



# The News Sorority: Diane Sawyer, Katie Couric, Christiane Amanpour-and the (Ongoing, Imperfect, Complicated) Triumph of Women in TV News

By Sheila Weller

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**“Weller rivetingly recounts these gutsy ladies' time on the front lines... an inspiration for future generations of journalists.” --*Vanity Fair***

For decades, women battered the walls of the male fortress of television journalism. After fierce struggles, three women—Diane Sawyer, Katie Couric, and Christiane Amanpour—broke into the newsroom’s once impenetrable “boys’ club.” These women were not simply pathbreakers, but wildly gifted journalists whose unique talents enabled them to climb to the top of the corporate ladder and transform the way Americans received their news.

Drawing on exclusive interviews with their colleagues and intimates from childhood on, *The News Sorority* crafts a lively and exhilarating narrative that reveals the hard struggles and inner strengths that shaped these women and powered their success. Life outside the newsroom—love, loss, child rearing—would mark them all, complicating their lives even as it deepened their convictions and instincts. Life *inside* the newsroom would include many nervy decisions and back room power plays previously uncaptured in any media account. Taken together, Sawyer’s, Couric’s, and Amanpour’s lives as women are here revealed not as impediments but as keys to their success.

Raised in Louisville, Kentucky, Diane Sawyer was a young woman steering her own unique political course in a time of societal upheaval. Her fierce intellect, almost insuperable work ethic, and sophisticated emotional intelligence would catapult Sawyer from being the first female on-air correspondent for *60 Minutes*, to presenting anchoring the network flagship *ABC World News*. From her first breaks as a reporter all the way through her departure in 2014, Sawyer’s charisma and drive would carry her through countless personal and professional changes.

Katie Couric, always conveniently underestimated because of her “girl-next-door” demeanor, brazened her way through a succession of regional TV news jobs until she finally hit it big. In 1991, Couric became the cohost of *Today*, where, over the next fifteen years, she transformed the “female” slot from secondary to preeminent while shouldering devastating personal loss. Couric’s greatest triumph—and most bedeviling challenge—was at *CBS Evening News*, as the first woman to solo-anchor a nighttime network news program. Her contradictions—seriously feminist while proudly sorority-girlish—made her beyond easy typecasting, and as original as she is relatable.

A glamorous, unorthodox cosmopolite—raised in pre-revolution Iran amid royalty and educated in England—Christiane Amanpour would never have been picked out of a lineup as a future war reporter, until her character flourished on catastrophic soil: her family’s exile during the Iranian Revolution. Once she knew her calling, Amanpour shrewdly made a virtue of her outsider status, joining the fledgling CNN on the bottom rung and then becoming its “face,” catalyzing its rise to global prominence. Amanpour’s fearlessness in war zones would make her the world’s witness to some of its most acute crises and television’s chief advocate for international justice.

Revealing the tremendous combination of ambition, empathy, and skill that empowered Sawyer, Couric, and Amanpour to reach stardom, *The News Sorority* is a detailed story of three very particular lives and a testament to the extraordinary character of women everywhere.

*From the Trade Paperback edition.*

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## **Editorial Review**

Review

*New York Daily News :*

“This immensely readable book made headlines before publication for its irresistible gossip. It is dishy, but it’s also a close up and very personal examination of three women who broke all the barriers.”

**Kera Bolonik, *The New York Times Book Review*:**

“... it’s hard to come away from *The News Sorority* feeling anything less than admiration, if not reverence, for Couric, Sawyer and Amanpour, and sympathy for all the women... who had to wrangle with ratings, network politics and defiantly sexist executives, while managing the delicate egos of their male counterparts. And that is, in the words of the old CBS slogan, ‘very good news.’”

*Los Angeles Times:*

“...a well-reported and refreshingly fair-minded biography of these gutsy and influential newswomen. Given the complexity of the subject matter, the remarkable thing is that Weller has produced a book that manages to be both compelling and resolutely evenhanded. Even when the catnip of rivalry raises its hoary head, Weller chooses balance. There are lots of controversies, but they usually come along with opposing opinions from different observers and in a broader context.”

*The Washington Post:*

“It’s worth reading *The News Sorority* as both a handbook of cutthroat office politics and a cautionary tale. These women brought ego, ambition and a willingness to play just as rough as the boys to the newsrooms—and made history because of that.”

*Chicago Tribune (Liz Smith)*

"[D]aring, dashing... Sheila Weller has written "the" book of the year on TV broadcasting, a thing that may be a dying, rapidly changing art form, but it's definitely still going to need voices and faces and intelligence giving out the news no matter how much our socially gadget-manipulated changing world changes. There will always be stars and TV has had them in spades... This is a terrific book. I marked mine so many times, it is virtually unreadable. Believe me, if you like history and gossip and believe, like I do, that gossip IS history -- you will love reading about the big three."

***Vanity Fair:***

“Weller rivetingly recounts these gutsy ladies' time on the front lines of domestic and international war zones, political battlefields, and live morning television; the prejudices they've faced; the personal sacrifices made and losses suffered, as well as the backlashes that followed their every gain, fueling their ambition and building their resilience. Weller's portrait of how these extraordinary women, in the words of Sawyer, turn "pain into purpose" is an inspiration for future generations of journalists.”

***New York Daily News***

“This immensely readable book made headlines before publication for its irresistible gossip. It is dishy, but it's also a close up and very personal examination of three women who broke all the barriers in TV news in terms of what it took, where it got them and the price they paid.”

***Houston Chronicle:***

"Weller is brave to write biographies with more than one primary person at the center. Professional biographers know that such a decision complicates research and writing exponentially. In a previous book, Weller... tackled three female vocalists. That book... deeply touched the emotions of many readers I know, female and male. I suspect *The News Sorority* will, too. [It's] a book that makes age-old gender battles seem fresh.”

***NYCityWoman.com***

"[T]his book is not just the story of the fight against sexism waged by three plucky but different dames. *The News Sorority* is also a tale about the bygone heyday of network news... Yet it is filled with important truths—*Vanity Fair* style—about feminism in the news workplace... Weller is terrific in citing genuine and unique strengths: Amanpour's relentless reporting on the horrors suffered by civilians during the war in Bosnia and the plight of Darfur; Couric's campaign against the colon cancer that killed her first husband, complete with her on-air colonoscopy; Sawyer's instinct for inspirational pieces about people like the Chilean miners and her humane yet probing interview with Whitney Houston."

***Bloomberg Businessweek:***

“Weller's book is sure to be catnip to TV obsessives and people in the news business.”

***Buffalo News:***

“This is an important book.”

### ***Kirkus Reviews:***

“As she did in her fluid multitiered biography *Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell and Carly Simon*—and the *Journey of Generation*, Weller takes apart feminist icons of her generation—those who came of age in the 1960s and '70s—to see how they work and how they made it to prime time. Inspiring bios of today's professional heroines.”

### ***Booklist:***

“Best-selling author Weller draws on interviews with their friends and colleagues to offer portraits of the will and ambition each mustered to achieve iconic status. Weller details the personal tragedies they've dealt with... [and] also explores the unique personalities of these women and the set expectations among broadcast executives and viewers that they have had to overcome.”

### About the Author

**Sheila Weller** is a contributor to *Vanity Fair*, the *New York Times Book Review*, and *Glamour* and has written for many other magazines, winning numerous awards for her journalism. She lives in New York City.

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## INTRODUCTION

The News You Give Begins with

the News You've Lived

*Diane, Christiane, Katie: 1969, 1997, 2000*

### I. Pushing Past Grief: Diane, 1969

Twenty-three-year-old Diane Sawyer (she used her real first name, Lila, ironically, only in affectionate letters) was working as the first ever full-time female news reporter in her hometown of Louisville, Kentucky—on WLKY, Channel 32—in mid-September 1969. She had been on the job for two years, and she—a Wellesley graduate and former beauty queen—was itching to leave for a bigger opportunity, in the nation's capital. Still, Diane's years at WLKY had not been uneventful.

Louisville in the late 1960s had a roiling temper. Some of its residents were hell-bent on overturning the recent federally mandated civil rights advances. When black demonstrators peacefully marched through the streets to protest the stubbornly still segregated neighborhoods, angry whites rushed them, bearing swastikas, hurling bottles. On top of that, the country had just passed through a nightmare of a year, and Diane Sawyer of WLKY had reported on all of it.

Diane and her colleague Bob Winlock—who rejected being “the black reporter” as much as she disliked

being “the female reporter”—witnessed painful backlash against advances they had both been a part of. Diane was kept off the riot-scene beat by her gallant bosses—at least one frontline reporter had gotten beaten—but the city’s racial anguish was on clear display everywhere, including during the emotionally fraught press conferences she covered for the station.

Violence became commonplace. Early in her tenure at WLKY, Martin Luther King Jr. had been spat upon by a little white girl who couldn’t have been more than seven. During another visit, the civil rights leader’s skull had barely evaded a rock hurled through his car window (he later held the rock high and pronounced it a “foundation” of his struggle there). Then, of course, came Dr. King’s murder—close by, in Memphis—and that of Bobby Kennedy, in Los Angeles, during that surreally violent patch of spring to summer 1968. “Diane was disconsolate” at both assassinations, the station’s general manager, Ed Shadburne, says. Still, she dutifully went out to get person-on-the-street responses. That was being a reporter: Tuck in the pain and do your job. You were a witness.

But that was the ironic thing. Diane had *already* been a witness—indeed, a participant—in some amazing ground-level integration gains almost a full decade earlier. Her junior high and high school, Seneca, had integrated startlingly early, in 1957, well before the city’s neighborhoods, restaurants, restrooms, and theaters had stopped barring blacks or roping them off in dingy “Coloreds” quarters. By a fluke of the school’s newness and geography, the 1957–1963 Seneca kids (“a third white, a third Jewish, a third black,” the alums today like to proudly exaggerate) and their teachers were on their own, improvising a racial amity.

In 1958, when Diane was in the eighth grade (four years before James Meredith’s federally assisted singular integration of the University of Mississippi), white boys in ducktails and low-slung jeans had written GO HOME, NIGGER! on the walls when the first black students bravely but nervously entered, and some of the kids were beaten. But by the time her class reached eleventh grade, in 1961, the students were protesting restaurant segregation together. When the boys’ basketball team traveled to racist Kentucky towns for away games, the white players refused to go into the coffee shops that didn’t allow their black teammates; they *all* ate in their bus. Now, in 1969, the still resonating killings of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy seemed like a Molotov cocktail hurled against those fragile, cherished Seneca High advances.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Todd Crain:**

Information is provisions for people to get better life, information these days can get by anyone on everywhere. The information can be a know-how or any news even a concern. What people must be consider if those information which is in the former life are difficult to be find than now is taking seriously which one would work to believe or which one the resource are convinced. If you obtain the unstable resource then you understand it as your main information there will be huge disadvantage for you. All of those possibilities will not happen within you if you take The News Sorority: Diane Sawyer, Katie Couric, Christiane Amanpour- and the (Ongoing, Imperfect, Complicated) Triumph of Women in TV News as the daily resource information.

#### **Alma Young:**

Reading a book tends to be new life style with this era globalization. With reading you can get a lot of



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#### **Doris Brown:**

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