



# JANE CLAYSON JOHNSON

**Guest Lecture to the College of Fine Arts and Communications**

**Brigham Young University**

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## [Reporting on the Home Front](#) - Jane Clayson Interview

It's really wonderful to be back on campus. I must tell you that every time we fly over the Wasatch Mountains coming from the East Coast, I just feel happy. It's a wonderful place here with a very special spirit. I appreciate the invitation to be with you here today. As I was looking out at you today, sitting up on the stand, I couldn't help but think of myself not so many years ago now . . . starting out in the broadcast journalism department.

I started on this journey, in many ways because Dale Cressman, who many of you know, opened the door for me of the Lee library one night after a long day studying. He'd just started graduate program, as I recall, and we started talking and he said, "You know, you should come see KBYU, it's a great place."

I had always loved to write and loved many things about what ultimately became my career and I went down to see KBYU-FM and I loved it. I started writing 30-second news and weather cut-ins for KBYU-FM the next week. And within a few weeks I was in the program and on to KBYU and the news and just an extraordinary experiences here at BYU. We had wonderful adventures in white TV-10 van. I don't know if it's still around, but I sure remember it.

I was thinking about what my experience was like here at BYU and what many of you are going through now. As Dale [Cressman], Bob Walz and some of the others can attest, when I was a student here, I remember thinking that I was a bit of a pest with my professors.

When I was a student, I would often take my tapes into professors for critiques. I just remember thinking that I was never good enough and I always wanted to be better in some way and I remember saying to my professors, "Be honest, be brutal, if you have to, just tell me what I need to do to be better." Having said that, I will also say that the path of Journalism was not always clear to me. I never set out to have a career in news in many ways. In fact, my career was—in my own mind—a bit of a place setter until my real life kicked in because I showed up on campus here at BYU with my wedding colors picked out: peach and teal. I had a list of baby names ready to go. I would graduate in April, get married in August. I would have a baby a year from December and it would be perfect. I had it all planed out. You can imagine my shock and a sense of disappointment when things didn't work out as planned. I remember so vividly, leaving this campus after graduation ceremonies with a diploma tucked in my purse and my parents wanted

to take me out to celebrate, so we drove to Salt Lake City for dinner. I remember getting as far as the stoplight in front of Liberty Park, when it hit me like a brick!

“What am I going to do now? NOW WHAT?”

I stand in front of you today to say that I believe that you will have many

“NOW WHAT?” moments yourselves over the next few years. And I want to tell you that you wouldn't want it any other way. If I had known back when I was sitting in your shoes, what was ahead of me—the adventures, the challenges, the good, and the bad— I'm not certain I would have ever gotten out of that car!

I've thought a lot about what I might say to that girl on her white-knuckle ride down Ninth South, in Salt Lake that day. And so today I offer you a few things I wish I had known before I went out into the real world. A few important lessons I've learned from my own journey since the day I was sitting in your shoes.

The first thing I would say to you is, FIND A MENTOR.

I started working at KSL-TV while I was still in school. In fact, I started as an intern and I'll never forget walking down the hallway, I think in the B-wing of the Harris Fine Arts Center, I can't remember exactly. I needed to do an internship to graduate and on the wall outside a professor's office was a sheet that offered an internship at KLS and I took it down and I thought, “Well, I guess I'll need this, so I'll go do it.” The expiration of the deadline for the application for that internship was that day at five o'clock. I quickly filled it out and I drove it up Salt Lake City myself and turned it in myself and handed it in. That's how I've got my story at KSL. I was still in school and I was hired as a student to work as a Saturday reporter at KSL.

And shortly after graduation I was hired as a full-time reporter. At KSL, I was the new kid. Very green. Very inexperienced. Looking at those tapes now: holy cow, very bad! I remember thinking that there were many of the very talented, veteran journalists in that newsroom who didn't appreciate me being there. Many of those are now my dearest of friends. But it was hard in the beginning. And looking back, I think they were probably right. They thought I hadn't earned a spot in the newsroom. I figured out very quickly that at 22-years-old, I was on a pretty steep learning curve. I needed help. And fast.

So, one day, at the end of my reporting shift, I approached someone that I respected. Somebody in the newsroom that I thought maybe could help me. And so there, in front of the assignment desk, I asked him, simply if he would help. He looked me straight in the eye and said, “I'm here to produce a broadcast, not train you!”

Hmmm . . . another “NOW WHAT?” moment!

Well, at first I headed straight for the ladies' room for a good, long cry. Then, a few days later I tried again. This time, I went to the executive producer at the station, who was a woman, a step up from my last attempt, a woman with much more experience, and—more importantly— a

willingness to share it. She walked me immediately into an edit room with a stack of tapes, a yellow note pad, and a long list of recommendations . . . of things I needed to do to improve. That was the beginning.

Fast forward—over a decade later when I began co-anchoring *The Early Show* on CBS, she mentored me all over again. She put her life on hold in Salt Lake City, for three months, to come to New York to meet me at the station at 4:00 every morning— to work through the day on stories and shoots and to help me study and prepare—until about 9:00 every night. That is a true mentor.

I hope you will search out a mentor. Someone that you trust. Someone who will guide you and tell you the truth, even if it's difficult to hear.

The second lesson I would say here today, and the second lesson I've learned is to work hard and be persistent.

If there are times in the next few years here when you feel like you're getting doors slammed in your face or you can't find a job, you're not up to your workload, that nobody will listen to you or take you seriously, I hope you'll remember this next story.

In 1996 I was hired by ABC Network News to anchor a 24-hour cable news channel that ABC was starting up. It was designed to compete with MSNBC, which is still on the air today.

So, I signed a contract, left KSL-TV in Salt Lake City, got into a U-Haul and drove west. The day I arrived in the Los Angeles Basin, I opened the *Los Angeles Times* to read a headline that literally took my breath away.

There it was, “ABC cancels plans for cable news.”

Well, you can imagine my reaction, reading this in the newspaper. I suspected I was probably in big trouble. No notice. No warning. No cable network. “NOW WHAT?”

Well, I showed up for work at ABC in the Los Angeles bureau anyway. And for several weeks, I just sat there . . . and sat there . . . and sat there. Doing absolutely nothing. Finally, one day I decided I really couldn't take it anymore. So I got on the telephone. I started calling people I didn't know and telling them that I wanted to work.

I called associate producers and desk assistants, producers. I called one news division vice-president, literally begging him to give me a chance.

I look back on that now and cover my eyes, thinking I was pretty relentless and probably quite a nuisance. But I really figured I had nothing to lose and the worst they could tell me was no.

So, I had been making these persistent pleas for weeks. And one morning, I was about to start my round of calls when the bureau chief in Los Angeles came to my little cubicle. He was quite a character—long hair, a chain smoker, and one of the best newsmen I had known.

He gave me instructions for my first assignment on a piece of paper that he handed me on my cubical that said. “Camp O.J. 8:00 tomorrow morning.”

For the next five months, I sat in the courtroom covering the O.J. Simpson civil trial—on the air for Good Morning America almost every morning.

PERSISTENCE. That's really how I got my start in network news.

That and a lot of hard work. They say be careful what you wish for.

That first morning, I showed up at the Simpson courthouse along with several hundred other reporters and camera crews that were doing the same thing I was. You can talk about competition and talk about the rigors of the routine they quickly settled in, both of them. Most mornings starting at 2:00 a.m. for the live broadcast because of the East Coast/West Coast time difference. And then actually covering the trial all day. It was not easy.

But over the years, I will tell you, I have watched some of the best in the business working harder than anyone else in the building. I've watched women and men, Diane Sawyer for one, in sweats and stocking feet, sitting with a producer to perfect a script well into the night. I've seen Lesley Stahl prepare for hours upon hours with meticulous detail for a single interview. They work very hard. They are persistent. That is in large measure why they have accomplished so much.

Success doesn't happen by chance. To reap the reward you have to do what you have heard many times before and what I say again today: Persistence. Hard Work. It's as simple as that.

Lesson Number 3, it's an important one—TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS.

When I first started anchoring The Early Show at CBS, I remember receiving a lot of opinions about everything I did—from a lot of different people—from my interviews to the color of my suits and the list went on. As someone who felt I still had a lot to learn, I tried to adopt the advice that I was hearing, but I quickly realized all the advice was adding up to something that wasn't me. I was constantly trying to meet other people's expectations rather than to just be myself. I had to trust some key professional advice, that's for sure. But I also had to trust what I felt inside—my instincts, my inner self.

So, what I wish for you is to develop, early, is what I didn't have—the quiet confidence to trust your instincts, to be able to say, “This is what I think. This is what I would like to do. This is what works for me.”

When that moment of self-discovery happens, I will tell you, it is a powerful thing and it will always serve you well.

I'd like to share with you some of my experiences of the last three years and a very important piece of advice that I would give you and that I have learned. And that is to keep your perspective.

Just before I was hired by CBS to anchor The Early Show, I was at home in my little studio apartment in Los Angeles making lists for everything I needed to get done, when the telephone rang.

My jaw fell to the floor as the voice on the other end of the line said, “This is Elder Neal Maxwell’s office in Salt Lake City. Elder Maxwell would like to speak with you. Do you have a moment that I may put him on the line?” Suddenly, there was nothing more important on my to-do list but to speak with an Apostle of the Lord.

Elder Maxwell was gracious and kind. He briefly explained that in his capacity overseeing Church Public Affairs, he had felt prompted to offer me a blessing as I started this new chapter in my life. He said, and if it wasn’t too inconvenient perhaps I could pass through Salt Lake City on my way to New York.

I hung up the phone and immediately changed my flight plans. Within a few days, my parents and I, who had come from California, flew to Salt Lake and drove to Elder Maxwell’s home. He and Sister Maxwell welcomed us so warmly, as if we had known them for years and we talked for a few minutes and then he pronounced the blessing. The Spirit was so powerful. Elder Maxwell said many things so eloquently, but there was one directive that penetrated my mind most deeply, “You must allow the Lord to use you. Sometimes you will not understand what he is doing or why he is doing it, but do not question. You must allow him to guide you and direct you.”

Sister Maxwell served us delicious soda cracker peach pie and, within an hour, we were back on our way to the airport and on our flight to New York.

I remember sitting in my apartment in New York that first night after my parents had left, looking over the Hudson River on the cuts of an extraordinary opportunity in many ways, feeling very much alone, and I remember thinking about Elder Maxwell words “Sometimes you will not understand what he is doing or why is doing it; you must allow him to guide you and direct you.”

And soon I began to understand some of what was ahead. In a few days, I found myself at the center of a conference call. It was actually a press conference via telephone, where reporters in their respective cities get on the other line and ask question about the new program. I was sort of being introduced as the co-anchor. They were journalists from all over the country such as the Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, USA Today and TV Guide. It was a tough crowd.

I remember a conversation with the president of CBS News just before the call. We were reviewing “talking points” for this really important meeting, and I told him, “I think my religion is going to come up in the course of this conversation.”

And he looked at me somewhat disbelieving tone he said, “Oh, Jane, we’re beyond that.”

And I said, “Okay.” Sure enough, not more than three minutes into the call came one of the first questions. It wasn’t about my reporting experience. It wasn’t about anything I had done at ABC

or any stories I'd covered. It had to do with my choice of beverage in the morning. They could not believe that I didn't drink coffee!

One reporter nearly shouted out, in a deep, gruff voice: "You're a Mormon?"

And I said, "Yes, I am."

She said, "Do you drink coffee?"

"No, no I don't drink coffee." Slight pause . . .

"How can anyone possibly wake up at 3:45 in the morning, do a two-hour morning program, and not drink coffee?"

I began laughing, I thought it was a joke but soon realized that she wasn't kidding.

The next morning, her newspaper column read something like this: "Jane Clayson, a Mormon who doesn't drink coffee," and on with the rest of the story.

Anchoring The Early Show was one of the most invigorating experiences of my life. It was also one of the most difficult experiences simply because of the physically and emotionally grueling routine that it required. I had absolutely no idea what I was getting myself into.

Mornings began with that 3:45 A.M. alarm clock. I'd arrive at the studio and, depending on how big the bags were under my eyes, spend about half an hour in hair and makeup. Skim four to five newspapers. Stop off in wardrobe. Revise and prepare scripts for that day's program. Be debriefed by producers about overnight interview changes on the broadcast. Be on the air at 6:30 A.M. with local affiliate anchors to promote the program, then cameras were live from 7:00 to 9:00 A.M. Then there was more promotion with West Coast anchors. And that was the fun part of the day.

Following the broadcast, meetings lasted until noon. Luncheons or speaking engagements at mid-day. There was almost always a photo shoot or some story that you covered in the afternoon. I'd get home by 5:30 P.M. for a quick dinner before homework arrived. Homework meant packets. About five to six 15-page packets—one for each interview for the next day. I would read those packets and prepare an outline and line of questioning for each interview. Bedtime was 9:00 or maybe 9:30. And then it was time to get up and do it all over again the next day.

It was a relentless routine. But every morning brought an extraordinary opportunity to interview the newsmakers of the day, from Washington to Hollywood and everywhere in between.

And more often than I ever imagined during that period of time, some issue related to my religion would come up. Not only did I not take a morning coffee, but I also had to explain to producers that I would need some sparkling cider or some water on set in the morning during 'cooking segments,' while everyone else was having wine or champagne at 8:30 in the morning.

I soon realized that who I was and what I believed was a source of fascination for some people. So what I said and how I reacted was always very much in the forefront of my mind.

I met many people and interacted with many colleagues who, surprisingly, would say to me, “I’ve never met a Mormon before.” They probably had but didn’t know it. In the world of network news I was an anomaly. I sometimes felt like a display in a department store window and often heard, “Oh, you’re the Mormon!”

But there were many wonderful opportunities to move beyond the inevitable questions about polygamy and the Word of Wisdom and try to describe the Latter-day Saints as people of faith and who are good and try to live service-oriented lives.

Still, there were many powerful and persuasive voices trying to persuade me to do otherwise. I want to share a story of a magazine shoot that I did once. It was for a popular ladies’ magazine. I remember showing up at a studio in lower Manhattan overlooking the Statue of Liberty and walked in and I could clearly see a lot of time and effort had been spent in preparation for this. There were stylists and hair and make up people and I was escorted to a back room to be shown the wardrobe I was going to wear for the shoot and the editor came with me and she showed me to my room and closed the door and I remember going through these racks of clothes and becoming increasingly uncomfortable as I realized I could not wear any of these clothes. My mind flipped back to my teenage years picking out a formal prom dress with my mom who said to me back then, “You may not wear that. It’s not modest, it’s not appropriate.” As I said a little prayer and asked Heavenly Father to help me, I remember walking up to this editor and telling her “I’m sorry, I can’t wear this, I can’t wear these clothes,” knowing full well that this shoot may be over and knowing the additional ramifications associated with that. I was picking up my bags to leave and this editor stopped me and said, “we have found some new clothes for you and they will be here in just a minute.” Sometimes it’s really hard to stand up for what you know is right and what you believe.

I remember also a lunch meeting with a CBS executive who handed me a paper that was a “personal PR plan” in conjunction with the broadcast. As part of that plan she suggested that it would be very nice if I dated someone famous. “Maybe an actor or an athlete,” she said, “That’s always a sure way to generate good press.”

Sure, good press for the show, but what was that going to do to my story, the one I had been slowly turning over to the Lord?

I had extraordinary experiences in network news and I will always be grateful for them. I remember a poignant moment initiated a series of events in my own life that changed the course of my life.

I was at Ground Zero in New York City on the one-year anniversary of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on our country. I was anchoring, with Dan Rather, CBS’s coverage of that terrible day for six hours. I had returned from Washington, D.C., two days earlier, where I had interviewed First Lady Laura Bush in the Blue Room of the White House. I just remember, professionally, I was on top of the world.

But, the emotions of the day hit me quite forcefully. I looked into the faces of those who had lost someone the year before—a husband, a wife, best friend—and I remember thinking over and over, “Life is so fragile.” The only things that matter are the relationships with our families and those we love.

I could not put those feelings aside. As I allowed my mind to wander and reflect, I stumbled upon two quotes that maybe you’ll remember from today. They have become my favorites:

First, from the actress and comedian Lily Tomlin: “You can win the rat race, but you’re still a rat.”

And this, from the Pulitzer Prize winning writer Anna Quindlen: “If your success is not on your own terms, if it looks good to the world but does not feel good in your soul, it is not success at all.”

Make no mistake, I was grateful for the many tremendous experiences I was having. I was passionate about my work. I even felt that I was fulfilling a particular mission I had been called to serve. But, I also felt that one of my deepest longings had not been met. And that was to be a wife and a mother.

Shortly after this experience, I met my husband, Mark, and not long after, on the grounds of the Salt Lake Temple, he asked me to marry him and, in classic BYU style, seven weeks later we were married in the Salt Lake Temple

For me this was another “NOW WHAT” moment. What happened over the course of the next few months is something I could not have choreographed on my own, or even dreamed up, for that matter. I talk about it in my book.

What followed were more than just interesting experiences. Shortly after that it has been three years now and I had decided to leave my television career in New York City to get married to Mark and to have a family. When I did that many of my colleagues told me I was nuts. I had turned down four-year network contract; it was a nice package with lots of interesting projects and prime-time opportunities with a big pay check attached.

When I explained to one rather influential colleague that I would not be taking that contract offer, that I was moving to Boston, he told me I was making a terrible decision that I would regret for years to come. “What will you be without your job?” he said. “If you leave television now, you’re done.” He quoted an old CBS newsman as saying, “Without work, there is no meaning to life.” And finally, knowing of my faith, he asked, “What are you going to do? Move up there and teach Sunday School?” Well, as it turned out, the first Sunday in my new ward, I was called to teach Sunday School.

Another network executive asked me what I was going to do once I got to Boston. I told her I was going to have a family, I was going to be a mother. “No, I understand that,” she said, looking quite puzzled, “But what are you going to do?”



This experience has taught me one of the most important lessons of my life, which I feel impressed to share, often, especially with young women. To the beautiful young women here today, may I say to you: There are seasons in life. Don't ever let anyone deny you the blessings and the joy of one season because they believe you should be in—or stay in—another season.

And never be afraid to aspire to be a mother.

Along your path my friends, there will always be people with their own agendas, that will always be there to tell you what you should think, how you should feel, what you ought to do. Do not listen. Trust your instincts. Keep perspective.

And set your moral compass now.

In the world of network television news, I witnessed some rather remarkable things.

And I worked along side people who would literally do anything, morally and otherwise, to get ahead.

Let me tell you today: No job, no career, no success is ever worth that.

And may I add this: There will always be another project. There will always be another interview, there will always be another award, there will always be another “something.” I didn't ever want to look back on my life and point to a bookshelf of videotapes and say, that's been my life. Or a wall full of pictures of amazing places with interesting people and say, that's been my life.

My dear friends, an old friend of mine once told me: “It is so much easier to write a resume than it is to craft a spirit.”

Let me tell you, now that I have two children ages two and a half and 15 months and three beautiful stepchildren 15, 14, and 11—I often say, as hard as I worked in TV, I work harder now!

And some days I think it would be easier, if not preferable, to be a foreign correspondent than it would be to be a mother. There are definitely moments, when I am down on my hands and knees mopping up yet another mess, when I look up at the TV to see an old friend interviewing someone interesting or globetrotting on a big story and I think, “What have I done?”

But as I look into the little faces of my sweet children—I would not do it differently.

I would not.

I trusted in the Lord and I will continue to trust in the Lord as I make decisions about the direction of my life.

I know what I gave up for this season of my life. And I know what I gave it up for.

I traded in fancy lunches, in fancy restaurants for delicious, bunny-shaped macaroni and cheese. There's no one to do my hair and make-up anymore (quite obviously!). Some mornings I'm lucky to squeeze in a shower. When I get up at 4:00 A.M. these days, it's not to be chauffeured off to a TV studio. Now, in the wee hours of the morning, you'll often find me tucked in the corner of the nursery, lulling a little baby (or two!) back to sleep. No more pats on the backs for booking exclusive interviews. They don't give awards for best diaper change of the day. And I don't get a paycheck you can cash at any bank. Now my rewards come in packages money could never buy.

There will be times when you have to make decisions about the direction of your life. And only you can know what's right for you at each stage of your life.

My path is not your path and your path is unique to you.

And I hope you'll always look for the "NOW WHAT?" moments in your life—and prayerfully consider the Lord's will for your life. Those moments are turning points. Yes, they can be very scary, but they are the doorways to the next opportunity, the next adventure, to the next season of your life.

I didn't bury my career. I still do occasional projects. I love to work on a show in Boston for National Public Radio now and then. But my life is very different than it was before.

And I wouldn't have it any other way.

May I tell you a story that illustrates that point? Not long ago, Mark and I were in Florida visiting his mom with our sweet new baby and my older step-kids. One morning after breakfast we were all walking through the lobby of the hotel.

I had our children in tow and probably looked a little frazzled, with my hair pulled back, my fabulous new mom wardrobe, no make-up on. Suddenly from across the room I hear someone say, "Jane, Jane, is that you?"

I turned around to see a rather well known old friend, somebody I had interviewed and profiled years before on The Early Show. He looked just the same—dressed and pressed perfectly.

I looked quite different, with a baby in arms, diaper bag over my shoulder and clad in this wonderful mommy outfit.

After a round of introductions with my husband, this fellow looked at me and for as long as I live I'll never forget what he said or how he said it:

"So, what are you up to these days?"

Then he paused, looked down at my kids, and said, "Just a mom?"

In a split second I had to decide. What was I going to say? What came out of my mouth surprised me at first, but also made me very happy.

“Just a mom?” I thought.

“No, No!” I proclaimed with a smile. “I am a mother!”

He got the message.

My brothers and sisters, this is the greatest university in the world. There is no place that will prepare you from the inside out for the many challenges and choices that are ahead of you. And there is no question, our Heavenly Father has wonderful things in store for you.

Will you please remember to trust in Him? Have faith that He knows you. He loves you. And He will bless you. I know He will.

That is my prayer and my testimony, in the sacred name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.