29 ON YOUR SIDE

News anchor and Clayton parent Kay Quinn has been working for KSDK Channel 5 for the past 29 years.

Kay Quinn at News Channel 5. Photo by Michael Melinger

"When you come to work, you never know what's going to happen and I really like that part of it," Kay Quinn said. "Anything could happen, you could meet anyone and you just never know."

Quinn started at News Channel 5 doing freelance work, which quickly became a full-time career. 29 years later, Quinn continues to work at Channel 5 as a news anchor and reporter.

Throughout her childhood, Quinn was immersed in the world of journalism and from a young age. Quinn lived in Hawaii for 13 years during her childhood and was influenced by her exposure to journalism. Her father worked in sports management for his whole career and had many friends who worked as broadcasters and sports writers. During their time in Hawaii, Quinn's father worked as a general manager for a baseball team; Quinn and her siblings would explore the Pacific Coast League stadium.

"Then, it was only men in the press box, so this would be in the 60s, and we'd just go running through the press box, and they'd say, 'no women in the press box!', and we'd laugh at them because we were just little girls," Quinn said. "But it was interesting to see, to think back on that experience and then to think at 14, ' I want to do what they do.' I always liked this idea of hearing something, getting information, hearing someone's story, being able to tell other people about it. So that's what really got me interested and then just by knowing some broadcasters, that really got me interested."

Quinn began her first job in Vancouver when she was 18 years old. She worked as a traffic reporter on one of her dad's friend's radio stations.

"I had a job at a radio station which is how I started my career. I always tell people, you get your first job by a different combination of things: it's going to be luck, it's going to be who you know, and following your passion, what your interests are and playing up your strengths."

For Quinn, having connections to other broadcasters and journalists opened up many opportunities for her career.

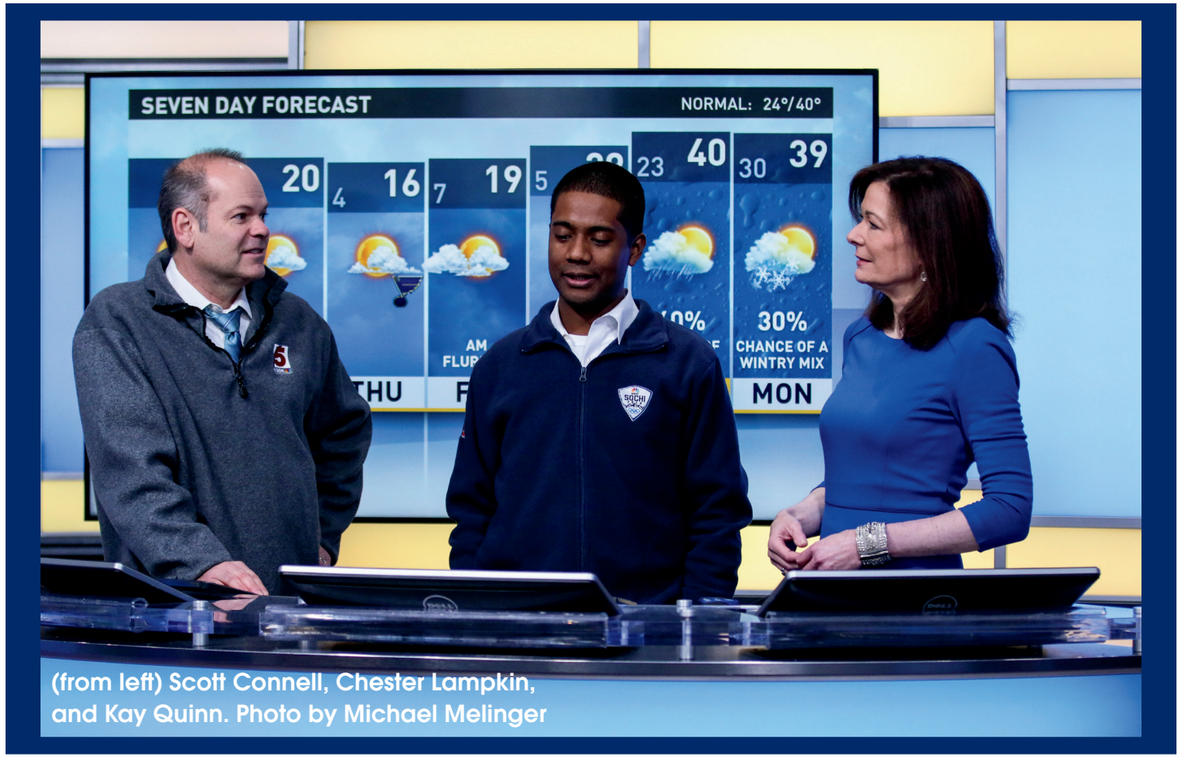
Quinn worked in radio for eight years before transitioning to the television industry. She moved to St. Louis in 1985 and continued working in radio with KMOX and KXOK. Then, Quinn began working part time for Channel 30.

"I was doing some On-Air promos for Channel 30, just on the weekends, they were all pre-taped, but it was on-camera experience," Quinn said. "I had the reporting part of it, I had the voice part of it, I had so many pieces of what I felt were the journalistic skills that I needed that would transfer over to TV. What I didn't have was the on-camera experience."

While working with Channel 30, Quinn was given the opportunity to be a representative for a United Way show. The director of News Channel 5 saw Quinn on the show and recruited her to do freelance work. Within three months, Quinn was working full-time for Channel 5.

Over the course of her career, Quinn experienced the dramatic evolution of technology. In the television industry, this change in technology was very visible. When Quinn arrived at Channel 5, the staff used typewriters to write their news copies and camera shots.

"Then, they would rip these papers (news copies and camera shots) apart and they would get distributed to the director, the anchors, the reporter, and one would go on this teleprompter where the papers literally rolled on this conveyor belt, through a series of mirrors were reflected onto the teleprompter in the studio," Quinn said. "I was here before they had computers, I remember when computers arrived, we had one. We never had cell phones, we didn't have phones in our news units, so you would have to make all of your calls before you left on a story and then when you got there, shoot your story and come back, and you wouldn't be able to talk to the news room or the assignment desk or your supervisor. You would just go out and collect the information and hope everything went well and come back."



(from left) Scott Connell, Chester Lampkin, and Kay Quinn. Photo by Michael Melinger

Now, cameras can be programmed to move to different shots, and a large quantity of information is stored digitally.

"It has just been an unbelievable change," Quinn said, "and to watch it all happen has just been fascinating, the way technology changes and the quality of what we do."

In addition to the technological change Quinn witnessed, she has also been able to experience the progression of women's involvement in the news industry. When she was growing up, there were very few women entering television.

"I think the idea of women entering television was fairly new," Quinn said. "Barbara Walters, who is still a huge icon of mine, she was one of the first women on the air and I remember being in high school and writing her a letter telling her how much I admired her work and asking for her advice on getting into the business."

While her choice to go into television news and media was not one made by many women, it was the rarity of the career that appealed to Quinn most.

"There were so many women breaking down the barriers and actually getting in the business. That's what I think had the appeal to me as opposed to working in a paper or the print side of things. It just seemed exciting," she said.

Women continue to face challenges in the workplace today, and fortunately, Quinn has not faced a great deal of inappropriate behavior during her time in the entertainment industry.

"I think the challenges are really the same today, which are wanting to be treated fairly in the workplace and luckily I didn't meet up with too much of that," Quinn said. "We're hearing a lot about the sexual harassment piece of what goes on in the entertainment industry and some in the broadcasting industry as well. I faced a little bit of that, but nothing that made me want to quit or leave my job. I just kind of always ignored it and just kept going. I think I just set a goal focused on that and never took my eyes off of that, but there were challenges."

Quinn explained how hard women have had to work to be viewed as reporters and journalists, not just "eye-candy" for the viewers.

"The men were always the serious ones in the suits, and the women were almost like the visual part of it. I think women have struggled initially, especially Barbara Walters and the first women in television to be taken seriously and to be looked at as journalists who are just as strong as men," Quinn said.

While women have made great strides towards equality throughout Quinn's career, she still thinks that society has a long way to go before equality becomes a reality.

"I don't think women are paid equally, that is going to be the next big barrier, is for women to be paid just as much as men. If you are doing the same job, the pay should be equal. But these are issues that women face in every industry and its just going to take time and hard work."

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