

Portland, Oregon

# PORTLAND OBSERVER

25¢

VOLUME XIX NUMBER 45

"THE EYES AND EARS OF THE COMMUNITY"

NOVEMBER 16, 1989

## Former Observer Intern Anchors TV 8 News



BRENDA BRAXTON

by Ulysses Tucker Jr.

"Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be open unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and him that knocketh it shall be opened. . . . Matthew 7: 7-8

After graduating from the U. of Portland with a degree in Communications (1985), Brenda Braxton took her dream of being a reporter south to the graduate program at Louisiana State University. In 1986, Braxton completed the program and caught on with television (Baton Rouge) station WASB TV (CBS) as an anchor/m'dical reporter. A dream come true, for the moment.

Very pleased with her development as a broadcaster and person, Braxton came home this past summer to "chill" out. She wanted to touch base with her primary source of energy, home, and to see some old friends. Without any expectations, the assertive Braxton hit the three networks in town just to "say hello" and to drop off a resume tape. KGW-TV 8 was the first to respond to her tape. Braxton knocked on the door at KGW one day and on the next, she had a solid job offer. She had never been afraid of taking risks or chasing her innermost dreams.

Braxton headed back to Louisiana with more than she ever expected but being a sensitive and conscious individual, she wonders how her employer would take her resignation. Some stations have been known to fire people on the spot. Needless to say, the news was greeted with much support and well wishes. WASB-TV gave Braxton a warm "send off" on the air and then, she headed to the Pacific Northwest.

Ulysses Tucker, Jr., is a freelance writer and television producer in Portland, Oregon. He caught up with Ms. Braxton in between the KGW Noon News, lunch, and working out as she does with such regularity. Ulysses filed this interview for the Portland Observer.

**Portland Observer:** Why Television as a career?

**Braxton:** "I think that I got hooked on the immediacy of television. I always thought that I'd be a print journalist. I was editor of the Beacon (U. of Portland school newspaper) and things like that. . . . Then, I met Art Alexander as a junior at U of P. He helped me to secure an internship at Rodgers Cable. Somehow, I got involved in a mock Democratic Convention at Memorial Coliseum. I served as a reporter for a group of high school students and the experience was a positive one. I didn't realize the great difference between print and broadcast. I didn't know what a photog was—it was sink or swim. People couldn't believe that it was my first real experience. I was just feeling my way around. I got hooked. From that point, I started making the transition from print to television. I've been pursuing the dream every since."

**Portland Observer:** What psychological adjustments did you have to make to television?

**Braxton:** "You have to get into a mindset like the one I'm in now. You have to be able to go one on one and be extremely

conversational, the formality is just not there to a great extent with television. You have to break it down. People can not go over and over the facts like they can in newspaper. They hear it once. Whatever they are doing, most often they are not specifically focused on the television screen, so, you have to make it very clear. You must also make it concise and conversational in order for them to comprehend the facts the first time. If we can accomplish this in a newscast, then we are effective and doing our jobs."

**Portland Observer:** What are you attempting to project across the airwaves?

**Braxton:** "I want them to know that they can depend on me and the station for all the journalistic things they have come to know. In reality, I feel like I'm just a person who has trained and specialized in this area. I'd like to think that I'm no different than any other person. I'm like any other professional who takes their job seriously."

**Portland Observer:** How do you separate your public self from your private self?

**Braxton:** "I find it real easy. Coming back to Portland provided me with a solid base because I had family and friends, I've known for years. When I go to KGW, it's my job and not my life. I strike a balance. When I leave work, I interact with a new set of faces and with people who care about or love me. The person on the screen is not everything that I am. It's just a part of me."

**Portland Observer:** Who are your heroes?

**Braxton:** "My parents, who are real opposites. My dad gave me drive, ambition, and a real good sense of self confidence. They always supported me. They always told me that there was nothing I could not do. My mother gave me the more human qualities. She taught me compassion and how not to be jaded when you look at situations or realities I may encounter. My mother has always had the ability to look at things through the eyes of a child. Mom appreciates the simple pleasures in life and if I need to break it down for you, my dad is city folk and my mom is country folks. I could never be where I am today without their sacrifices economically or emotionally. They are real heroes."

**Portland Observer:** Do you have any television heroes?

**Braxton:** "I like some of the network guys. Brinkley, Donaldson, and George Will thrown in there. As far as people I like to look at, Peter Jennings and Connie Chung are easily related too. Both offer something different. Being in television, I find it difficult to be just an observer because there are so many things going on at one time. It's an art just sitting there and accomplishing your objective. I also like journalist who are tenacious, like Brett Hume and Sam Donaldson. Both are excellent reporters. When it comes to delivery, I really enjoy Carol Simpson."

**Portland Observer:** What does the public have a right to know?

**Braxton:** "I think what the public has a right to know is a tough question, especially when it starts to get into people's personal life. I suppose that if there is any possibility of your personal life affecting your public service in a negative way or if your personal

## Oprah Winfrey Harpo Productions Makes Portland Selection



OPRAH WINFREY



GWENDOLYN REID

by Mattie Ann Callier-Spears

(exclusive interview rights by Career Network, Inc. Agency)

Early in the morning of October twenty-third, an American Airlines flight departed Portland's airport with Ms Gwendolyn Reid aboard. The plane was bound for the windy city of Chicago.

Until this day, Gwendolyn was considered an ordinary, but not so ordinary, person—who worked an eight hour day. Just like the rest of us—she cares for family and she performs her daily tasks, for the Wieden and Kennedy Advertising Agency. Let's go back a bit.

One day Philip, Gwen's 24 year old son, phoned his mother, from his Eugene residence, with a very interesting bit of information. He had been watching the Oprah Winfrey Show when he heard this announcement at the very end of the program—he had heard that women 40 years old and older were being asked to send a picture and a brief autobiography to the Oprah Winfrey Studio. These were women who still considered themselves to be sexy and attractive. Well, needless to say, Gwen was terribly flattered that her son would even think that his forty-six year old mother would fit into this category. To be doubly sure, Gwen checked with her twenty-three year old daughter Tracie, who lives in Los Angeles, California and her mother, who lives in Ohio. Well, even if she wasn't selected, she was very excited. She had to check with her daughter to see if she would be embarrassed—but, she was delighted.

Gwen sent in a photograph and a copy of her autobiography. She was selected as one of nine out of five thousand entries. Entries poured into the Harpo Productions Studio from all over the country. Gwen's entry was the only one from the state of Oregon. And the only other Black representative came from Chicago. A fifty year beauty named—Marie. The mother of five children.

When you see Gwendolyn's 5'5-1/2", size 7 figure, you too would be amazed to find out that she is 46 years old.

**"I refused to do nude modeling . . ."**

Gwendolyn modeled professionally about 25 years ago. She was a very young mother, and wife, with two small children. Again, she was lucky to widely, back then. Roth Laboratories decided that they wanted to use a Black model for their pamphlets on Similac. Gwen was selected out of a group of twelve Black models to advertise Roth's Similac baby products. She worked feverishly for two years at trade shows, conventions, television commercials and . . . then she quit. "I refused to do any nude modeling" Gwen candidly stated. "Maybe it was my up-bringing. I don't want to think of myself as 'old-fashioned'; but, I don't have certain standards that I live by . . . and after a while they pressure you to do it."

### Oprah Does Everything First Class

"On the morning I arrived in Chicago" says Gwen, "the excitement began." "First I was met at the airport by a limousine. The driver was standing outside the door holding a sign with my name on it." Oprah had made all the arrangements: air fare, hotel reservations, limousine service and so forth. She was very organized. "The limo picked me up at the airport and took me to the hotel. All I had to do was give my name and everything was taken care-of. Although, the studio was located only two blocks from the hotel, the limo was there each time to pick me up and take me back—n—forth. It was wonderful!" "I was very flattered to have been there in the first place and, then, to have all this first-class treatment . . . Oh, my!" "My hotel room was located on the eighteenth floor overlooking the river, there was room service and anything I wanted there was taken care of by the Ops."

### The Sex Symbol Show

Nine women, whose ages ranged from 40-81, will be featured on a special Oprah Winfrey Show presentation. The show will air on the 24th day of November, 1989. The day after Thanksgiving. The show's theme will be: Sex Symbols—Women Over 40.

Gwendolyn appeared in a bathing suit, which was a requirement. You had to prove that you were qualified.

Oprah's studio personnel called Gwen's

home in Hillsboro, Oregon on a Thursday and interviewed her over the phone. At that time, she was informed that she had made the first cut-down to fifty women. After a brief interview, she was asked if she was willing to appear in a bathing suit. She only hesitated for a brief second. Gwen felt that if she had said "No!" they would have selected someone else.

All of the women, in the final selection, were required to wear either a bathing suit or tights. Gwen chose a bathing suit. Each woman appeared on stage for only a short time; then, they changed into day-time dresses. Gwen chose a lovely knit dress which she had purchased expressly for this occasion.

When Gwen's mother heard that she was required to wear a bathing suit on national television, she said, "Oh, Gwen do you just have to ear a bathing suit on television? You know . . . you look so nice in your clothes." Gwen called her mother back the next day to tell her that she had purchased a lovely bathing suit. She recalls her mother's response, "Gwen," I hope your buns aren't going to be hanging out! I will be so embarrassed." Gwen consoled her by saying, "Mother . . . please give me a little credit. I am too old for that kind-of-a suit. I think that I've made a good selection that you will be proud of."

### The Day Of The Taping

The women arrived at the Harpo (Oprah spelled backwards) Productions Studio in their limousines. Each woman was escorted backstage where she prepared herself for the program. Hair stylist and make-up artist were provided to assist in the preparation. Its seven-thirty in the morning of the 24th of October, 1989. Everyone is trying to get every little hair in place. Everyone wants to make a good first impression. Gwen fixes her own hair and does her own make-up.

Oprah arrived at 10:00 a.m. She shook hands with each woman. "Oprah is such a down-to-earth person," says Gwen. "We didn't get to meet Oprah until we saw her on stage. Not before." The excitement and anticipation exuded by each woman was that of overwhelmed enthusiasm.

When each woman was presented, her birth certificate was flashed on the screen as

proof of her age. The least believable guest was Betty, the 81 year old great grandmother. She didn't wear a bathing suit but she wore leotards and tights.

### Keeping In Shape Is Important

Prior to Gwen's selection, she was running a total of two miles per day; but, now it is dark and she is 'chicken'. If she runs, she has her boyfriend to follow her in his car. No joking. Right now she goes out, pretty much, on weekends but she feels much better if she can go out at least 3 or 4 times per week. It helps to relieve stress and at the same time helps to keep her toned. She runs in her neighborhood and at this time of the year the colors are so bright and beautiful. You don't think about the pain. You just run, look at all the beauty and it makes you feel so much better.

Gwen played basketball in high school but it did not have teams for girls at that time; so, she played basketball with the boys in the alleys and in the lots. She even took boxing—until the coach forced her to drop the class simply because she was a girl. She still has muscles in her arms that she has never been able to get rid of—just from that ol' boxing. Yes! She was one of the boys and loved it!

Some of the women on the show asked Gwen if she took body building.

Her Job Will Never Be The Same  
Wieden & Kennedy Advertising Agency is the sole major advertiser for NIKE, a national level. Gwen has been employed with them since February, of this year, as a receptionist. When they heard about what had happened—they thought that it was just wonderful. In fact, as Gwen was being told, on the phone by Oprah's assistant that she had made the show, there are two receptionist at my desk and the other one was paging throughout the office "Gwen is going to be on Oprah's!" Everybody ran out. There was a conference going on and everyone emptied the conference room. They ran out, yelling and screaming, cheering her on for five or more minutes. It was incredible. Everyone has been very supportive. She is now known as "Their Super Star."

## Beyond Memorials

Mr. Betre Melles, a prominent member of Portland's Ethiopian Community states that the death of Mr. Mulugeta Seraw at the hands of racist Skinheads "shall not be in vain." He has embarked on a determined and highly visible campaign to heighten awareness of the intensifying racist terrorism abounding in community.

Mr. Melles told the staff of the Portland Observer that immediately after the sentencing of the first Skinhead involved in the gruesome murder, he was asked had "enough been done." His reply, "Its never enough. . . you cannot eat one meal for a lifetime." This ancient adage turned out to mean that he



Mulugeta Seraw:

foresaw the need for a long-term program of both intervention and prevention; "We need to bring to bear the same multi-level focus being brought to the drug problem."

It was further stated that the numerous memorials being held on this first anniversary of Mr. Seraw's death (Nov. 13) "can signify a determined effort on the part of the entire Portland Community to deal with a universal problem . . . we can say peace and harmony but what is the reality?" Carrying out his personal mode of "intervention and prevention," Betre Melles has begun a schedule of appearance in the local schools where he will present a concept of universal humanism as expressed by the Ethiopian community—"How many have seen an Ethiopian to know him?" Melles says that so far the response has been good. Among those numerous memorials to which Melles alludes are the following; On Sunday, Nov. 12,

The Ethiopian Community Cultural Organization held special service; at Seattle's Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Amamel Church. On the same day a similar service was held in Portland by the local chapter of the organization. Monday night the Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Program held a memorial candlelight vigil at its S.E. Main Street office; the impressive ceremony received considerable television coverage.

This Newspaper Observes: An ironic twist to the ugly scenario is that the Ethiopians are the people whom the Greek historians described as the most gentle and noble of races. And both the Bible and documented history inform us that the Ethiopians were involved at the beginning of Christianity—the "mute stones speak" from many an ancient grotto carved into the mountains of East Africa. And yet racist barbarians would dare to hide behind a facade of pseudo-Christian icons.

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