

# *Marlene Sanders, Pathbreaking TV Journalist, Dies at 84*



Marlene Sanders, a correspondent for ABC News, outside the White House in 1965 before the inauguration of President Lyndon B. Johnson. Credit...ABC

By [William Grimes](#), July 15, 2015

[Marlene Sanders](#), one of the first women to break into television journalism, where she compiled a stellar résumé as a reporter in the field and an Emmy-winning writer and producer of documentaries, died on Tuesday at a hospice in Manhattan. She was 84.

The cause was cancer, said her son, [Jeffrey Toobin](#), a writer for The New Yorker and legal analyst for CNN.

In television newsrooms populated almost entirely by men, Ms. Sanders made remarkable inroads. In 1964, viewers beheld the rare — in fact, unprecedented — sight of a woman behind the anchor desk of a network news program when she substituted for Ron Cochran, who was sidelined with a throat ailment, on the evening news on ABC. She later took over for Sam Donaldson as the anchor of ABC's weekend news for three months in 1971.

She became one of the first network newswomen to report from the field in Vietnam, in 1966, and one of the first women to rise to the upper reaches of management when ABC made her vice president and director of documentaries in 1976.

“Marlene Sanders got there first,” the journalist Bill Moyers told The Associated Press. “That women are finally recognized as first-rate professionals is due in no small part to the pathbreaking courage of Marlene Sanders.”

Marlene Sanders was born on Jan. 10, 1931, in Cleveland and grew up in nearby Shaker Heights. After attending Ohio State University for a year, she decided to try her luck as an actress and, at the Theater by the Sea in Matunuck, R.I., got to know its producer, Mike Wallace, the future “60 Minutes” star.

In New York, her acting career went nowhere, but in 1955 she found work as an assistant to Ted Yates, the producer of “Mike Wallace and the News,” a twice-daily report broadcast on a local DuMont Television Network station. She became an associate producer when Mr. Yates developed a late-night interview program for Mr. Wallace, “Nightbeat.”

Image



Ms. Sanders, in Vietnam's Central Highlands in 1966, was one of the first TV newswomen to report from the field on the war. Credit...ABC News

In the early 1960s she worked as a writer and producer for the Westinghouse Broadcasting news program “P.M. East,” on which she once again teamed up with Mr. Wallace, the show’s host. She then became the assistant news director of WNEW radio in New York, writing and producing documentaries.

Ms. Sanders joined ABC News as a correspondent in 1964, landing the job after an open audition. During her 14 years at the network, she covered the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy and the riots at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968. For several years, she anchored a five-minute afternoon broadcast called “News With the Woman’s Touch.”

In the early 1970s Ms. Sanders produced documentaries for ABC on issues related to the women’s movement, among them “The Hand That Rocks the Ballot Box,” about the formation of the National Women’s Political Caucus. Three of her documentaries dealt with women and religion, notably her profile of [Sally Jane Priesand](#), the first woman in America to be ordained a rabbi.

Ms. Sanders moved to [CBS](#) in 1978 as a correspondent and producer for “CBS Reports,” and won three Emmy Awards for her work there. After nearly 10 years at CBS, she was the host of several public affairs programs on WNET, the public television station in New York.

For the last 20 years, she was an adjunct professor of journalism at New York University.

Ms. Sanders’s husband, Jerome Toobin, died in 1984. In addition to her son, she is survived by three grandchildren. She lived in Manhattan and Sherman, Conn.

One of Ms. Sanders’s abiding concerns was the status of women in the news profession. It was the subject of her 1988 book, [“Waiting for Prime Time: The Women of Television News,”](#) which she wrote with Marcia Rock.

One of her pet peeves was the term “newsman.” “It’s discriminatory,” she said in a 1971 interview. “It’s like putting up a sign: ‘For Men Only.’” She proposed the term “news broadcaster.”

She found the glass ceiling to be frustrating — ascending at times, but then descending without warning. In 1989, two years after budget cuts at CBS had cost her her job, she surveyed the landscape of television news and told USA Today, “The boys are running things again.”

Twenty years later, she saw change, which she noted with an asterisk.

“Women have made a great deal of progress on air, as you can see from TV news,” she told The Connecticut Jewish Ledger in 2010. “But they are not well represented in management, and the glass ceiling is still there.”