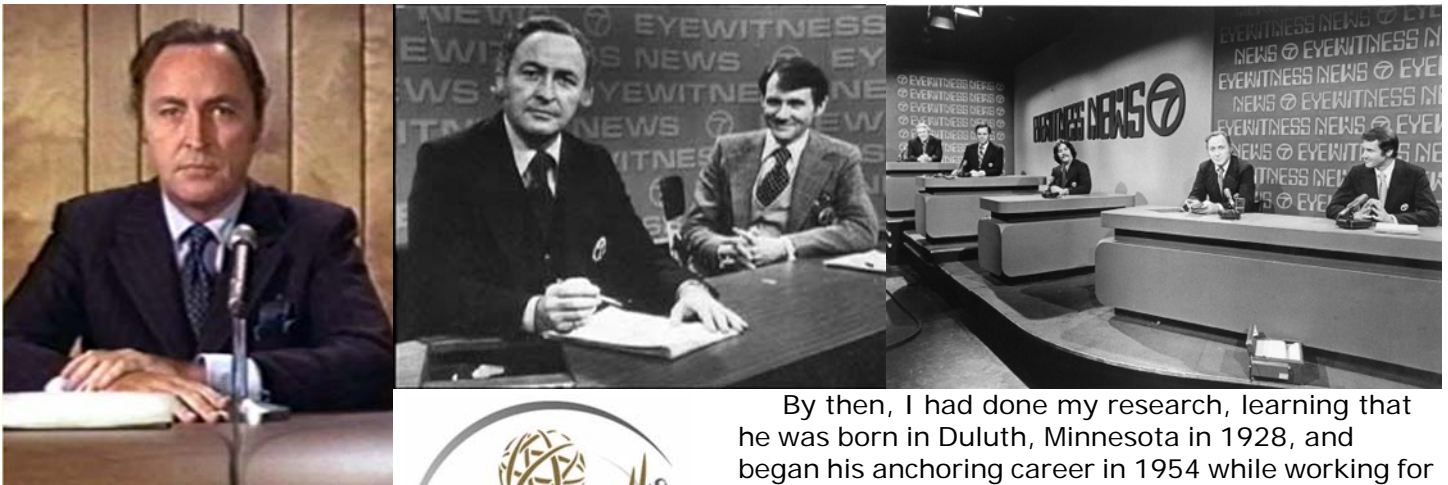


Roger Grimsby: A Face from the Sixties



Class of 1994

Silver Circle Profile
By: Kevin Scott Wing



For seven years in the 1960s, **Roger Grimsby** (*Silver Circle Class of 1994*) was the news anchor and news director at KGO-TV in San Francisco. While perhaps best-known, post-San Francisco, for his 18 years as a news anchor in New York City, Grimsby was a colorful television news personality in the Bay Area during his reign here. He was one of those hardened, tough, gruff television TV journalists who, likely today, would scoff at any reference to being called a “personality.”

Grimsby anchored KGO-TV’s news years before I even knew I wanted to pursue a career in the business, and he had left San Francisco for New York well before I even had heard of him. That’s what happens when you’re someone like me who grew up here in the 1970s. But, I imagine my parents’ generation knew exactly who he was on the Bay Area television airwaves of the 60s.

Grimsby was famous, and he was equally infamous. And, years later, my knowledge of who he was here in the Bay Area – and what he meant to the industry here and around the nation – drew me to ask him if I could interview him for a writing project I was working on shortly after my college graduation.

By the 1980s I knew that I wanted to pursue a career in television news. I relished learning all I could about the history of Bay Area television journalism. I soon learned who Roger Grimsby was. And, so it was in the early 1990s that I decided to contact him for the project. With the assistance of this Chapter’s then administrator, **Dick Robertson**, I successfully tracked down Grimsby in New York. He agreed to an interview; I, of course, wanted to meet him in person, and he said he would be coming to the Bay Area in a few weeks and would give me a call once he was in town.

By then, I had done my research, learning that he was born in Duluth, Minnesota in 1928, and began his anchoring career in 1954 while working for a Minnesota radio station. He soon desired to switch to the growing medium of television, working at several Minnesota TV stations before moving to St. Louis in 1959. Two years later, San Francisco came calling, and Grimsby moved west to join KGO-TV as its anchor and news director. He was a colorful Bay Area television newsman, who became known for beginning his broadcasts with the phrase, “Good evening, I’m Roger Grimsby, here now the news.” He would end his broadcasts with “Hoping your news is good news, I’m Roger Grimsby.”

As you might be able to tell, I was fairly intrigued by the time I had an opportunity to meet Grimsby in the lobby of the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco’s Union Square. The day before, he had called to announce his arrival in the Bay Area. I wasn’t home when he called, but he spoke to my then-wife, who was none too impressed with the telephone manners of the famously gruff, no-nonsense newsman.

“Kevin there? When’s he gonna be home? Tell him Grimsby called. I’ll call him back,” my then-wife repeated his blunt demeanor to me. “Who is THAT guy? He was rude!” Although I was sympathetic to her concerns, I was also concerned that she might have blown him off and ruined my chances of meeting with him. Yes I can laugh about it now. Back then she assured me that she was polite and agreeable with him.

Grimsby called back, and this time I answered the phone. “You still want the interview? Meet me in the St. Francis Hotel lobby tomorrow and we’ll get a drink and talk about the old days.”

Nervous and not knowing what to expect from this broadcasting legend, I met him the next day in the lobby as he instructed. I was looking forward to the experience. I had done my homework on all things Grimsby, and I was ready to grill him about his life and career.

During the next two hours, I took notes, and was thankful that Grimsby allowed me to record him with my mini tape recorder. Meeting him was some-

continued on page 15

Roger Grimsby



continued from
page 14

thing else; yes, he was gruff, short with his answers, but I was bowled over by the fact that he wanted to

know more about me and my ambitions. I began wondering who was interviewing who.

But I soon learned first-hand even more what an impact he had on Bay Area television news. In the '60s, he was a force to be reckoned with at KGO-TV. He helped the station to compete with cross-town rival KPIX.

Grimsby's commanding delivery, combined with his acerbic wit and larger than life TV persona, helped him to redefine Bay Area TV news during an age when the medium was growing incredibly, spurred by the assassination of President **John F. Kennedy** in 1963.

After seven years at KGO-TV, he moved on in 1968 to anchor the evening news at New York's WABC-TV. Two years later, he would be teamed with **Bill Beutel**, and New York's TV news "dream team" was born. It was during that time that Grimsby's innovative style of presenting the news came to be labeled "happy talk," though he regarded that description as derisive.

The team of Grimsby and Beutel lasted 16 years, and the pair dominated the evening news ratings wars so much that it led to imitations across the country.

In 1986, Grimsby became the news himself, departing WABC-TV for WNBC-TV, where he stayed two years. He then returned to the West Coast, anchoring in San Diego for independent KUSI-TV. He didn't last long there; the station eventually fired him.

In spite of his gruff demeanor, Grimsby had a wry sense of humor, off the cuff and often with the typical journalist's sarcastic intonations. He even appeared as himself on the big screen, with cameo roles in such films as *Ghostbusters*.

In 1995, two years after my interview with him, Grimsby passed away from complications of lung cancer in New York at the age of 66. When I learned of his death, I recalled my one meeting with him. To this day, I feel very grateful to have met the man who became the face of Bay Area television news throughout most of the '60s.

Silver Circle Class of 2011 Announced



Janice Gin

Richard Hart

Sherry Hu



Suzanne Shaw

Angelo Stalis

Jim Vargas

A stellar group of distinguished TV broadcasters will be inducted into the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of NATAS on Saturday, October 22, 2011, at the Parc 55 Wyndham Hotel in San Francisco.

The Inductees are: **Janice Gin**, KTVU Channel 2; **Richard Hart**, New Material; **Sherry Hu**, former KPIX CBS 5; **Suzanne Shaw**, KNTV NBC Bay Area; **Angelo Stalis**, KFSN ABC 30 and **Jim Vargas**, former KTVU Channel 2.

Stay tuned for more information about the *Silver Circle* CLASS OF 2011 coming up in the August issue of *Off Camera*. Please PASS THE WORD and SAVE THE DATE!

San Francisco/Northern California Chapter
Annual Meeting

Saturday, July 9, 10am-12:30pm

KTVU - 2 Jack London Square, Oakland

All NATAS Members invited

Attend the Board of Governors' Meeting

Special Guest **David Perry**

34th America's Cup Coming to San Francisco, July, 2013