

That's the Headline Newspaper Editor Amanda Bennett Would Write to Describe Her Meteoric Career. Here's the Inside Scoop on How She Succeeded.

By Jennifer Vishnevsky

The Philadelphia Inquirer was founded on June 1, 1829. It took this major daily newspaper exactly 174 years to appoint its first female editor-in-chief. On June 2, 2003, Amanda Bennett assumed the title of editor and executive vice president of the paper, selected for this plum job, in part, because of her track record as an award-winning journalist. As managing editor for enterprise reporting at the Portland Oregonian, Bennett won the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for public service with a team of reporters. At The Wall Street Journal, where she worked as a reporter and later bureau chief, she was part of

the staff that won the 1997 Pulitzer Prize for national reporting, for a series of articles about U.S. policy on AIDS. Most recently, she was editor of the Lexington (KY) Herald-Leader. A 1975 graduate of Harvard College, Bennett, 51, is also the author of several books, including "The Death of the Organization Man," detailing the effects of new economic realities on individual career paths in corporate America.

Journalism became a hot career after Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's incisive reporting of the Watergate scandal in 1974 and the subsequent publication of their best seller "All the President's

Men." Female role models in the profession, however, have been scarce—though not for lack of trying. According to a recent report from the Media Management Center of Northwestern University, while women hold 44 percent of newspaper jobs, few are in the top positions; 86 percent of the top jobs in newspapers today are held by men.

If you love writing about and reporting on the events that shape our lives, don't let those statistics frighten you off. For women to reach the top "is not only possible but completely likely," says Bennett. Three months after

Bennett landed in the catbird's seat at the Inquirer, **MAKING BREAD** talked to her about the opportunities for women in journalism and what it takes to succeed in this traditionally male profession.

to watch the wire and then write incredibly complicated, full-length stories. I was learning everything all at once, and I knew nothing about the business. I used to cry a lot! In retrospect, though, I learned

AB: Thinking critically and being able to examine a problem from all sides. In order to report on anything, especially an area where you have no expertise, you have to start thinking critically; ask yourself

There were two occasions when I walked into a meeting, and I was asked if I was there for a school paper. So much has changed now; we all have support groups and networks.

MB: What made you decide to pursue journalism?

AB: It sort of picked me! When I was 11, I wrote my first story, and it ran in our local paper. My youngest sister had Down's syndrome, and I described learning about the disease. Writing was pretty intoxicating. After that, I continued to have an interest in it. I worked on the college paper, and I worked with the Associated Press.

MB: What was your first job as a reporter?

AB: I worked for a newspaper in Canada. I was hired as a bilingual reporter in the French-speaking part of Canada, right on the border of Quebec and Ontario. I was only there for a short time, and then I headed to *The Wall Street Journal*.

MB: What were the most valuable lessons you learned from those early jobs?

AB: The *Wall Street Journal* had a very busy office. I had

that I could do it—even with stuff where I didn't have a clue. I could do it.

MB: How did you work up the ranks to become an editor?

AB: I resisted anyone trying to get me to become an editor for almost 20 years. I loved being a reporter, and I stayed at that much longer than most people do. Then what happened is that I got the job of my dreams: I became a national economics correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*.

I was based in New York, but I could travel anywhere I wanted. And I got bored. I kept going to the managing editor, applying for every job there was. Finally, I got offered the job of Atlanta Bureau Chief, and I agreed. I realized that I just loved being an editor. After 20 years of trying to avoid it, I realized that it was the perfect job for me.

MB: What are the most valuable skills you need to have as a journalist?

what is the most important thing. You have to be able to turn the story around in different ways.

MB: What do you think are the most necessary personality traits to have as a journalist?

AB: All different kinds. Some people are very analytical, some are aggressive, some are empathetic and intellectually curious. Maybe gossipy, too; good journalists want to be where the action is.

MB: How has a career in journalism affected your family life?

AB: I had my children relatively late. They are 14 and 9, and I'm 51. We had to move a lot; my kids hated that. On the other hand, they've had all kinds of experiences they wouldn't have had otherwise. We've lived in great places.

MB: Would you want your children to get involved in journalism?



AB: Neither of them shows the slightest interest, but I think it's a wonderful job. My son is more interested in being a musician, and my daughter is only 9. I'm always encouraging people to pursue journalism.

I think I underestimated my own potential. Don't do that! Don't throw up barriers to your own success.

MB: What advice do you have for women who want a career in journalism?

AB: The most important thing

in the profession is that you learn a lot by doing. Find opportunities to write and get published. Just do it!

MB: What does being the first female editor at the *Inquirer* mean to other women coming up in the ranks?

AB: It is possible—and completely likely. I'm the first female editor here, but we also have the most diverse masthead in the country. Three of the top positions at the paper are held by women, two of whom are African American. Not only is it possible but it is likely.

MB: Why do you think it took so long for the *Inquirer* to appoint a female editor?

AB: Some of it has to do with historical patterns; some peo-

My failures have been times when I didn't take advantage of terrific opportunities.

ple have been here for a long time.

MB: How hard do you think it is for women to work in a male-dominated field?

AB: When I started 30 years ago, it was an issue. I was young, and that was hard. I was one of only 10 women at *The Wall Street Journal*. There were two specific occasions when I walked into a meeting, and I was asked if I was there for a school paper. So much has changed now; we all have support groups and networks.

MB: Is there anything you would recommend that a woman never do on the job?

AB: Getting involved with someone at work. I can't say, "Never do that," though, because I have seen it work out.

I think I underestimated my own potential. Don't do that! Don't throw up barriers to your own success. That's more common than exterior barriers.

MB: What are some ways to get your work noticed?

AB: When I've been really excited about it myself, and I thought my stuff was good, I

Something a woman should never do on the job: Getting involved with someone at work . . .

wanted other people to see how good it was! It didn't really bother people, because it was clear that I was excited. Confidence is key. People understand when you're excited about your own work.

MB: Who are your role models in the profession?

AB: Sandra Mims Rowe, the editor of *The Oregonian*. She hired me away from *The Wall Street Journal*, and she is everything that an editor should be.

MB: What has been your biggest career success?

Headline about women and money I'd most like to see on the front page of the *Inquirer*: "WOMEN ACHIEVE WAGE PARITY BECAUSE THEY ACHIEVE JOB PARITY."

AB: It sounds so obvious, but I led a team at *The Oregonian* that won the paper a Pulitzer

Prize in public service. It was totally thrilling, not only to win, but thrilling to be a part of that team and that paper at the time.

MB: Your biggest failure?

AB: I think of failure as those times when I didn't fully seize my opportunities. I look back on my career, and there were times when I didn't take advantage of moments of opportunity. When I traveled to strange places, I wish I had done more aggressive foreign-correspondent's work. I wish I'd tried more ambitious stories in my life. My failures have been times when I didn't take advantage of terrific opportunities.

MB: What's the headline about women and money you'd most like to see on the front page of the *Inquirer*?

AB: "Women Achieve Wage Parity Because They Achieve Job Parity."

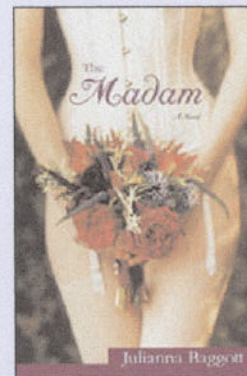
MB: If you had to write a headline describing your life so far, what would it be?

AB: "What a blast!"

MB: Thanks. It's been a blast talking with you! ☐

Jennifer Vishnevsky is an associate editor at *MAKING BREAD*.

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