

SHOP TALK



THE AMERICAN NEWS WOMEN'S CLUB

JEANNE VINER BELL TRIBUTE ISSUE - JUNE 2008

In Appreciation of Jeanne Viner Bell ANWC President 1988-1990

In the weeks since her passing in May, family and friends of Jeanne Viner Bell have paused to remember both her many professional accomplishments and her personal charm and treasured friendship.

Members of the American News Women's Club were honored to have Jeanne preside over the club as president from 1988 through 1990. It was a time of exciting growth and programs that reflected her legendary public relations touch and the prestige that she brought to the club's endeavors. After her tenure as president, she remained active and continued to invite other outstanding women to join ANWC.

With this special issue of Shop Talk, we salute Jeanne and celebrate her outstanding contributions to the club and to the many friends and associates who worked with her at ANWC in support of women in communications and news media.



Jeanne Viner Bell

From Nancy Lang (President 1975-1977):

Jeanne was a very special ANWC member, concerned for the quality of the club and also its financial health. You could always count on her.

She was a mainstay for our benefits and an expert linguist who knew just how copy should be written. Out invitations were always impeccable because she oversaw their content. And her years as president occurred at the point where we were concerned for the solvency of the club and had considered creating a separate foundation structure. Fortunately we were able to convert to a 501(c) (3) status. Our benefits always needed her careful scrutinized evaluation so that all the "I's" were properly dotted.

Jeanne's years as board member of the first black owned bank—the Independence Federal Savings Bank—was a landmark. There were so many remarkable traits to this remarkable, astute, fun loving human being. She spoke French beautifully, enjoyed playing tennis at the Hilton, participated in programs aired on the Voice of America and was very active in the Washington Chapter of American Woman in Radio and Television. She was an individual of endless energy and brilliance and also pursued excellence in the printed word and style. I can still hear her wonderful articulate way of speaking with a voice that was low, crisp and sophisticated. She will be missed. And she was loved, too.



Nancy Lang



From Diane Smigel (ANWC President 1993-1994):



Diane Smigel

How many times I picked up the phone and heard, “Diane dear, Jeanne Viner Bell” in that unforgettable voice?

She always had a generous offer. “Sweetie, could you come to my house with Nancy Lang to review the invitation for the annual roast. I’ll have something for lunch.” “Di, dear could you go to Pisces? It’s lobster night and we could talk about the program,” or “Diane, let’s have the meeting at my house. It’s closer, dear, and I’ll arrange a light repast.” “Diane, will you be my guest for lunch at the Cosmos?” “OK, we’ll have the meeting at your house, but I’ll bring the salmon if you provide the ‘proper’ serving pieces.” Who could ever turn her down?

When I think of JVB I conjure up her color palette: black, white, ebony and ivory. The colors began with her sparkling dark eyes and continued with her tailored black pant suits with matching ivory silk blouses, black evening dresses and tennis whites. Her perfectly tended Georgetown house with white cabinets and bookcases lining her first floor office which was filled with reference books every PR person in Washington would envy: protocol books by Pauline Innis, Emily Post, Charlotte Ford, Letitia Baldrige, the PRSA Handbook; directories including the National Journal’s Capital Source, The Green Book, National Press Club Directory and News Sources; Cosmos Club and, of course, a dog-eared ANWC directory; grammar books on tap to nail an unwitting committee member on any grammatical error. California white wines were chilled to perfection and served in French crystal stems, cashews or almonds on the coffee table. The delicious white meat chicken salad arrived with white grapes, Brie and Bremmer wafers. Her perfect Mercedes in basic black sat in the driveway, a welcoming ivory angel on the front door.

Jeanne was a loyal Californian with exciting Hollywood connections. She called me a week before my inaugural as ANWC president and

casually asked, “How would you like to have Harrison Ford at your inaugural?” A Ronald Reagan Republican, her party devotion was matched only by her long time friend, Eleanor Lyons Williams.

As a long-standing member of the Public Relations Society of America, JVB planned a program at the Club with Denny Griswold, founder and editor of Public Relations News, as guest of honor and speaker. I had invited the entire Corporate Public Affairs and Advertising staff and the three local senior vice presidents of my company. A large group of members and guests were anxiously awaiting Ms. Griswold’s arrival from New York. Pat Harrison was watching the front door, clutching a dozen red roses, when our guest of honor phoned asking for Jeanne Viner Bell. Denny relayed the shocking news that while she was stopped in airport traffic, a gunman jumped into her cab and ordered the driver at gunpoint to take him to a certain location. The episode ended without harm to anyone but the flight to Washington was long gone. One of my guests was General Jerry Dalton, USAF (Ret.), the incoming president of PRSA. With her usual quick thinking, JVB quietly asked him to substitute for the speaker. Together Jeanne and Jerry saved the night.

I will always remember JVB’s warm and original “Hugs” closing on her frequent correspondence and her unique Jeanne Viner Bell, Public Relations Counselor, stationery.

Jeanne was an exemplary president and devoted member of ANWC. I will cherish my happy memories of her and I extend my sincere sympathy to Michael, Karen and family.

From Ginny Daly (President 1986-1988):

Jeanne was a remarkable woman.

I tapped her to follow me as president of the club and later when I chaired our award gala, I learned so very much from her. She had such a way about her! No details were overlooked.



Ginny Daly

From Deborah Taintor Toll (President 1996-1998):

Jeanne was a welcome presence at the club. If she appeared, we knew the program was worthwhile.

She managed to question speakers without losing the gracious behavior appropriate for a hostess, even if, as happened on one occasion, thanks to Helen Thomas, her question (to a tell-all former White House employee) was "How does it feel to be a traitor to the United States..."

They say "a voice is a second face." Jeanne's was always low, dramatic, and if need be, powerful. She made full use of the five tones of a female voice, which made her easy to listen to. Men have only three tones, but thicker vocal cords and a bigger resonating chamber (chest). This can put women at a disadvantage. Walter Cronkite, commenting on Katie Couric, said women may have harder times as anchors because "they're so high pitched."

Anyone running programs at the Club is aware that in that small space many women are still better off with microphones. Yet who can forget the night when three small Middle Eastern women, using microphones and discussing the Israeli road blockades, were heckled by a large man, who simply stood in the back of the room and drowned them out! This could not have happened with Jeanne, yet her voice created a lovely effect. Maybe in memory of Jeanne, we should all learn how to project.

From Joan Walsh Casedy (President 1979-1980 and 1998-1999):

I especially liked the remembrance of Jeanne's lovely voice. I will miss her greatly.



Deborah Taintor Toll



Joan Walsh Casedy

From Karen James Cody (President 2001-2003):

Thank you for these sweet remembrances.

I, too, felt very much influenced by Jeanne. She took an active interest in me, and her early invitations took me to Washington parties that I remember to this day.

I remember many Saturday mornings at the big table at the club, planning the details of benefits. In my day, Jeanne always handled the flower arrangements, among other things—how she got those advantageous prices, I will never know! Relationships. Jeanne knew people all over Washington—Nancy mentioned the Independence Federal Savings Bank. Through the bank (and probably other relationships I didn't know about), Jeanne was part of Washington's Black community—quite remarkable!



Karen James Cody

From Sandy Trupp:

Jeanne was a wonderful mentor to me and was such fun, too. We had great times together.

The first time I realized her impact was when she asked me to be her "Hollywood go-to person" for her inaugural as president of the club.

Jeanne asked me to call Lynda Carter (aka "Wonder Woman,") to be her special guest and hand her the gavel. I was amazed that when she heard Jeanne's name she accepted right away.

I learned at that moment that Jeanne had all the star power. We even called the event Wonderful Wednesday!

I served on the board of the Arthritis Foundation with Jeanne and helped her with the Oscar Night in Washington. She hosted many dinners at her home and we helped to raise significant funds for the organization. Who could ever say no to Jeanne?



Sandy Trupp



From Paula Lettice:

I was driving Jeanne home to her townhouse after a gala meeting at the club late one Saturday morning and we were in my Audi convertible, the one with the 3XLDY license plate.

We got well into Georgetown and were turning onto 33rd Street from Q when a D.C. police car, lights flashing, pulled us over. Apparently, unbeknownst to me, my car registration had expired. I didn't recall ever getting the renewal papers in the mail -- not like me to be running afoul of the law. Anyway, I was really given a hard time by the two officers when I got out of the car to actually look at my license plate. When I walked towards one of the officers, I was told in no uncertain terms to stand back! Nothing I said or did was going to make a difference to them. Well, Jeanne heard this and was really incensed and about ready to hop out of the car and give them a piece of her mind in Jeanne's guttural voice before I caught her. Can you imagine the two of us—lovely ladies in their Saturday finest, driving an adorable Navy blue car with 3XLDY on the license plates—being threatened by these two guys in uniform ... and with guns on their hips? We could have ended up in the hoosegow. The irony of the story is that, when I called the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles on Monday, they said "no problem, just come into the DMV some time this week!" No one from Virginia had ever pulled over "my little lady."

Rest in peace, Jeanne ... it was great knowing you. The angels are going to love your great voice!



Paula Lettice

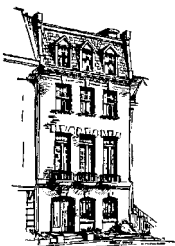
From Helen Panarites:

I join all the ANWC members in hearing the sad news of the passing away of Jeanne Viner Bell.

What a brilliant, enterprising lady she was and how she contributed to charitable organizations, as well as being one of the identifiable faces of successful journalism. She was a dynamic reflection of what ANWC is all about.



Helen Panarites



Founded in 1932

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