



GOLD & SILVER CIRCLE PROFILES

by Kevin Wing



By all appearances, it's difficult to believe that **Joyce Mitchell** began working in Sacramento television 40 years ago this year.

That was 1975, the year **Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme** - a member of the infamous "Manson Family" of **Charles Manson** fame - attempted to assassinate President **Gerald Ford** during a visit to Sacramento that September. And, **Edmund G. "Jerry" Brown, Jr.** was serving his first term (and his first incarnation) as governor of California.



Joyce Mitchell, in her home office in Carmichael

for that matter - for four decades. And counting.

Even though Mitchell no longer works daily in a television newsroom as a news producer, special projects producer or executive producer, she is hardly far removed from the business. She knows her stuff. And, she is more well-connected than her modesty would ever let you believe.

Among other things, that's what Sacramento television stations were covering on their newscasts back then. And Mitchell wanted to be a part of it all.

And so, it's even more difficult to believe that before the Sacramento native became a news intern in 1975 at KCRA, Mitchell was already working as a political reporter for the state Capitol press corps.

But, you'll have to believe it, because it's true. Her youthful looks scoff at any evidence that Sacramento's hometown gal has been in television news - or in journalism,

The four-time Emmy Award-winning Mitchell, who, in 2010, was inducted into the *Silver Circle* of the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Art and Sciences, remains very much involved in the business. In 2013, she was elected to serve as Governor representing Sacramento on the Board of Governors of this Chapter. For the last 14 years - since 2001 - Mitchell has been serving as president of her own production company, 4U Productions. And, while she may own her business, she is very much involved with every project her production company takes on, from writing to producing to conducting interviews.

And, from 1975 to 2000, Mitchell's name was synonymous in Sacramento with KCRA, and later, KOVR.

She has been there.

Born in Sacramento to **Louis** and **Helen Mitchell**, she grew up on the east side of town, attending Sacramento High School before graduating from Sacramento State University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in government journalism. In high school, she wrote for the campus newspaper and knew that getting a hall pass meant more than just being excused from class to interview someone. It meant having unique access to administrators and people in positions of power. That was intriguing to the teen-aged Mitchell.

Mitchell loved writing poetry, but she knew early that being a poet wasn't going to support her.

"I always wanted to write poetry, but I knew I'd never make a living at it, so I found journalism," she says.

By the mid-1970s, with her college education behind her belt, Mitchell decided that simply wasn't enough, returning to Sacramento State to study for her Master's degree in communication studies.

It was during this time that she was a writer and a political reporter for Capitol News Service. She eventually became bureau chief.

"This was during the heyday of (San Francisco mayor) **George Moscone**, and (then-state Assembly speaker) **Willie Brown**, and Jerry Brown," Mitchell says. One thing led to another, and



Those Were The Days

Mitchell, in an early photo taken at her desk at KCRA

in 1975, she found herself at KCRA as a news intern.

"I started as an intern, then became assistant to the elections producer at the station. It was an election year (1976)," Mitchell says. "I put grad school on hold to go to work for KCRA."



Production company shoot

*Mitchell, with photographer and director of photography, **Ken Day***

KCRA made history in the late 1970s when its news bosses promoted Mitchell to be a producer. Back in the day, TV news was a male-dominated industry in most markets around the country, and Sacramento was no different. Only one female had ever produced a television newscast in Sacramento up to that point. And, let's not forget that California's capitol city has been served by television since the early 1950s.

Some 25 years later, Mitchell came along, becoming only the second woman in Sacramento television history to be a producer.

"After a year of producing on Saturday nights, I was given the 11 p.m. show. That was a big investment in me," Mitchell says of KCRA.

Mitchell says KCRA's 11 p.m. newscast was, perhaps, "the highest-rated 11 p.m. newscast in the country", so the pressure was on her to keep the Sacramento Valley tuned in to KCRA.

"I was always under pressure to keep doing better," she adds.

Women had been making inroads in TV news by then, but mostly on camera as reporters and

After her elections assignment, Mitchell eventually went to work in the station's traffic and promotions department.

"I learned how a TV station ran," she says. "When you work on the daily log, you really understand how things work from a business standpoint."

Talk about effective networking. As an intern, Mitchell was getting connected. On her last day as a news intern, she spoke with then-KCRA general manager, **Don Saracino**. She told him it was her last day as an intern and Saracino asked Mitchell what she wanted to do in her career.

"I told him that I wanted to work in the KCRA newsroom," she explains. "So, Don called the newsroom and told a manager to hire me, and I was hired as a writer."

Mitchell became a writer for the station's 5 and 11 p.m. newscasts. She then began producing the news on Saturdays.

anchors.

"But, I wanted to be a boss. Usually men are the bosses, and women are in front of the camera," Mitchell says. "I wanted to be a boss. I like to say that I wanted to be **Stan Atkinson's** boss."

Wow, that's big time.

You remember Atkinson (***Silver Circle, 1986***). The longtime primary anchor at KCRA who made the station's "Where the News Comes First" a household phrase during his tenure there from the 1970s to the 1990s. Later finishing his illustrious career at cross-town rival KOVR in the 1990s (he also worked in the Bay Area, at KTVU, in the early 1970s), Atkinson is considered by many to be the dean of Sacramento television news.

"I knew it was a male-dominated workforce, but I was determined to break in," Mitchell says. "I was determined to change the landscaping and change the culture. I wanted to make change. Being an anchor or a reporter wasn't appealing to me. That's why I felt that being a writer would allow me one day to be a producer."

Within two years, she was producing the news at KCRA.

And from then, and right through the 1980s, Mitchell was KCRA's prolific and ever-capable producer.

But, you'll recall she put her grad school studies on hold to work at Sacramento's NBC station. While working full-time, Mitchell eventually returned to finish her grad work. Nine years after joining KCRA, she received her Master's degree in communication studies. The year was 1984.

Always independent-minded, Mitchell took advantage of her good fortune at KCRA to buy a small house for herself. "I was always

progressively thinking, and I always wanted to be a homeowner," she says. "I worked and I went to school. I was someone with goals, and I wanted to accomplish them. Not just for me, but as



Par For The Course

Mitchell's producing skills allows her to be versatile on location shoots

an example of an independent woman."



A fourth Emmy win for Mitchell

Mitchell remained at the CBS station for 10 years until 2000, when she decided it was time to leave TV news fulltime.

For her, it was just time.

But, not one to rest on laurels, Mitchell bounced back the following year, forming her own

Throughout the 1980s, Mitchell did it all at KCRA.

"No job was beneath me," she says. "I was always about teamwork. KCRA is where I was taught that TV is a team sport. I need to be there to work with others, and I needed others to work with me. I did what I needed to do to get the product on the air."

But, as some producers in the business may attest, Mitchell admits that producing newscasts for a long time took its toll. It can take away a newscaster's "freshness," she says.

In 1988, after 13 years at the station, Mitchell decided it was time for a change, and she left KCRA. To this day, the station holds a very special place in her heart.

"KCRA was home. My friends today are many of the people I worked with at KCRA," Mitchell says.

Once she left the station, Mitchell vowed never to be a fulltime news producer again.

In the late 1980s, she had a baby, becoming a single mother to son,

Jameson.

She also began teaching television writing at Sacramento State.

But, a year later, KOVR hired her to be special projects producer. It was a very busy time, Mitchell says, between being a mother and working at KOVR.

production company, 4U Productions, "TV rebels with a cause", as she puts it. Now in its 14th year, her company specializes in social cause television.

Among her clients, Mitchell counts the state of California, the California Air Resources Board, and KVIE, the PBS station in Sacramento. Her clientele also includes non-profit organizations, such as Pathway to Prevention, whose focus is on drug addiction among children.

"Everything I do today is cause-related," she says. "Even with the Air Resources Board. It's about asthma, and the quality of our air. I feel that it is important to do this kind of television. Television is a powerful tool, and I feel it's a responsible thing to give back to the community."

There is no doubt that Mitchell loves what she does.

"I love it, otherwise I wouldn't be doing it," she explains. "I have to love it to do it, but it's a lot of work. I have to write grants. I have to find the money to produce the programs that I produce. It's a lot of work. Sometimes, I will work on a project day and night. I rarely take lunch. But, I feel like I'm making a difference in the world. And so, it's worth it to me."

Last year, KQED in San Francisco called Mitchell to ask her to produce a live gubernatorial election debate between incumbent Jerry Brown and his challenger, **Neil Kashkari**. She assembled an entire crew of producers, camerapeople and engineers to pull off the live telecast. It was not an easy feat, but the former KCRA executive producer succeeded.

The live telecast originated from KVIE in Sacramento, KQED's sister PBS station.

Last May, a television project near and dear to Mitchell's heart aired on four CBS stations in California. *A Choice to Heal - Mental Health in California*, was produced by Mitchell and hosted by actress **Mariel Hemingway**. Hemingway is a mental health advocate. Her famous grandfather, **Ernest Hemingway**, and her actress-sister, **Margaux Hemingway**, are among seven relatives who committed suicide. The documentary, which aired on CBS stations in Sacramento, San Francisco, Fresno and Los Angeles on May 31, focused on the prevention and early intervention of mental illness, an approach that is at the forefront of changing and improving the nation's mental health care system.

The documentary aired during



Mitchell, joined by actress **Mariel Hemingway**, who served as host of *A Choice to Heal -- Mental Health in*

Mental Health Awareness Month. *California*

Mitchell knows that everyone has a story to tell.

"Once you start meeting people, and if you see them sick, or dying, there's no turning back," she says. I'm just very involved with the cause. I care too much."

It is an understatement to say that Mitchell is well-accomplished in her four decades in television. For someone who was encouraged by her grandfather to enter a Sacramento beauty pageant in her teens, it hasn't been a lackluster, ordinary career for Miss Perfect Type (newspaper jargon; it's the pageant title she won).

Mitchell, who has an identical twin sister, **Janice Mitchell**, enjoys life in Carmichael with her husband, Dr. **Eric Reininga**, a psychologist, and their son, Jameson.

When not working on a television project, Mitchell finds solace in painting and her love of art. She paints in oils, and is self-taught. She sells her paintings, and the proceeds are directed to her non-profit charitable organization, the Capitol City Aids Fund, which she co-created in 1997.

To relax, she also enjoys cycling, long-distance cycling, working on her non-profit charity and playing Scrabble.

That is Mitchell's world.

When it comes to her life's work - telling stories for television - she says this.

"Everyone has a story to tell. We just have to figure out the right way to tell it. The world is a really fascinating place."

***Kevin Wing** is a San Francisco Bay Area-based producer for ABC News' Good Morning America. He also serves as editor of Off Camera and as vice president, representing San Francisco, on the Board of Governors of the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. He is also a 2013 Silver Circle inductee. Tweet Kevin @KevinWingABC*

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