a bigger station I'd be one of maybe 10. You get to do things there you wouldn't in a bigger station just because it's small. I said I wanted to go on the air and I got it. That would never happen in a big station."

Mrs. Niblock doesn't do on-air shows through the week but every other weekend she does a shift in the newsroom. The station's other eight reporters do daily shifts in the newsroom but only a bit of work on the street. Being cooped up totally would drive her up a wall, she says.

"I'm not crazy about working six days a week but if that's the only way to get air time then that's the way it has to be," she says. "I'm getting experience I'd never get a chance at in many other places and I'm lucky to be getting it. It will give me a far better chance when the time comes



A portable tape recorder is the broadcast journalists' irreplaceable tool and the only piece of equipment Fran Niblock was given when she first began covering meetings for CHIC radio in Brampton. The trick to being a good radio news reporter is to be brief and precise, she says, and it takes lots of practise to achieve the desired results.

(Herald photo)

that I want to go somewhere else."

Knowing what makes a good story wasn't something Mrs. Niblock grew up with. There was no connection with the news media while she was a girl growing up in Mississauga. She refers to herself as having had enough of "suburbia" when she left the family home to do her own thing. Her father's company transferred him East and she decided she was going West. She had never seen the Rocky

Mountains so she went to Vancouver.

ALLEY-CAT NERVES
"I just packed up and hitchhiked to Vancouver," she says. "I'd never do it that way now but in those days I had all the nerve of an alley-cat. I'm glad I went. I needed to get out on my own and get rid of suburbia. I was welcomed back with open arms but I'm sure I broke their hearts when I left my parents."

She finally came East again in time to visit her brother for Christmas in London. He was

managing a Big Steel clothing store and she moved in with him.

Before long Mrs. Niblock, her brother, and three other young people got together and rented a house. By sharing rent and food costs they all got a decent home at a price they could afford.

"It wasn't a flop house type of thing," she says, "where people just live there and dirty it up. Everyone had his chores and if they didn't do them there was hell to pay. We didn't have much in the way of furniture but everyone's parents gave them castoffs and we managed to furnish the place."

"I'll never forget the first time my mother came to visit us. She couldn't get over someone had cooked a roast of beef and Yorkshire pudding. I don't know what she expected - hamburgers or hot dogs, or something."

SIMILAR FAMILIES
"We all came from middle-income families with similar backgrounds," she says. "We all had the same sort of expectations from people so it was easy to live that way."

It was while she was in London that Mrs. Niblock got the urge to further her education. She didn't know exactly what she was looking for so she took a general year at Fanshawe College. In April of 1976 her husband began working in Bosch in Mississauga and they moved to Erin. Mrs. Niblock entered the first year of Sheridan College's two-year journalism course at the Oakville campus that fall. Just before Christmas they moved to a house on Main Street North in Georgetown.

He was commissioned a pilot officer in the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1955 and promoted to flying officer in 1956.

His main legal concerns in the past three years have been criminal litigation, estates and taxation.

Really?
"Before we got married, you told me you were well off." "I was but I didn't know it."

"Whatever people say about Harry Allan I'll always be grateful to him for giving me the chance to get into radio," Mrs. Niblock says. "He could have told me to take a hike as soon as he found out I was only a first year student. But he didn't. He gave me a chance."

Exactly how good the chance was might be debatable in the eyes of some people. Mrs. Niblock admits that most of what she did in the beginning was night meetings that no one else would take. Her very first meeting lasted until 3 a.m. and she had a class the next morning. She averaged three night meetings a week through April, May and June of 1977 and spent 40 hours a week or more on station work even though she was only a part-time employee on an hourly wage. Then in the summer the station news director asked her if she'd take a full-time job if he could get it for her.

TAKE THE MONEY

"I went to see Ben and Mr. Allan and they more or less advised me to take the money and run," she chuckles. "After all, the job was what we were after through the course and if I left the job to go back to the second year of the course I probably wouldn't get the job when I graduated. Someone else would have it by then."

Mrs. Niblock admits she had a hard time making the decision. The first year taught her the basics of print journalism and photography but nothing about the electronic media at all. Both radio and television news broadcasting are second year courses at Sheridan and she wondered how much she'd miss by not taking them.

"I came to the conclusion I'd probably learned as much already about broadcast journalism as I'd get in the course," she says. "Practical experience is a great teacher. You don't forget."

Being concise enough was the part Mrs. Niblock found hard. You only have room for about five or six lines in a 30 second spot and into that you have to pack what the story is, a comment from those favouring the issue and something from those opposing it. On top of that it must flow naturally so a listener can understand it. There's no going back to take a second look with radio the way there is with a newspaper. If the listener doesn't understand it immediately you lose him.

Radio reporters also contend with an hourly deadline rather than a daily or weekly one such as print journalists face.

"You have to be quick and precise," she says. "You can't go home and figure out an angle on the story the way print people can. The station wants it this hour."

COVERS COUNCIL
Mrs. Niblock says she is now covering "basically civics", Mississauga council, Peel Regional council, occasionally Caledon council with a few special assignments thrown in, like covering the unveiling of the 1980 cars for Ford Motors recently. She has done Ontario Municipal Board hearings too and anyone getting their updates on events in the Hydro hearings or the library hearing in Georgetown last year over CHIC radio would have heard her.

At one time Mrs. Niblock expected civic beats to get boring. After all, there are so many proposals for housing developments you can listen to before they all sound the same. The personalities of the councillors, however, keeps the whole process interesting, she says. After 1 1/2 years she is only now beginning to see the by-play that goes with votes.

"I've been there long enough now that councillors are beginning to trust me," she says. "They'll come up to me after a meeting, for instance, and ask if I saw the way so-and-so voted, then remind me that two weeks ago he swore he wouldn't support it. Then they'll suggest that such another person must have lobbied him."

GETTING RAPPORT

"Now they know me and I'm beginning to get that kind of rapport with them and that's nice. It's also nice that they'll answer telephone calls or call back when I call them. And I even get the odd tip now. But all you have to do is turn them once and they'll never trust you again."

Being a reporter is a weird responsibility, she finds. Since reporters are trying to pass on the news to others they should be the best informed people around and that entails a phenomenal amount of reading and listening to other people's broadcasts and just trying to keep up with the world. There's no way you can keep abreast of it all but you have to try, she feels.

Despite her enthusiasm and the rapport she has established with the community her job has been shaky for the past several months and may yet disappear.

The Allan brothers who own

ed CHIC for 15 years or so, were charged with stock manipulating and playing with company records and the company went into receivership in April.

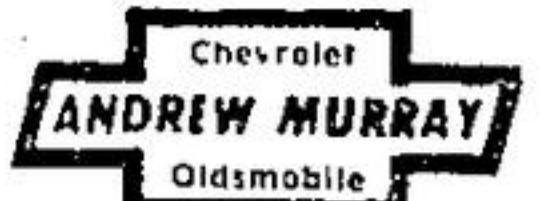
Early in the year before the Allen brothers were eased out a "bloodletting" occurred which saw 12 people come and go through the newsroom in two weeks. No one knew if they'd be there the next day, let alone whether their pay cheques would arrive. Job security picked up when the receivers took over the company but CHIC's fate is in the hands of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

The CRTC held hearings to decide on whether a French company, Civitas, should be allowed to buy the station but no decision has been announced yet. Civitas owns six stations in Quebec, including one

English language station, but this would be the first move out of that province. Since the company is all made up of professional radio people Mrs. Niblock feels it would be an excellent opportunity to learn with competent trainers if their bid is accepted. If it is not, however, there is a good chance the station could be shut down. Only time will tell.

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PC campaign manager named county judge

John Webber, a partner in the Brampton law firm of Lawrence, Lawrence, Stevenson and Webber, was sworn in last week as a county court judge for Dufferin County.

The appointment was announced Friday by Justice Minister Jacques Flynn. Mr. Webber, 46, served as

campaign manager for Progressive Conservative candidate John McDermid in his successful race for the Brampton-Georgetown seat in the House of Commons in the May 22 federal election.

Mr. Webber was admitted to the bar in 1959 and went to work for Bowyer, Beatty and

Andrews in Brampton. In 1961 and 1962 he was partner in the Andrews and Webber law firm, and in 1962 joined his present firm.

Mr. Webber was born in Oakville, but moved to Brampton when he was just a year old. He graduated from Brampton High School in 1952; Trinity College, the University of Toronto in 1955; and Osgoode Hall Law School in 1959.

He was commissioned a pilot officer in the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1955 and promoted to flying officer in 1956.

His main legal concerns in the past three years have been criminal litigation, estates and taxation.

Really?
"Before we got married, you told me you were well off." "I was but I didn't know it."

CHILDHOOD EDUCATION GROUP TO MEET

The Halton Association for Early Childhood Education in Ontario will hold a general meeting at Sheridan College, Trafalgar Campus, on Tuesday October 16 at 8 p.m. in room B 123. There will be a panel consisting of the following four agencies: Children's Aid Society, Public Health, Children's Assessment and Treatment Centre and Day Nursery Consultant for Ministry of Community and Social Services. Following the discussion will be a Question and Answer period. Refreshments will be served.

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