

Jan Wahl

BY MIMI TOWLE



Within two years of graduating from San Francisco State with a B.A. in radio and television in 1975, Jan Wahl held an Emmy in one hand (for producing and writing a comic documentary on the Lee Marvin palimony case) and an invitation to join the Directors Guild of America in the other. “I was thrilled to be the youngest woman inductee,” says Wahl, who brought along her mom to accept her award. “My mom always told me that women can do anything and she has always encouraged me to draw outside the lines.”

That sage advice has guided Wahl over the past three decades as she’s established herself as a star both on camera and off (winning two more Emmys along the way). For nearly 20 years she’s been discussing or dishing about the latest Hollywood news on TV’s KRON-4 as well as radio, newsprint and other media. Nowadays, always in a bonny chapeau, Wahl spends much of her time emceeding community events and teaching classes on entertainment. We caught up with her last month just as she was about to catch a Crystal Cruise ship to Iceland—not as a guest (though she undoubtedly could use the rest) but as a seminar leader.

You could live anywhere. Why Marin? I’ve lived in Marin for 26 years. It’s a magical place [full of] beauty, history . . . a place that celebrates eccentrics, those of us who march in our own unique parade.

What makes you happy in Marin? The views, the fingers of fog climbing over the hills, the animals and the people who love them. The rainbow tunnel, the quest for inner peace and higher consciousness.

What bothers you here? Traffic.

What do you value every day? An attitude of gratitude.

What is your personal idea of luxury? Time to read, swing-dance (142 Throckmorton Theatre and Marin Center) and swim.

What person has influenced you the most? Patrick Dennis’s fictional Auntie Mame, who said, “Life is a banquet and most poor suckers are starving to death”; filmmakers Billy Wilder and George Stevens; Ruth Gordon as Maude in *Harold and Maude* and every woman who was and is not too invested in what others think of her.

What has been the most fulfilling moment in your work? When young people tell me that I have them looking at theater, music or movies in a new way and that they are viewing and studying people they would never have known about, from Tennessee Williams to Cole Porter to Barbara Stanwyck to anchorman Howard Beale in the movie *Network*.

What’s your desert-island favorite book or album? Albums by Janis Joplin, Frank Sinatra, Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald. I am an avid reader of biographies and books on classic Hollywood and Broadway.

What’s your favorite place to unwind? Anyplace with live music playing swing or traditional rock ‘n’ roll, dog parks.

Do you have a favorite Marin view? The amphitheater on Mount Tam and Sausalito waterfront.

What do you like about yourself? Enthusiasm, kindness, warmth, willingness to speak out, to plant my feet and tell my truth (always backing it up with specifics—that’s what I teach in my critical thinking classes!).

How do you want to be remembered? As a woman who lived out loud, with zest, passion and opinions! And who once in a while made a difference.

PHOTO: BARBARA RIES

