LYNN POVICH INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Lynn Povich
American Journalist
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Interviewed by Betsy West
Total Running Time: 52 minutes and 28 seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:
Makers: Women Who Make America
Kunhardt Film Foundation

ON SCREEN TEXT:
Lynn Povich
Journalist

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Journalist

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BETSY WEST:
Can you tell me a little bit about your family, your growing up, your childhood?

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LYNN POVICH:

Sure. I'll start with my dad just because… You'll see why. He was the longtime sports columnist for the Washington Post. He actually wrote for 75 years. Started when he was 17 and he died at 93, having been his last column. My mother was a homemaker and I have two older brothers, and so our house kind of revolved around sports. Every spring, we went to spring training for the Washington Senators in Orlando and we were put in school in Florida for several months at a time.

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My brothers were bat boys for the Washington Senators and we used to go to night games to see my dad in Washington when the Senators would play. And he would come down at the seventh inning stretch and say, "Good night," and then we would go home. So, it was a very sports oriented home, which I loved but I chose not to compete and go into dancing, so I was actually a dancer growing up and I did ballet and then I switched to modern until I went to college, and actually danced in college as well.

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BETSY WEST:

In this, sort of, sports centric household, what were your parents' attitudes about gender that girls and boys…

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LYNN POVICH:
Well, I don't really remember that much except I remember that I couldn't go into the club house 'cause I was a girl, where my brothers went and that my dad always arranged to have a ball player. I remember Mickey Vernon played catch with me on the ball field so that I would be involved in some way. We didn't obviously talk about women, girls. I think that the expectation was I would go to college as my brothers did. But apart from that, I don't remember anything particular.

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BETSY WEST:
Did you ever remember wishing, "Oh, I wish I were a boy."

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LYNN POVICH:
No, except for the obvious access they had to things like bat boys and ball clubs. But I was happy dancing, I enjoyed dancing, and I was very involved in school and athletics on the girls teams and things like that.

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BETSY WEST:
When you were a kid, did you assume you would grow up and have a job?

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LYNN POVICH:

My assumptions were to be well-educated and get married and have children. There was no discussion of a career, there was no discussion of having to earn a living which was a big surprise to me when I graduated from college and realized, "Oops, I actually have to earn a living." Not that I wouldn't have taken a job, but just the whole concept of not just taking a job but actually supporting yourself was a big surprise, and I always wished that my parents had sort of educated me to do that. And in some way, I felt they must have said that to my brothers, but not to me, but I wasn't part of those conversations so I didn't know.

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BETSY WEST:

So, how did that happen? You looked around and you weren't married and that's when you-

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LYNN POVICH:

Yes. I graduated from college in 1965. So, I was in the cusp generation of women who were raised in the 50s, which I was, and when I graduated, half of my class got married. Because it was still sort of the thing to do which is to get married and start a family. Some of those women got jobs. The rest of us got jobs, but the kinds of jobs we could get were very limited. Help wanted ads were still segregated. Women mostly were secretaries, nurses, teachers.

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A few went on to graduate school. Mostly law school or medical school. I don't think I know a woman that went to business school in 1965. And then there were things like training programs for department stores or, not even Wall Street, I don't think too many women went to Wall Street. And I wanted to go to Paris. I didn't care where I worked, I just wanted to work there. So I actually applied to about 6 or 7 companies-

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-that ranged from airline companies like TWA and Pan Am to Time and Newsweek and any company that had a- any American company that had a bureau in Paris, 'cause I knew that a French company wouldn't hire me.

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BETSY WEST:
So that was really your calculus, was, in a way- Your professional calculus was, "Let's go to an exotic place."

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LYNN POVICH:
Yes, and work for a while, and I was just- I could have ended up at Pan Am but I didn't. I ended up because Newsweek suddenly had an opening in a bureau there as a secretary. That was the other thing, that I have to say, is that I was a history major. I knew I wasn't going to get a job as a history major and that I would probably have to be a secretary. And while I was a very fast typist, I

used to earn money at school typing other people's papers, I didn't know shorthand.

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So my last semester at Vassar College, in Poughkeepsie, New York, I found a course on shorthand called stenoscript at Dutchess County Community College. And at night, I took that course and learned it, and if I hadn't had known shorthand, I wouldn't have gotten a job at Newsweek in the Paris bureau as a secretary.

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BETSY WEST:
So, you're working as a secretary. When did it dawn on you that maybe you could do something more? What happened?

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LYNN POVICH:
Well, I enjoyed my job. I did some reporting and did a lot of researching. I had a boyfriend back in the States and so, I came back really because of him. Otherwise, I think I might have stayed. The problem is I could have- Even if I had stayed in Paris, I would have never become a correspondent. You can't go from being a secretary to being a correspondent. You really need experience. So I came back and I started as a researcher in New York, and I just found that I really enjoyed the more reporting I did, I was very lucky.

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I worked for an editor in the back of the book named Harry Waters who was very encouraging and let us do a lot of reporting. So I did a lot of reporting and I really liked it a lot. When Henry Luce started Time, he separated the three editorial functions. The reporters reported the story and filed their reports to an editor in New York. The editor wrote the story, presumably to get a national point of view. And the fact checkers or researchers fact checked the story.

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So women at Newsweek were hired in, first as on the mail desk, which meant they clipped newspaper articles and distributed them to the appropriate sections and editors. Then, if you were lucky, you became a researcher which was essentially a fact checker. And no one really was promoted out of a research category. Women in the back of the book tended to do a lot more reporting than the women in the national affairs section and the foreign section, or in the arts section where the critics wrote the stories.

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So some of us actually got out and did a lot of reporting and during the campaigns, the women in the nation department did some reporting as well. But we were all stuck there as researchers and no one ever really got promoted out of the research category. There were women in the bureaus as reporters but most of them had been hired from outside. There was the occasional woman who was promoted to a writer and became a reporter, and when I was working in Paris, she was a correspondent in the Paris bureau, a

wonderfully talented woman named Liz Pierre. She is one of the few that got out.

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BETSY WEST:
Did they have- They had a name for you, for all the women in…

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LYNN POVICH:
Well, the women in the nation department were called the dollies because one of the editors thought that was very cute. None of the rest of us were called dollies, just the women there. The rest of us actually had quite good relationships with the writers we worked with, because most of us in the back of the book had offices where we sat within 12 feet of our writers, and were not only office wives, but we actually were good friends.

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And so there wasn't that sense where there was, in the front of the book of a row of women researchers and all the men having the offices on the outside.

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BETSY WEST:
So in some ways, it was somewhat collegial.

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LYNN POVICH:
It was extremely collegial. Newsweek was considered a family. Everybody was the first name including the editor in chief, Oz Eliott. Everybody called him Oz. It was a little deceptive and probably not only paternalistic but condescending in some ways.

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BETSY WEST:
And you had mentors…

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LYNN POVICH:
All of our mentors were men because there were no women mentors, and I certainly- Harry was my mentor. Ed Kosner, who became the editor, was a mentor of mine.

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BETSY WEST:
And at what point, did you begin to become a little unsatisfied with the situation?

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LYNN POVICH:

Well, I had been promoted only because Harry didn't want to write fashion any more and so, he suggested to the senior editor that I could do that 'cause he had seen my files and things like that. So I had just been promoted as a kind of junior writer to write fashion. And a very good friend of mine, named Judy Gingold who was a head researcher in the back of the book, had had a discussion one day with a friend who was a lawyer who asked her about Newsweek.

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And when Judy described what the women did and what the women didn't do, this woman, Gladys Kessler, said, "Well, you know, that's illegal." And Judy said, "What?" And she said, "Yes. You know, Title 7 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, you cannot discriminate against women in employment and education based on gender." So she said, "Call the EEOC," the Equal Employment Opportunity Committee, which Judy did. And this woman said, "Yes, it's illegal."

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And Judy said, "Well, I'm sure these men don't know, and I'm sure we should just tell them that. They probably have no idea." And the woman on the other line said, "Are you crazy?" She said, "If you go and talk to them, they will promote two women. They will co-opt you. Nobody likes to give up power. You need to organize and you need to file a complaint of discrimination." So Judy, who is one of the most brilliant women I know—Judy was a Marshall scholar, a summa cum laude graduate of Smith college who was fact checking stories at Newsweek for men who had far inferior credentials than she—

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So she asked her two best friends at the time, Lucy Howard and Pat Linden in the Nation department to lunch, and told them about this. I'm sorry, Lucy Howard and Margaret Montagno. They all had lunch and they decided they should do something. They were going to write a letter and then thought, "Wait a minute. Let's just wait." They brought in Pat Linden who had been promoted to being a reporter at Newsweek, and then they brought in me. I was the fifth. And then we sort of thought, "What should we do?" And we started looking for a female lawyer to represent us.

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BETSY WEST:

Can you describe to me that moment when they first approached you?

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LYNN POVICH:

Well, Judy was the one. Judy and I, by that time, shared an office and so they were very- The women were very careful and everyone sort of had to be vetted and trusted because, as you can imagine, this was the sort of conspiracy within Newsweek. And so Pat and Lucy did not know me but Judy knew me, so she had to sort of vouch for me. And then Judy said to me one day when we were in our office, "You know, a couple of us are thinking about organizing. Do you want to join us?"

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And I said absolutely because of course, even though I had gotten out, it was so clear to me what the injustice was. I personally didn't feel as discriminated against because I had a lot of encouragement and support. But there was no question how women were treated at Newsweek.

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BETSY WEST:
You started meeting. Tell me about that.

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LYNN POVICH:
So then each of us decided what we needed to do was to bring one other woman in very slowly and carefully 'cause we were terrified we were going to be found out and of course, fired. And at the same time, we went to look for women lawyers. We first went to a very corporate lawyer, first amendment lawyer Harriet Powell. She didn't really want to represent us. She didn't know about employment rights law which was very new. We then went to Flo Kennedy, Florence Kennedy, one of the most radical Black feminist lawyers who had defended Valerie Solanas, in 1968 when she shot Andy Warhol.

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She was way too outrageous for us. And then we decided- And also we didn't have any money, so we thought we should go to the ACLU, because this is a pro bono civil rights case. And we looked at the ACLU and we found that there was a woman lawyer who was the assistant legal director who was Eleanor

Holmes Norton. So several of us went to visit Eleanor. We had an appointment. We brought the magazine and we explained the case.

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And she took the magazine out of our hands and she opened it to the masthead. And she looked at the masthead and said- looked at us and said, "The fact that there are men from here to here, and the fact that there are only women from here to here, means that this is obviously a pattern of discrimination. So I'll take the case." And she became our lawyer.

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BETSY WEST:
What was she like?

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LYNN POVICH:
She was fabulous and terrifying. And as you can see today, 'cause she's the representative from the district of Columbia. She is a fierce- She is a sort of- can use anger extremely well. She's tough, she is really smart. and she was great for us. I mean, we needed help and she put us through a boot camp of political strength and courage. She kept saying, "You've got to screw up your courage girls. You've got to take off your white gloves." She said, "I really had to prepare you all because you didn't know what you were getting in for when you were going to file as a class action."

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BETSY WEST:

There seems a certain naiveté from people who thought they could just bring this to their attention or just write a letter. She realized that this was about power.

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LYNN POVICH:

Yes, and it turned out, although we didn't realize it at the time, that we were the first- not only the first women in the media to sue—this was going on in the fall of '69 and the winter of 1970—but we were also the first women class action suit. Until then, there hadn't been class action by women. There had been on the part of men. So there was a lot to sort of understand about that.

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BETSY WEST:

So, can you tell us the days leading up to the lawsuit?

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LYNN POVICH:

Well, what happened is, as we were organizing, we had a meeting. By that time we were- What happened was that in January or so, when we had been meeting with Eleanor, a few of us had been meeting with Eleanor, we decided we should have a meeting with more of the women and let Eleanor lay out

the options. It was a very- Feminism was about consensus and so we wanted to make sure the women did everything by consensus, that they had options and that everybody agreed.

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And just as we were organizing this larger meeting, the Newsweek editors decided that the women's movement was worth a cover story because so much was going on. But guess what? They had no woman to write it. I was too junior to write it, which was true, and there were no other women writers on the magazine, although there were very talented women reporters in the bureaus including Liz Pierre with whom I had worked in Paris.

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She was now in the Washington Bureau and was a terrific writer and had been a writer in New York and a wonderful reporter. But they didn't reach out to Liz and instead, they went outside the magazine, and they hired a very notable woman who wrote for the New York Post, Helen Dudar, to come in, report and write this kind of story. And at that point, we had a meeting with about close to 30 or 40 women and said, "Here are the options and by the way there's going to be a cover on the women's movement which gives us a perfect peg for us to announce our lawsuit."

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BETSY WEST:
How did you go from this sense of family, collegiality, loyalty that you had to Newsweek because it must have been a fun place to work in many ways, to

taking this stand apart from them, to the point that you didn't even really want to open a negotiation. How did that happen?

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LYNN POVICH:

It happened in a way because a lot of us, in some ways, thought there were some sympathetic men and some not. But the real reason we didn't go to them was that six months before, as we were organizing, the senior writers were very unhappy about not enough independence in their stories, not enough voice, too heavily edited, and their ideas not listened to. And they organized, quietly, what was known as the colonel's revolt.

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All men, of course, and the editors found out about it and the editors invited each of them, one by one, to talk to them. And they talked to them and they promised that, "Yes, things would change and so on and so forth," and nothing happened. And we knew from our friends who were writers that they had essentially co-opted them and didn't do anything. And we thought, "Well, if they're not going to do anything for the top staff members who are so important to the magazine—

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—and these writers were really the best writers and critical to getting out the magazine—they certainly weren't going to listen to us." And so we realized we couldn't go to them and we really had to show them that we were serious.

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BETSY WEST:

Can you tell me about the day of the press conference? The day of, the cover, the whole thing…

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LYNN POVICH:

Yes. Well, it was really interesting. First of all, Helen Dudar was married to a senior writer at Newsweek and one of the things that we did was to call Helen the day before and say, "Helen, this is what we're going to do. It has nothing to do with you and it has nothing to do with the story that you've written." In fact, the story she wrote ended up being very sympathetic to the women's movement. She started out not particularly, and ended up saying these women are right to question all of these things.

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The day of the press conference was Monday morning, and Newsweek goes on the newsstands Monday morning. It's usually in the airports and on the public things, and then it mails to people Tuesday or Wednesday. So that morning- The night before, I should say, several things happened. The night before when we met to finalize everything, we had to do a couple of things. We had to decide who was going to speak at the press conference with Eleanor and three women volunteered.

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We had to decide to write a press release to deliver to all the news organizations to put on their day book to cover the press conference. We had to send a letter to Katharine Graham in Washington, DC, because we wanted to alert her to the fact that this was going to happen before the press conference. Katharine Graham was the publisher of the Washington Post, which owned Newsweek and was running the company. Her husband, Philip Graham, had died.

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She was one of two women who owned media, the other being Dorothy Schiff. So we wanted to send a letter to Washington and get it to her to say that this was going to happen and why before we announced it. And we collected funds to send our youngest member to Washington on this shuttle for a student fare to deliver the letter to a friend who would then deliver it to Katharine Graham's home in Georgetown. So we did that. Then, my then husband at the time said that he would deliver the letter Monday morning to Oz Eliott at his town house on 72nd street-

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-because none of us wanted to knock on Oz's door and hand this letter over to him that we were suing him. So he did that. So that was all Sunday night and then one by one, we got in line and signed our names to this complaint with the EEOC. Then Monday morning, the press conference was called for 11AM at the offices of the ACLU on lower Fifth avenue. And we got there about 9, 9:30, and started rustling all the chairs and was in their board room and setting up the table where Eleanor and the three women were going to speak.

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And then we waited and we waited and nobody came. And then about 10:30, people started filing in. Susan Brownmiller, who had worked at Newsweek as a researcher and was a friend of some of us, came as one of the reporters. And as a friend of ours said, when Gabe Pressman from Channel 4 showed up, we thought, "Aha, this really is going to happen." And at 11:00, Eleanor opened the press conference and read the statement that we were filing a complaint against Newsweek for sex discrimination.

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BETSY WEST:
Can you just briefly say what the complaint was?

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LYNN POVICH:
Yes, essentially it said- It started out with a cover story saying that Newsweek had, this morning, holding up the cover, is doing a story on the women's movement when they had no woman to write it, that there were 50 male writers at Newsweek and only one woman writer. That women were never promoted out of the- rarely promoted out of the research category, that there were no women, basically, bureau chiefs, things like that.

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And that this is clearly a pattern of discrimination, and that we also called on Katharine Graham as one of the few female owners of media to be involved in

the negotiations. And that she called for the immediate integration of women into the reporting and writing ranks and the integration of men into the research ranks.

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BETSY WEST:
So, you have this press conference. Then what happened?

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LYNN POVICH:
Well, then we were terrified. Actually, it was interesting when we went back—some of us started work on Monday, others began on Tuesday—we went back to the office and many of our male colleagues were very supportive. Most of the men we worked for were surprised but very supportive. And we got cable from the San Francisco bureau saying the all male San Francisco bureau says, "Right on." And so, many of the men at the lower levels of the magazine who knew us and worked with us and respected us were very supportive.

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We didn't hear anything from the top management or many of the senior editors. But Lucy and Pat ran into Oz Eliott on Tuesday when they got to the office. He worked a Tuesday-Saturday week. And Pat said, "What did you think?" And he called them in for 45 minutes and talked to them about it, but

wouldn't concede anything and immediately asked that the women meet him at the top of the week,-

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-which was the reception area for Newsweek on Tuesday, to talk about why we didn't come to him and what was wrong and why did we feel this. Eleanor immediately said to us, "Everyone should attend this meeting. I will be there with you but you should not say one word. I am going to speak at this meeting." So we said, "Fine." It was very awkward obviously. Some men in the office clearly were not happy with us.

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And when we got to the meeting on Tuesday at 3:00, Oz had set all the chairs up in front of the sofa, and he and Kermit Lansner, his number two, sat on these very luxurious soft suede sofas, and he started talking to us. Eleanor had not yet arrived. And someone said "Oz, we can't talk to you until Eleanor comes." Eleanor said, "I was afraid you all would self-incriminate yourselves so I didn't want you to say anything."

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So we just said, "Oz, we can't say anything until Eleanor comes," so he thought, "Oh my god, this is serious." So in walks Eleanor Holmes Norton, who is about 5 foot 7. She is five months pregnant. She has a gigantic Afro. She's African American and the editors of Newsweek really made their reputation on covering the civil rights movement. They were the most progressive editors. They believed in civil rights. And here they are

confronted with an African American pregnant lawyer on the other side and they were completely flummoxed by her.

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They didn't know what to do. They sat down on this couch, which actually lowered them about 8 inches, and they are suddenly looking up at Eleanor and 46 women in this room, as Oz describes in his book. And Oz starts the meeting by saying, "I have invited today here today because I really want to know why you didn't come to me first." And Eleanor said, "Excuse me, Mr. Eliott. This is our meeting, I will do the talking."

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At which point she took over and told them exactly why we were filing this complaint and if they wanted to negotiate, they should show their good faith by certain signs.

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BETSY WEST:
And how long did this take to play out?

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LYNN POVICH:
We negotiated, that was March 17, 1970. And we signed a memorandum of understanding ,which was essentially an agreement, in which they promised to hire, promote, train, on August 26, 1970, which was the first women's strike for equality day, the 50th anniversary of the right to vote. That Betty

Freidan had called for a national strike that day and we picked that day to sign the agreement.

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So essentially what happened is we only negotiated for about a month, because Eleanor was then appointed to the City Human Rights Commission for the city of New York by Mayor Lindsay, and by that time, we had sort of ironed out the agreement and worked out the language. We signed our agreement on August 26, 1970, and a few women got promoted to reporters and others were asked to be on panels and do public speaking. But very few writers were hired and 3 women on the staff who tried out failed their tryouts.

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And in the spring we were not very happy and we wanted to bring in a lawyer. We felt we should again. And the men said, "No, no, no, no we'll do this. Just keep negotiating." We negotiated through the summer of 1971 and things were not improving, and so we decided we really did need a lawyer and we hired Harriet Rabb, who was teaching an employment rights clinic at Columbia University. And Harriet came in in October of 1971 and talked about how Newsweek had failed to live up to its commitments of the agreement.

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The statistic I remember most from that time was that five women had been hired as writers in the year that we had been working, negotiating. One woman from inside, four women from outside. And at the same time, when

they were supposedly aggressively looking for women, they had hired 15 male writers. So that, plus all the other things they hadn't done, were getting really frustrating us.

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And I was on the second women's panel as well, and I remember presenting to a group of women that, we felt on the panel, that either we give up or we do another legal action, that these negotiations were not working with them. They really weren't doing it. And so, Harriet said if we want to do something legal, she suggested that we both file with the EEOC, which would take forever to work through, and at the same time, file with the New York State Division of Human Rights because that would be in federal court and that would be faster.

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The women voted, and to my amazement, voted to sue again. I was really surprised. I mean, it's not easy to file suit against your employer. A lot of women had gotten some promotions. Several women had gotten pay raises. Some got title raises. Some were hassled, but mostly the idea that we were going to go through it again, with all the recriminations and however the men were going to treat us again, to me, took a tremendous amount of courage on the part of the women.

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It just showed that we were younger, we were still angry, and we really felt that this was the only way to do it. And so we filed suit in May of 1972. Again. At the EEOC and the State Human Rights Commission.

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BETSY WEST:
Where does that nerve come from? The courage to do that?

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LYNN POVICH:
You know, I think we were pretty young. Most of us were like, in our mid 20s. We always compared ourselves to the women at Time who were also researchers. They were a little older, they got paid better. I think we felt- first of all, what do we have to lose? And we were all full of the women's movement. We couldn't have done this without the women's movement being behind us. We felt we were on the right side, that we had good on our side.

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We were inspired by the civil rights movement. We were in the middle of the youth quake. All of the sort of, social and political things really conspired to help push us forward, and yet I think also there were a lot of very courageous women.

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BETSY WEST:
Did you have self doubt about this? Were your parents, or…

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LYNN POVICH:

Well, several women, I mean- I remember Fay still felt we should talk to the editors first. I remember one of my friends' parents called her and said, "Are you going to be fired for doing this?" And she hadn't even thought about it. We knew once we filed a legal action, we were legally protected, but certainly people were harassed. The women who tried out and didn't make it were not treated well.

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It was a difficult time and I think the second time we sued Oz Eliott, who had been the editor in chief of Newsweek had gone to the business side right after our first agreement, and Kermit Lanser was editing the magazine, and I think Kermit Lanser just didn't care that much. It wasn't what he was focused on, so nothing happened. And Oz came back in 1972 and said he was shocked nothing had happened.

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So I think he got it. He got it the first time. He's the father of 3 girls. I think he understood things had to change and pushed for some changes. I think when he came back the second time and saw that nothing was happening, he was also horrified.

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BETSY WEST:

Can you talk a little bit about what it's like to change a whole culture?

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LYNN POVICH:

Well, I wish… I mean, I think that it's true we were the first women in the media to sue. We were educated middle class White women. We wanted to change the system from within. We weren't flame throwers. We weren't rebels. We weren't radicals. We wanted to be part of Newsweek. We were proud to be part of Newsweek but we wanted them to treat women better. And that was a very sort of bourgeois point of view, but that's what most of us felt.

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And so I think that the change for us had to do with our own expectations. I mean, I think many of us just realized that the way we had been brought up, the things we had been taught that were appropriate for women, we were now rejecting. We were all good girls, but that didn't work for us. And so we had to reject all of those values and that was very hard and that was very scary.

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And suddenly, we had to come to terms with our own ambition which was a very stigmatized quality for women and still is. We did have ambitions, or as a friend of mine said, "I wasn't ambitious, I was just competitive," which was another way of saying it. And that seemed to be okay, but saying you were ambitious wasn't. So I think for us it was- A personal change was what was so difficult, and some didn't make it.

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Some said, “Yes, I supported Newsweek, I supported the suit. But I just thought it wasn’t going to change my life and I couldn’t change. I believed the way I was raised.”

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BETSY WEST:
And how about you? How did it change your life?

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LYNN POVICH:
Well, I think for me, it did make me realize that work was a very important part of my life and that I had certain ambitions of things I wanted to do. I was very conflicted about ambition but I was lucky enough that I was managing to move ahead despite my fears and trepidations. It also had an effect, I have to say, on my personal life. I was married at the time, and I was in the middle of trying to work out a sort of problematic marriage.

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And I really was having trouble doing that as I was trying to build my career. And as I look back I realize it was only when I felt accomplished in my career, when I got the outside feedback from people that, “Yes, you can do this, you are doing it well,” that I was then able to sort of deal with my personal life. But that I needed the outside confirmation from the world, not just from my parents or my husband, but from an editor that said, “This is a good story,” to

really believe in myself and I think all of us one way or another went through that change.

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BETSY WEST:
When you look back on the lawsuit now, have your views about its significance, and about it, changed from what you thought at the time you were doing?

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LYNN POVICH:
Yeah, a little bit. I mean, I still have tremendous admiration for all of the women who did it, I just think it took enormous courage. I think we were too optimistic about how much we could change. I think we certainly changed a lot, and after we settled the second suit, after 1975, doors opened for women. There was a period in the mid 70s through the mid 80s probably up to the 90s, where women just walked through those doors. We had women White House correspondents, women who covered wars.

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They were never allowed to cover. They became editors. They became writers. I mean, it was a tremendously- And we somehow thought this would somehow solve the problem. Our generation believed it was a pipeline problem. Once the women were in the pipeline, then of course they would rise to the top because of merit. We thought we would be recognized, that our

merit would be recognized, and that would just be obvious to everyone. We understood that there was a sort of male macho culture in the newsroom and in most newsrooms.

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The news organization culture is a very macho culture. It's breaking news. It's last minute, it's very tough minded. And we knew that, but somehow we didn't account for that in what we thought was going to change. And we didn't account for how much attitude- how attitudes had to change. Because like everything else, it's the right person.

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It's not a man, it's not a woman. It's the right woman and it's the right man, and it can be either. And we believe very strongly that there were a lot of good guys in this. But it really depended on who was running things. We thought Oz Eliott, once it happened, got it. There were editors after him who probably didn't get it.

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BETSY WEST:
So cut to 2010, the women at Newsweek who went out to suddenly discover this history. Tell me about that.

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LYNN POVICH:

So at Newsweek today, there are no longer researchers. There is no longer a ghetto of women anywhere. When you come in at the bottom, you're coming in as a reporter-writer. So in 2009, there were some young women writers at Newsweek who were very dissatisfied. They were extremely accomplished. They had done well in school. They were terrifically smart. But they somehow were feeling marginalized.

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They weren't getting ahead as quickly as some of the guys. They weren't getting the best assignments. They weren't being listened to. And they couldn't figure out what the problem was because they are the post-feminist generation. And as they were talking about this, a fellow in the library who had worked at Newsweek for many years told one of them that there had been a suit at Newsweek 40 years earlier, and they didn't know anything about it and they were shocked.

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And they started to try to find out about it, including looking at all the Supreme Court cases, 'cause somebody had said it went to the Supreme Court. And this was happening at the same time that David Letterman scandal was going on, and there was a scandal with an ESPN announcer with a woman that- for the New York Mets, and there was a lot going on. And so, the women started pitching a story about working women today and what was going on in the workplace.

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And when they found out from Susan Brownmiller's book that there had been a lawsuit at Newsweek, they said, "We could peg it to this lawsuit that was 40 years earlier." And so they convinced this editor to let them write a story. That came out last year on women today who are in the work world and pegged to this suit from 40 years ago.

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BETSY WEST:
Were you surprised by their story, what they found? I mean, what did you think reading it as a- you were the alum of the …

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LYNN POVICH:
Yes, well, first of all, I was really proud of them. So I felt like our legacy lives, here are these young women who are really pushing the envelope there. I thought that they had some really interesting statistics in the story. Obviously they had to walk very carefully about their own position at Newsweek versus women in the greater world, but they didn't shy from it. They talked about how out of the last 49 cover stories, only six were written by women at Newsweek.

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And they mentioned a little bit of some of the attitudinal problems. Mostly they concentrated on women in general. And I think it was a really personal

reflection of how young women today feel and how they don't feel this discrimination until they get into the work world.

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BETSY WEST:
Was it surprising to you to hear that statistic about the number of covers that had been written by women? I mean, 40 years later when…

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LYNN POVICH:
Well, yes, because I mean, if you looked at the Newsweek masthead, there were a lot of women writers, there were women senior editors, there was a woman assistant managing editor—several—and there was a woman general manager, over top of the editor in chief. But every age, every person has their own style and I think the editor at that time had a sort of group of close male editing colleagues whom he trusted, and just didn't recognize, or want to recognize, these problems.

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BETSY WEST:
Can you talk to me a little bit about how younger women think about feminism?

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LYNN POVICH:

Well, I had a lot of talk with both- Well, there was Jessica Bennett, Jesse Ellison and Sarah Ball, were the three young women who wrote this story, and I got to know them very well and talked to them quite a lot. None of them—this was fascinating to me—none of them took a women's studies course in college. That's the first thing I said to them is, "Didn't you take a women's study course?" and they said no. And then I said, "Well, didn't your mothers tell you? Did your mothers work?"

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"Yes." "Didn't they talk to you about what it's like as a woman to be in the work world?" "Not really." One of them, Jesse Ellison, was a young feminist when she was growing up because her mother was divorced. She was a single mother. She had a business. And Jesse was the only girl in her class to support Anita Hill during the Clarence Thomas hearings. But she went to Barnard and she said she felt she didn't need to take a women's course because hey, it was Barnard, it was a girls' school and feminism was what that was all about.

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So that was the first thing that surprised me was they had no idea of the history of the women's movement at all. Then because they felt that they could do everything and they were post-feminism and they didn't necessarily like the image that had been portrayed of feminists, you know the boots, the whatever, non-attractive women, they sort of didn't want to identify as feminists. But the more they were having problems at work and the more they were educating themselves, they are now big feminists-

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-and I know a bunch of young women now, my daughter is 30 and a bunch of her friends, and they are all coming back to feminism because they are hitting these problems in the work world.

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BETSY WEST:
For the women at Newsweek and other women now, what are the big issues for them? Is it sexual harassment? What are the hidden- What are the thing they're not prepared for?

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LYNN POVICH:
I think there are a couple things. I think… corporate cultures have to change. They really haven't changed, and it depends- sort of depends on certain industries. The accounting business has become a feminist- feminine business so those corporate cultures have changed. But the law firms. Most of corporate America, certainly the news business are still very male cultures. I think that's something that needs to be worked on.

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BETSY WEST:
When you say that, "male culture," what does that mean?

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LYNN POVICH:

I just think that you have to act a certain way and be a certain way and the corporate culture might be about playing golf and going out to bars. In the news culture, it's about being tough and working 89 hours a day and always being on the job and showing that you can cover the wars and you can ask the tough questions and you can do the tough things. It varies in different cultures, but it all seems to be more about how men are raised than how women are raised.

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I think the other thing—and the women's movement in general has failed to succeed here—there's no question that work-family issues play an enormous role in how women can get ahead. It just is. And the fact that our country has no public support for child care, the fact that businesses and private companies don't do anything to help women and men have flexibility in their careers, is a big problem.

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And I think it's a horror that this company, that this country has no support for working families, men and women. And so many women I know turn down opportunities because they don't want to make the sacrifices that they have to make in terms of taking care of their children. Men don't understand that necessarily, although I think younger men are changing, but women clearly have turned down so many things because they are talented. They

have the skills, but they have these horrible choices they have to make all the time.

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BETSY WEST:
But sometimes, that fact is used against women. The fact that a very high percentage of Harvard business school graduates who are women drop out of the workplace for a while. These statistics are used to basically say it's not worth promoting women.

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LYNN POVICH:
Yes, it is used against them. And it's sort of crazy because here you have a trained, educated workforce, half of which you're not really using at a time when we need every little piece of brain power that we can. And I think if people understand, especially with the new technology, where you don't have to be in an office, you can do it from home. You can do it at night, you can be on the other end of a phone call if you're not in your office. Why we haven't been able to change these ideas of what has to be done and how it has to be done, I think is really a problem.

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BETSY WEST:

You alluded to this as a failure of the movement. Did you have other problems with the movement, things you felt went astray or didn't succeed or maybe underestimated problems…

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LYNN POVICH:

Well, there were sort of two movements. In the early days when we were organizing, there was a very much of a radical movement, feminist movement, and I think that probably turned off a lot of people. On the other hand, I admired the fact that you need a lot of outside pressure and radical pressure to get to the middle so I think they served a very important purpose.

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Some people feel that the whole lesbian part of the movement was a problem, certainly Betty Freidan did. I don't think that has turned out necessarily to be true in terms of the women's movement.I think what happened was the younger generation, either we didn't' educate them enough or they didn't like what they saw, really turned off feminism and it was very hard for many decades to get young women to either want to be feminists or say they were feminists.

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I mean, there are many women who say I'm not a feminist, and yet when you say to them, "Do you believe in equal pay? Do you believe in a woman's private right to her body? Do you believe in-" Of course they do. But they just don't like the word and the image. So in that sense, I think the women's

movement somehow failed to incorporate everybody in the movement and somehow it got skewed.

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BETSY WEST:
What do you think that women of our generation don't understand about what it's like for younger women? What do you think we don't get?

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LYNN POVICH:
In many ways, it surprises me they seem to have be less conflicted about ambition than we are. They seem to be much more comfortable with focusing on a career and going after what they want. I think they still have issues about work-family and how they're going to do it all, I think that continues through the generation. I think that they have a different view of how a woman should look.

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I was thinking of criticizing some of the young women today, in terms of what they wear to work and how they look and they're so provocative, and then I remembered, "We wore mini skirts, we didn't wear bras." And I'm thinking, "Hm, maybe I shouldn't say anything." I'm not quite sure what we looked like either in the 60s. When we sort of began to rise in the corporation, we got those suits and those shirts and all of that stuff and felt that one had to present a very professional- that we wanted to be sort of neutral.

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We didn't want our bodies and our clothes to define us. And that's changed, think that's really changed. I think young women today don't care.

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BETSY WEST:
Do you think that being sexy at work or wherever is an empowering thing? Or is there a part of you that thinks it's a mistake.

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LYNN POVICH:
I think there's a line and I think you can go over the line. I think some do and many don't. But yes, it's very distracting and it does change the attitude. The other thing that's interesting to me about young women today is that they have really good friends who are men. In the 50s and 60s when we grew up with men, it was all about dating and romance and sex and stuff like that. Today, women have really close friends who are men, young men, and I think that's for the better and I think that's really good.

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BETSY WEST:
How did you solve the career-life balance?

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LYNN POVICH:

I was very lucky. I had been editing as a senior editor for five years. I just want to finish one part of it. After the second suit, as part of the negotiations, we had goals and timetables. We insisted that a third of all the writers and a third of all the reporters be women and a third of all researchers be men. And we had a writer training program and we had said that there had to be a woman senior editor, and they refused to do that because it was management and we couldn't tell them.

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And we said we would not sign an agreement unless there was a woman in the meetings where all the decisions are made. So they promised that by the end of 1975, they would have a woman senior editor. And when Ed Kosner became the editor in August of 1975, he appointed me a senior editor. So I was the first woman senior editor there. I got married- I had gotten divorced and I got remarried to Steve Shepherd, who at that time a senior editor at Newsweek.

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And I became pregnant when I was senior editor. I had been an editor for five years. I took maternity leave and I said to them, "I will not go back to this job because I cannot stand to work these hours with a young child. So I would like to come back part time but don't hold the position for me." So they were able to hire somebody else and then, three months, I came back- or six months, I took the maternity leave, I came back and I worked part time while

I also had my second child, three days a week for about 4 years, and then I came back full time after that.

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Now in the meantime, a younger generation came ahead of me and took over the senior editor jobs within the magazine, and I was doing more special projects and things like that.

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BETSY WEST:
Were you conflicted about doing that?

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LYNN POVICH:
I wasn't conflicted about working part time. I thought it was the best solution possible and I wish more women had the option. I was conflicted about the fact that when I went full time and after I came back, I was then considered either too old or something to get right back in a mix, but I'm not sure I would have wanted to do that either. I never really wanted to be the editor of Newsweek.

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BETSY WEST:
A lot of women say that, "I never really wanted the very top job."

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LYNN POVICH:

Because if you look at the top jobs, the way they are run, they are not very attractive. If they were run differently- And we had many discussions about this at Newsweek, like why it all has to crash on one night? Why don't we have a rolling close of the magazine so people don't have to stay there all night long over two long nights? Close some on Wednesday, close some on Thursday, close some on Friday.

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BETSY WEST:

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

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LYNN POVICH:

Well, I think the Newsweek suit really was a turning point for me, and hopefully for other women, so I'm incredibly proud of that. And I'm incredibly proud of my children and my family and my husband. And I would say those were the highlights, really. I mean, I loved every job I was in. I was fortunate enough to be the editor of Working Woman magazine and to get into the Internet in 1996 which was very early, but I don't think anything had an impact the way the Newsweek women's suit did.

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