



# Belva Davis Moore



**Class of 1989**

Silver Circle Profile By:  
*Kevin Wing*



It is very easy to see why **Belva Davis** is rightfully referred to as one of the hardest-working television journalists in the Bay Area.

Davis has done it all, and continues to do it all. She has been a television news anchor, reporter and host in the nation's largest market since 1966. No one else can claim that kind of longevity or the history Davis stands for, as the Bay Area's first African-American female television news anchor.

Add five years working in Bay Area radio and her Bay Area broadcasting career stretches nearly a half century.

Few women in their seventies anywhere in America can say they are about to begin a new television program, but Davis can.

She is one woman who is not ready to retire. She is on the go constantly, from rising early in the morning to calling it an evening just after the late news.

Davis, a seven-time Emmy® award winner, has been very busy lately, tending to various community organizations she is involved with, and preparing for the re-launch of *This Week in Northern California* on KQED Channel 9, the PBS station in San Francisco. The station is breathing new life into the long-running public affairs show, giving it a fresh look with a new set and a new format. It debuts October 9<sup>th</sup>.

Working on the new show is not the only exciting thing happening in Davis' life. Yes, it is true that her trophy case at home is filled with Emmy® statuettes and other regional, statewide and national honors, including accolades from AFTRA, RTNDA, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Bay Area Radio Hall of Fame, among numerous others. Yet another award was added to that collection on October 3<sup>rd</sup> when the Bay Area Black Journalists Association recognized her for lifetime achievement.

"I am truly honored," Davis says.

The veteran newswoman was inducted into the Silver Circle of the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in 1989. In 2005, she received the Chapter's Governors Award for her four decades of

commitment and involvement to the Bay Area television news industry.

Davis, of course, is not only a part of Bay Area television history, but she is also an important figure in the history of American broadcasting.

In 1961, she worked as a news announcer at KSAN Radio. She later joined KDIA Radio, where she says, "I really started to get some serious training."

A stint at KNEW Radio in 1965 came at a time when Davis says radio was just becoming desegregated.

"So my station manager hires this black woman – me," she recalls. "In the early days, these were uncharted waters. One day, he said I didn't sound black enough. I just stared at him and said nothing. He didn't bring it up again."

At KNEW, Davis was a deejay, spinning **Petula Clark** records and other songs of the era for Bay Area listeners.

"I was also known as Miss KNEW," Davis says, doing double duty as the staff announcer for the station's public service announcements.

Finally, in late 1966, television came calling, and the history books were about to be rewritten. KPIX Channel 5, the Bay Area's number-one TV news station at the time, hired Davis as an anchor and reporter. Thus, she became the Bay Area's first African-American female anchor and the first black woman to anchor on the West Coast.

"I was hired in December of 1966, but didn't start until the next month," Davis says. "I came to TV with no training whatsoever. I learned TV on the job. By February of 1967, I started reporting. I would write VOs. It was all film, of course, so I had to learn how to edit film."

Davis has fond memories of KPIX. "When I worked at KPIX, it was a very special place," she recalls. "We had huge ratings. Five was big stuff. **Walter Cronkite** was rising to the throne, and CBS News had a strong evening newscast with him. To be associated with CBS was like everyone's dream, and I was living that dream."

Davis remained at KPIX for 11 years, making her mark – and historically so – as a talented anchor and reporter.

In 1977, Davis jumped ship, going to KQED to

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work in the newsroom there. Channel 9 had an excellent news reputation at that time, thanks to its landmark *Newsroom* program. But, the show was very expensive to produce and it eventually had to go.

November 1978 arrived with the "highest drama I've ever lived through", she says. The political strife that was taking place at that time at San Francisco City Hall came to an unfortunate climax with the assassinations of Mayor **George Moscone** and Supervisor **Harvey Milk**.

"It happened in the morning," Davis says. "I was still at home, getting ready to go into work at KQED. My daughter, **Darolyn (Davis)**, worked at City Hall, getting some experience on local government that started out as a summer job. Darolyn called me. She was hysterical. She said she had heard gunshots at City Hall. The place was in chaos. I dropped everything and made it over to City Hall. I stayed around the crime scene long enough to comfort my daughter and get the information I needed, but then, I had to get back to Channel 9 to get the show going. We were so short-staffed at that time."

Davis was able to bring in the heavyweights of San Francisco at the time, including **Willie Brown**. As that fateful day wore on, Davis was on the air with Brown and other City Hall figures, reporting on the devastating news.

"We even had (acting Mayor) **Dianne Feinstein** on with us by phone, but we had technical difficulties much of the time with her phoner," Davis says.

Davis says the assassinations took a toll on her and her family, including her husband, **Bill Moore**, who was one of the first KTVU Channel 2 photographers on the scene at City Hall that morning.

"When you cover stories like that, it takes a serious toll on you. Bill and I were friends with the Moscones. It was past just being a story. They were our friends," Davis says.

In 1981 Davis went to work at KRON Channel 4 and remained there until 1999, all along retaining her long association with KQED.

At KRON, Davis was a weekend anchor, and reported during the week. She took part in the production of many documentaries with producer **Ken Swartz**, produced and reported numerous documentaries for the station, including programs on

the Moscone/Milk assassinations, and another on a shootout at San Quentin Prison called *Day of the Gun*.

"That was the first time the state Department of Corrections had released photographs of the bloody scene from behind prison walls. Those photos were so bloody," she says. "People were either repulsed by them, or they weren't."

Davis also produced documentaries on the Black Panthers, her trip to Kenya after the U.S. Embassy was bombed there and even took part in one about Seabiscuit.

Working at KRON through the 1990s brought more opportunities for Davis. The station, in 1994, launched BayTV, a 24-hour news channel, and created a 30-minute show for her. But, by 1999, Davis was ready to retire from the station. She would appear occasionally afterwards. She was such an integral part of the KRON newsroom that the station still maintains a staff mailbox for her.

KRON and KQED understood the "sharing" of Davis. "I had bosses at both stations who understood that the two didn't compete with each other. Still, I got a lot of flak for it. Some people would tell me I was allowed to work at both stations because of the color of my skin."

Davis has worked for some of the best in the business, helping her to mold her high standards for broadcast journalism.

"When I first started, you didn't go on the air with a story until you confirmed it with three sources," she says. "These days, what used to take three people to do something now takes one. I'm not saying the quality is bad, but the framework is there for it not to improve in terms of accuracy and believability. Before, it used to be to get the story and get it right. Now, it's just get the story."

Davis, as a historic broadcasting pioneer in the Bay Area, is one of the few American journalists whose work is featured in The Newseum in Washington, D.C. "I'm very proud of that honor. I think I got there for all the wrong reasons, such as my skin color, but it got me there."

She says she is a survivor in the business because of her tenacity and love for the industry. "I have always just wanted to be one of the team,"

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Davis says. "Bill and I have worked very hard to get to a certain place in this business, and I couldn't have done it without him."

It's very evident how much Davis loves the Bay Area. She had an opportunity to work for CBS News in New York at one time. The offer was on the table. Davis and her family went to New York for the interview but then realized it was not for them. They flew back home.

"Part of the reason Bill and I hung around the Bay Area was to be involved in the Bay Area community," she says. "Take part in things, getting involved. I've always tried to stay close to the people we cover as best as I could, by being a regular citizen. We're just regular people, trying to raise a family. As a result, our news sources have always been good because Bill and I have stayed connected. Given the demands of the job, I don't know if you can expect that out of a reporter today. But, in the old days, it was a wonderful way to pick up a story."

Thinking back to her beginnings at KPIX in the mid-1960s, Davis remembers Channel 5 anchor and reporter **Wanda Ramey**, who passed away this summer at the age of 89. Ramey made television history when KPIX hired her, becoming one of the nation's first female news anchors

"I owe Wanda an awful lot," Davis says. "She helped me find stability in the business. Wanda was the woman in the newsroom, and then, I came along and joined her. We'd met in radio, originally. Wanda was just a really terrific gal and really helped me when I got into the business. She set the example that I tried to follow."

And, Belva Davis has followed it very well.



*(Kevin Wing pens Gold & Silver Circle profiles each month for "Off Camera." He is a news writer at NBC Bay Area/KNTV in San Jose and is a host and producer of travel programs, including "Catch a Wave.")*



## Newscast Changes

KSEE (Channel 24.1) President/General Manager **Matt Rosenfeld** decided to stop producing a 10 p.m. weekday newscast for KAIL (Channel 7.1) so he could focus the station's resources solely on content for the local NBC affiliate.

One way he used those resources was to launch a 7 p.m. weekday newscast on September 21st.

*KSEE24 News at 7 p.m.* is a 30-minute program and is the first locally produced news at that time in the Fresno market. This time period is usually filled with game shows, reruns of network series or entertainment programs.

Rosenfeld hopes everyone will watch the new newscast, but the key audience will be those who are busy after work and don't have time for the traditional 5, 6 or 6:30 p.m. weekday newscasts.

The newscast, anchored by **Carolyn Bruck**,



**Carolyn Bruck**

won't originate from the station's main anchor desk but from an adjoining studio with a 175-inch television monitor.

The addition of the 7 p.m. newscast means KSEE now produces seven hours of news — airing 4:30 a.m. to 11:35 p.m. — each day. No staff has been added to deal with the additional work.

"There are a million different reasons why we should do this show. It is a way to serve local viewers more while highlighting the news talent and sources we have. I also think it will make financial sense," Rosenfeld said.

