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## Gold & Silver Circle Profiles



# GOLD & SILVER CIRCLE PROFILES

by Kevin Wing



## Wendy Tokuda

*Silver Circle Class of 2001*

**KPIX, KRON, KNBC**

**Wendy Tokuda** is synonymous with the Bay Area. And, with excellence in television journalism. As many of you know, Tokuda retired this summer after more than 40 years in television. She had worked in Seattle, and Los Angeles, and, of course, right here in the Bay Area, where she had worked for most of her career.

She made her mark early, coming to work at San Francisco's KPIX in 1976. Still in her 20s, she eventually rose to become one half of the legendary anchor team with **Dave McElhatton** (SC '88), creating appointment television in the Bay Area -- at 6 and 11 p.m. weeknights -- for many years with the station's *Eyewitness News*. People weren't just talking about them. People were watching them. It showed in the ratings. The team was No. 1 in the Bay Area throughout much of the 1980s.

Tokuda, who was inducted into the *Silver Circle* of the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences in 2001, is, much like who McElhatton was, a legend herself in our business. She has done it all. It's been a bit less than two months since Tokuda retired, and it's still taking a little time for most of us in the Bay Area to get used to no longer seeing her on television. These days, instead of seeing her walking through the newsroom, you'll most likely spy her tending to her lovely vegetable garden in her spacious backyard, the envy of everyone in her neighborhood.



One of the most prominent anchors and reporters ever to grace TV screens in the Bay Area, Tokuda's 40-plus years in television was



***Eyewitness News Dream Team***  
**At KPIX in the early 1980s, with (left to right) Joel Bartlett, Dave McElhatton and Wayne Walker**

wrapped up nicely in a celebrated, colorful career that included starting out in her hometown of Seattle before moving to the Bay Area in the mid-1970s to begin the first of what would ultimately be two tenures at KPIX. Tokuda's Bay Area career wouldn't be complete, of course, without mentioning her tenure at KRON, which she graced the TV screen for upon her return from Los Angeles in the mid-1990s, remaining there for a decade before returning to KPIX to finish out her career.

Tokuda began her television career at KING-TV in Seattle.

"The news director turned me down something like four times," Tokuda says. But then, he gave her a chance.

First a secretary for the station, she moved to the station's news department as a reporter.

After six months on the air, station management promoted her to weather anchor and science reporter.

"It sure didn't feel like a promotion," she says. "I told them, 'well, I don't know anything about the weather, or science.' And the news director said, 'Any good general assignment reporter can be a science reporter. And we're going to show you how to do the weather.'"

She did one weather rehearsal. That was it, she said. Then, they put her on the air, in front of the weather map, in which she used magnets to illustrate cold fronts, temperatures and sunny skies.

"I struggled to get a few words out, then fumbled through this horrible thing. It was torture. And, after that newscast, no one would make eye contact with me. You know what that means."

Afterwards, Tokuda sat in a chair, trying not to cry. She felt horrible.

Later, one of the station's anchors told Tokuda not to worry. He said to her, 'I'll bet you \$50 that one day you will go farther than anyone else will who's sitting in this studio'.

The rest is history.

San Francisco, and KPIX, came calling in 1976. Once in the Bay Area, Tokuda began reporting for the station, eventually being promoted to weekend anchor. Eventually, by the late 1970s, she began anchoring weeknights with McElhatton -- and along with meteorologist **Joel Bartlett** (SC '03) and sports anchor **Wayne Walker** (SC '95), the foursome, with the Eyewitness News franchise, became the most popular anchor team in the Bay Area by the early 1980s. It was a dominance that would last until Tokuda left KPIX in 1991 to be an anchor and reporter at KNBC in Los Angeles.

While in Los Angeles, her work included coverage of the **Rodney King** beating and the riots that



***First 4 News***  
**In 1997, with co-anchor Pam Moore at KRON**

ensued, the Northridge earthquake and, of course, the **O.J. Simpson** saga.



**Governors' Award Celebration**  
**In 2010, after receiving the Governors' Award from the**  
**San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of the**  
**National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences**

jobs doing what I do, and it didn't matter what I'd done before I left for L.A., or what my reputation was. None of that mattered. What mattered would be, 'was there an opening?' And there aren't many openings for people who do what I do. You have to just wait, and be lucky. And, I happened to get lucky."

When she returned to the Bay Area to work at KRON, she began anchoring the station's then-new 4 p.m. newscast, *First 4 News*, with co-anchor **Pam Moore** (SC '10). She eventually began co-anchoring with **Pete Wilson** (SC '01), too.

"I didn't like it, it was disconcerting," says of her time in Los Angeles. "It was, I guess, the fact that Hollywood can be all about money. There was this crevasse, this gap, between the races, exposed in a really sad way. A gap between the rich and the poor. I think the Bay Area is more integrated than it is in L.A."

Tokuda remained in Los Angeles for five years, until opportunity in the Bay Area came knocking for her to return and work as an anchor at KRON. She was hired by then-KRON news director **Dan Rosenheim**, who later became vice president of news at KPIX and subsequently brought Tokuda back to KPIX after a decade at KRON.

Returning to the Bay Area, Tokuda "wanted to drop down to the ground and kiss the earth", she says. "To do what I do, there aren't a lot of

"I had a whole different appreciation for the Bay Area, and to be in this place where I felt so at home, and where people are.. well, where there are so many good people," Tokuda says. "Not that there aren't good people in L.A. But, there are so many communities here in the Bay Area. And, I was a part of the community. I was so happy when I came back to the Bay Area."

During her earlier years with KPIX prior to leaving for Los Angeles, Tokuda was a calming, authoritative presence with McElhatton following the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989.

In 1985, when a wayward humpback whale entered San Francisco Bay and remained there for days -- with the Bay Area news media and an adoring public subsequently nicknaming the whale, **Humphrey** --



**Tending to the Garden**  
**Tokuda, at home doing a little pruning in her backyard**

Tokuda shined during the saga, documenting the whale's saga and eventual rescue. She, along with now-former husband, **Richard Hall** (a former executive producer at KTVU in the 1980s and the son of **Monty Hall** of 1960s-70s' *Let's Make a Deal* fame) -- created three reality-inspired children's books about Humphrey.

That passion for connecting with children slowly surpassed Tokuda's desire to command the anchor desk. Her most endearing endeavor, "Students Rising Above", is her most important work. The segment highlights a non-profit organization that helps at-risk students who excel in the classroom despite harrowing personal challenges. The franchise began when Tokuda was at KRON; it moved with her to KPIX.

If Tokuda could name those who were most influential to her in her career, there would be three people: **Don McGaffin**, who was managing editor at KPIX (as well as a media critic and commentator) during Tokuda's first years at the station; McElhatton; and **Bruno Cohen**, KPIX's president and general manager.

McGaffin was instrumental in Tokuda's career. He would edit her scripts with a pencil. And he did

something that would become invaluable to her.

He offered to come in once a week, early before work, to help her hone her skills.

"He was incredibly generous with his time," Tokuda says.

McElhatton helped her to become a better anchor.

"Mac was the one who taught me how to write for anchoring," she says. He'd tell her to write more conversationally. "He was that kind of teacher. He affected forever the way that I anchored.

McElhatton also told Tokuda to do her best never to make factual errors, saying that viewers would never let her forget it.

"You cannot make a factual error," he told her. "I am not being mean here," he said, "but you are a minority, and you are young. They are going to be judgmental if you make a factual error."

"The standard was different then for a young woman of color," Tokuda says. "And that's how it was back then."

Through the years at KPIX during her first tenure there, Tokuda and McElhatton anchored coverage of every major story, including the Loma Prieta earthquake, which struck the Bay Area on Oct. 17, 1989. In the first hours following the earthquake, the pair anchored their coverage from a partially-lit newsroom because electricity had been knocked out in the studio.

On Aug. 19, Tokuda said goodbye to KPIX and to television news. At age 66, she was ready to move on after some 42 years in the business.

These days, Tokuda spends more time with her husband and the five daughters they share while

continuing to pursue her continuing passions of storytelling, environmental restoration and finding ways to help at-risk children. She is also quite a green thumb in her sprawling garden.

She is also one of the nicest, most down-to-earth human beings you could ever meet.

**Kevin Wing** has been writing 'Gold & Silver Circle Profiles' for 'Off Camera' since the summer of 2007. A 2013 Silver Circle inductee, he is a two-time Emmy Award-winning producer, reporter and assignment editor in the Bay Area, currently associated with ABC News and 'Good Morning America'. He also has a production company, Kevin Wing Media

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## The Health Reporter

# the Health Reporter

by Karen Owoc



## Fit Feasting This Fall

Fall is here. That means a harvest of new and returning TV shows' premieres. It's the season for change. Autumn, with its emerging warm glow, signals it's time to evolve. As the deciduous trees let go of the old to prepare for the new, perhaps it's the perfect time for you to shed your old ways of dieting and try some new foods, cooking techniques and recipes! Designate fall as a time to try something new - especially if the foods you're eating are as boring as last season's reruns.

### Face Your Fall Food Fears

Perhaps fall brings visions of bingeing, bloating and weight gain caused by the annual sugar feasts (a.k.a. Halloween), harvest festivals, turkey feasts, and super bowls of football food, but there IS a way