

## Six Questions with Ann Compton



Compton visited March 16, pictured here with NT news staff | NT News

New Trier alumnus and Hall of Honor member, Ann Compton, is the former White House correspondent for ABC news, and has been a journalist for 41 years, covering seven presidential administrations. After retiring in 2014, Compton was brought back to cover the 2016 political conventions for ABC. She is now a member of the Journalism Hall of Fame and the National Radio Hall of Fame.

### How would you describe the profession of journalism?

Journalism has been transformed by the Digital Age. The reporter's job is still the same - discover what is going on in our world that affects people's lives and share that information in a way that is clear, fair, and accessible to the general public. The internet has spawned thousands of information sites in addition to those posted by mainstream newspapers and broadcast stations. Too many of those new sources do not have the same commitment to accuracy and fairness that professional journalists hold. I fear that a growing number of news consumers are not getting their information from trusted sources.

### How has journalism changed since you began working in it? What has remained relatively the same?

I like the idea that journalism is an art, and a science. The need for good, solid, accurate information has never been greater. An informed American public will do a better job of holding their government accountable.

### What's it like to be a woman in the field of journalism? How has this role progressed over time?

I was the first woman assigned full-time to the White House beat by a major TV network (ABC News, December 1974). The playing field has become far more level for women as news departments made a real effort to hire and promote them, and America's viewing audiences came to accept women as equal voices of authority on the air. (As an aside, journalism has not been as successful in diversity in race and ethnicity.) One happy result of this is that your generation grew up seeing women in the workforce as normal and right. And mothers working while they also raise families has become a standard of normalcy in the U.S. and in television journalism.

### What do you think of the current administration's relationship with the media? How does it differ from the media's relationship with past administrations?

I have covered seven US presidents, beginning after the tumultuous years of the Watergate scandal in which news reporting uncovered wrongdoing in the Oval Office and led to the only resignation in disgrace in US presidential history. Those American leaders treated me with respect, grace, and honesty. The "media" is now a much bigger, much more diverse industry, with some so-called "news organizations" way too eager to take sides and political positions. This administration is led by an unconventional president who has never been in government service, but has been in television entertainment, and he has chosen to make the professional news media his favorite target. I never thought I would hear a president call the mainstream news media "enemies of the American people." It saddens me, and pains me personally. Isn't the press the exact opposite of that?

### What would you mark as the "highlight" of your career?

Every reporter has favorite stories and news events, and with over 41 years at ABC News I could fill a book with them. But to stand in the presence of an American president in a moment of crisis, and see history unfold before my eyes has been a rare privilege. Two extreme moments: Christmas 1991 when I left my four little children and husband at home with their holiday toys under the Christmas tree. I went to the White House to report live as Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev announced at the Kremlin that the old communist Soviet Union was disbanding, ending a half century of global power struggles with the free western democracies. That changed the map of the world. The second was Sept. 11, 2001, as terror attacks brought down the World Trade Center Towers in New York and a wing of the Pentagon, with more than 3,000 innocent civilian casualties. It just happened to be my day to travel with the President on Air Force One, as the lone reporter's voice informing the nation on how the President was responding to the attacks. A sobering and challenging ten hour odyssey.

### What tips would you give for students who hope to follow in your line of work?

The whole concept of media is changing before our eyes. I covered stories before we had computers, no cell-phones, no Internet, and none of the instant ability to send messages around the globe. Who knows what the frontier will look like even four or eight years from now? And how will people get their news? But the need will always be there for Americans to be well informed and strong participants in support of democracy. We will always need, and I hope value, reporters who make it their responsibility to keep Americans informed, especially on how their government is upholding the public's trust.

# Trump's America makes media enemy



by Bella Geroulis

As the Trump administration enters its 100-day mark, the White House staff has begun tackling the plethora of issues that plague our country both here and abroad.

A notable feat of POTUS Donald Trump and his administration has been their continued "war on media."

Though the media has always acted as somewhat of a fourth branch of government, past presidents have never made a point of targeting the media or demonizing it quite like the Trump administration has during his presidency or campaign.

It's no surprise that a president would have a love-hate relationship with the press. What with their sometimes unfavorable statistics and reporting, the press represents a portion of the country that disagrees with the White House.

What is surprising, however, is Donald J. Trump's constant criticism of any and all media outlets that re-

port anything even remotely against him, even if that criticism is based on facts.

This lack of trust in the press that the Trump administration continues to stir among the American people sparks a sense of fear in anyone who knows the value of a free press.

Without a separate, non-partisan outlet to report on the happenings in Washington, how are we the people supposed to stay alert to government actions that directly affect us?

Most U.S. citizens and those around the world take Trump's accusations against the media with a grain of salt. Those who are skeptical of Trump's claims that the press is a "failing industry" and that what they report on is false, still heavily rely on different news outlets to act as a "check" on Trump and his administration.

Senior Jake Ladderman is one of these people. He doesn't believe that Trump has really swayed anyone against the media. "Trump's claims about 'fake news' just seem like a joke," Ladderman said, "His attacks on the media just make those who already disliked Trump dislike him even more, and those who voted for him are hearing what they want to hear."

Ladderman, among others, agree on that last point. Time and again it feels as though Trump is

reading from a script that his voters have indirectly written for him.

First and foremost, Trump is a businessman. There's no denying that throughout his campaign he knew exactly what to say and do in order to sell himself as a brand.

Without generalizing, Trump voters voted Republican in 2016 in part because they had a fundamental distrust of the government.

It's no surprise, then, that he has been attacking the very thing that is constantly working against him. If a negative review came out about one of his investments or properties, it would be understandable that he would respond to that review.

But should Trump be treating his presidency as a business? Should he be generating a sense of distrust in the media simply because they hurt his name and his brand?

Though most people would agree that Trump's stance on the media is outlandish, it's important to note exactly what it is that the media chooses to report on in regard to Trump and his presidency thus far.

Trump has had so much negative press than any other president in modern history. The media and news outlets have become polarized with some only writing favorably about Trump and others only reporting on what they think is negative about the administration.

New Trier alumnus Alyssa Faber said that this divide in the news is what's driving the war on media, not necessarily Trump's words. "I think a number of people have been influenced to think that the media is evil due to the way he portrays it," Faber said, "but I also believe that most people will continue to trust the sources that they find to be most suitable to their opinions."

This divide in the media between left wing and right wing sources is something that has been building for the past 50 years, and the only thing it needed to fully develop like it has is a figure like Trump. Someone who is so polarizing, and so controversial.

So was this media war bound to happen? To answer that question, look no further than Trump's own social media accounts.

Trump's activities on platforms like Twitter have drastically increased since he decided to run for president back in June of 2015. Since then, not only has he posted consistently but the content of his posts has changed as well.

His online persona went from one type of businessman to another. Gone are the days of Trump using social media to promote his businesses, now his timeline are filled with his political achievements and attacks on those who disagree with him.

So to answer the previous ques-

tion, no. This war on the media was not bound to be this explosive or controversial. Donald Trump has made a conscious effort to instill a sense of distrust among the American people towards the media, and he's even using his own social media platforms to do so.

Whether or not you stand with Trump, this fight to delegitimize something that has been held sacred enough to be ensured in our Constitution should alarm everyone.

Where would we be without a free and fair press? What would our government look like if there were no way of communicating what was going on in Washington to the people that it governs?

As with all things in life, something positive has come out of this negative. Now more than ever we need an informed nation. We need a nation that cares enough about what's going on to take the step to make sure that the news they're receiving is the truth and not just opinion. And we have that.

We have news outlets which continue to rise up and provide reliable news in the easiest way possible. Trump is making America great again, but not in the way he thought. He's making America more aware, more invested. And for that, I thank you, Mr. President.

## The New Trier News

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