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Getting to Know Sally Wiggin

By Daniel Casciato

For Sally Wiggin, broadcast journalists are more than just purveyors of information, they're teachers if they do it right.

A television news anchor with remarkable experience, Wiggin has been teaching us for over 25 years. Whether it's delivering the news, reporting on a breaking story, educating viewers about heart disease, or making an appearance for a charitable organization, Wiggin has made an impact that far transcends our television screens.



Since we were first introduced to her, Wiggin has become a familiar, trusting face in the television news landscape. She began her career at WTAE Channel 4 as a reporter in 1980 and became the anchor of the 6 and 11 p.m. weeknight newscasts. Now, she can be seen on the noon and 6 p.m. weeknight news.

Though she was born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and raised in the South, she has embraced the Pittsburgh region as her home. "I've been here longer than anywhere in my life," she says. "I'm now a Pittsburgher. I never had really thought of that before."

Surprisingly, Wiggin never studied journalism, which is something she doesn't recommend now. "I think it would be difficult to do it the way I did it," she says. "There are now so many communication schools that provide valuable internships."

Wiggin graduated from the University of Alabama with a Bachelor of Arts degree, and the University of Michigan, where she received a Master's degree in Asian Studies. She also attended Emory University in Atlanta. Until her freshman year in college, Wiggin intended to become a zoologist because of her love of animals. "That was before I realized I'll never get through calculus," she says laughing.

It was her passion for sports that eventually led to her career path. In the summer during her college years, Wiggin helped do some coaching for the swim team. "I knew I couldn't make much money coaching, but I thought that perhaps I could cover sports as a reporter," she says. A news director at a radio station in Birmingham saw her resume and told her that they could teach her to become a reporter.

"Because I didn't have any training in journalism, I bought some broadcast journalism books at a university bookstore and studied them," she says. She also watched

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television news and taped the sound so she could study how a news program was structured. Ironically, Wiggin didn't cover sports because there were fewer sports position openings in both radio and television. After a couple years in Birmingham, she received inquiries from television stations in Miami, Atlanta and Chicago.

One of the photographers from the Birmingham station where she worked sent a tape of her to the WTAE Channel 4 Action News director at the time, Joe Rovitto, who saw the tape and immediately called her. After her first interview went well, she was invited back to meet the general manager John Conomikes, who later became head of Hearst Broadcasting, and vice-president Fred Young, who is now senior vice president, news, for Hearst-Argyle Television. "The three of them: Joe, John, and Fred, are the reasons I came to Pittsburgh," she says. "I was really impressed with them."

In addition to her hectic schedule as a news anchor, Wiggin remains active in the community. Among the many organizations she's been involved with – whether as an honorary chair, board member, or even as gala host – include the Caring Foundation, the Caring Place (a center for grieving children and adolescents), the Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium, Animal Friends, Animal Rescue, Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Symphony, Pittsburgh Dance Council, City Theater, Gateway Rehabilitation, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation and Daffodil Days for American Cancer Society.

The Caring Place and the Caring Foundation hold a special place in her heart. Wiggin lost her father when she was just 14 and she says her life was never the same. "It's a wonderful organization," she says. "It's a safe haven for children and I'm very supportive of the work they do."

Working Hearts, a coalition of women and organizations committed to marshalling resources to curb heart disease, is another organization that is special to Wiggin who was diagnosed with heart disease in 2001. "Our focus is to educate women about heart disease and how to lead heart-healthy lives," says Wiggin. She hopes to travel more in the future, continue working with young children, and visit more schools.

Her career path has taken her everywhere. What she enjoys most are the people she comes into contact with. The very same people she reports about on a daily basis. "Because of this job I have been given great gifts in every aspect of my life," she says. "I have been able to meet fascinating people. When your job is observing other people's lives and telling their stories to your community, it's a wonderful feeling."