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## PROFILE

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# Brenda Wood

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### Dialogue With an Adventist Television Anchorwoman

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**B**renda Wood, 36, is a Seventh-day Adventist television anchorwoman and reporter for WAGA-TV in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A. She juggles an

arm-load of responsibilities in her broadcasting career and as a wife, mother, church leader, organization president, and public speaker.

In her 15 years of experience as an anchor and reporter, Mrs. Wood has managed to negotiate around working on the Sabbath. She is proof that one can cling to convictions and still be successful in a spotlight career.

Mrs. Wood has been a Seventh-day Adventist all her life. She was born and raised in Washington, D.C. After graduating from Takoma Adventist Academy in Takoma Park, Maryland, she attended Loma Linda University in Loma Linda, California, where she received a communications degree with an emphasis in film production.

She began her career as a reporter

at a Huntsville, Alabama, TV station. While there, Mrs. Wood hosted a face-to-face confrontation between representatives of the Ku Klux Klan and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. That program was later featured nationwide. Mrs. Wood worked in two Tennessee cities—Nashville and Memphis—before joining WAGA in 1988 as prime-time anchor and reporter. The station has since become the most-watched newscast in Atlanta during its 5:30 and 6:00 shows.

Committed to her career as a journalist, Mrs. Wood is also dedicated to her church activities and her family. Her husband, Keith, is a clinical psychologist and college professor. They have two daughters, ages six and nine.

#### **W**hen did you first want to be a television news anchor?

I never wanted to be one! I had always intended to produce and direct feature films. My first job opportunity turned out to be in television news, and in my mind, it was a temporary stepping stone. I was looking for an interim job while I was waiting to start my master's program at Ohio State University. And then I got talked out of getting my master's and into staying in the business as a reporter. One thing led to another, and I eventually got on as an anchor and moved up from there.

**You've obviously been very successful in your career. To what do you attribute your success?**

It's clear that God had a hand in all of this. For whatever reason, He wanted me to do this rather than film, because film was what I was going to do, and that didn't work out.

But in addition to that, I've just been very fortunate that in the

markets that I've been in, the viewership has responded to my style of anchoring. As a result, I've always worked at stations that have been number one in the market, or have achieved number one status after my having been there.

**Do you have opportunities to share your faith with colleagues and others with whom you come in contact?**

I say to people when they are in need of support, "I'll be praying for you," or "Would you like for me to pray for you?" And people see me from day to day. They see what I'm about. They know I'm active in my church. They know there are certain beliefs that I stick by under all circumstances, no matter what. Those are the kinds of things, I suppose, that equate into witnessing. There isn't an opportunity, nor is this the appropriate place, to do any kind of witnessing verbally. But I feel that being an example and a caring person is the strongest kind of wit-

nessing; when you live a life that people know is what you believe.

**Do you face difficulties as an Adventist in your career?**

Absolutely. The Sabbath is a *major* issue. And I have been fortunate in the jobs that I've acquired that the news directors would work around that. It's written into my contract.

When you are a prime-time anchor you work Monday through Friday and do the early and the late news. Well, being Adventist, you can't do that. And on Friday nights in the winter months, you can't even do the early shows.

I've had opportunities to triple my salary, to work in the top five national markets and to work at the networks, but I'm not in any of those places because I keep the Sabbath, and the news directors would not work around that.

**It's been said that there is a high rate of atheism among members of the media. Have you found this to be true?**

No. I know there are more

Christians in here than anything. There are a lot of cynics in the business, but that doesn't mean someone is an atheist.

In most newsrooms where I've worked, everyone believes in a higher being, a supreme authority. They may not call Him God, they may call Him something else. But most are Christians, and believe in God and Jesus.

**What gives you the most satisfaction in your work?**

Meeting people who are in situations they can't do anything about, and helping them through exposure in the media. I enjoy being the reporter who comes to their aid in that fashion.

There is satisfaction in publicizing broad-based problems such as the AIDS situation in our country because I'm helping to get the word out—that this is something that can't be ignored. There is satisfaction in being a conduit through which people learn about their community and begin to take action because of what they've learned.

**What frustrations do you face?**

There are lots of frustrations in this business. Time is a frustration. There's never enough time with my family, or to do things for myself. This business is very demanding. For the most part, it requires one to be married to it, which is not always healthy for a personal relationship.

It's also frustrating sometimes when I see a problem that needs coverage, and I can't get the coverage, for whatever reason. And then there's the technical frustrations of having worked all day or all month on a piece and the machine eats the tape. Whenever you're dealing with technology, things like that can happen.

**How do you balance your work life with your home life?**

I'm fortunate to have a husband who is supportive of my career and of me, and is very committed to our family. He has always been there in whatever capacity I needed him.

Also, my mother lives with us,

and she helps take care of the girls. I realize I'm lucky. Any career woman who works outside the home has the same issues to deal with.

**Tell us about your family.**

My husband, Keith, is a clinical psychologist and assistant professor of psychiatry at Emory University's medical school. He helps train medical students, and also has a private practice. It's a very, very busy life-style for both of us.

My girls are six and nine. The oldest is Kristen and the youngest is Kandis. I'm very young as a parent, so I have much to learn, but part of what makes our family successful right now is that we cherish the time we do have together. One of the things they say repeatedly is, "Is tonight Sabbath?" "Yes." "You'll be home tonight?" "Yes." "Oh, goody! We can be together." And so we all look forward to Sabbaths for a lot of reasons.

**What church-related activities are you involved with?**

My husband and I both sing in the choir. I'm the director for the new members' committee and he's family-life director. Also, I'm establishing an organization within the church called Friendship Force, which links old church members with new ones. It's a buddy-system, one-on-one, and very personal. I'm also the president of the Southern Society of Adventist Communicators.

**Give us an example of your typical day.**

For instance, tomorrow I have an interview at 10:30, and another at 11:40, and another one at 2:15, and then I have a speaking engagement at 7:00 that night. That's in between writing and being on-air for the 5:00, 6:00, and the 11:00 news. And I tape a talk show every Thursday night. My normal day runs until midnight or later.

I've got a series on "Teens and Sex" that's hitting the air on February 6, and I'm doing another project about battered women.

When I'm doing these projects, I usually get between four and six hours of sleep. A lot of times I have to come in on Saturday night and Sunday, but I'm really trying hard not to do that.

The Sabbath is wonderful. It's the one 24-hour period I can count on. I'm really lucky, because my colleagues can't even count on that.

**What advice do you have for Adventist youth interested in broadcasting careers?**

You have to be dedicated. What troubles me with a lot of communications students is that 70 percent of them have stars in their eyes. They all want to be TV anchor people, and, of course, not all of them can do it. If communication students could get beyond that and see that there are other significant jobs in television news and news in general, they'd be a lot better off.

This is an extremely difficult time for broadcast journalism. TV stations and networks are needing to cut back on their expenditures, and they're doing it by cutting personnel and making those who do have jobs wear two or three different hats or work extra hours.

For every person who's here, there are probably 100 who want their jobs, here in Atlanta, at this station. And trying to get hired somewhere is very competitive. And then once you get it, it's not a bed of roses. It's a lot of hard work. Very little of it is glamorous.

Students who are willing to face all of this should give it all they've got, and be prepared to stand firm in their beliefs.

**Jennifer A. Jas**

*Jennifer A. Jas will graduate in May 1992 with a B.A. in journalism and a religion minor from Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists in Collegedale, Tennessee, U.S.A. She and her husband Raul live near Collegedale.*