

TV Sunday

Paula Zahn was supposed to be history when she was moved to make way for Bryant Gumbel on CBS' morning show. After spending \$30 million, CBS still hasn't matched her ratings. Now, as the signature figure of Fox News Channel, she is taking dead aim at CNN.



FOX-TV Lady

by MICHAEL GILTZ

Life is busy at Fox News Channel. "It's pretty crazy, sandwiched here between conventions," admits Paula Zahn. The co-anchor — with Brit Hume — of the 24-hour cable channel's convention coverage and host of the daily hard news/interview show "The Edge with Paula Zahn," she's become the face of Fox News Channel. And that face is smiling after her strong showing at last week's coronation in Philadelphia. "We couldn't be happier," says the 41-year-old Zahn. "The Republican convention is the first convention we've had a crack at covering. The fact that we resoundingly beat MSNBC and came close to tying CNN in certain time slots is very encouraging."

Those triumphs are more fun to discuss than the perennially third-placed "CBS This Morning," which Zahn co-hosted for six years with Harry Smith. Born in Omaha and raised in a Chicago suburb, Zahn worked her way steadily through the local news ranks to snag a spot with ABC. She then jumped at the rare chance of a slot on a network morning news show, only to work under a perpetual cloud of indecisiveness at CBS. She and Smith ultimately carved out a thinking-person's niche. But it was clear more changes were in

store when Fox News Channel dangled its offer of primetime TV and a return to covering breaking news.

"My daughter had a very distorted notion of what mommy's life was like. She told her nursery school teacher that her mother lived in a box."

Zahn took the plunge into cable and expresses undisguised (if good-natured) glee that CBS's infusion of cash and massive promotional support hasn't helped the show since her departure. "I am so proud of my record there," she says. "Harry and I had the longest run of any team in CBS morning history and our ratings were significantly higher than CBS' are today." She's even prouder of her new home's coverage of the conventions,

despite naysayers who insist these events have been reduced to glorified infomercials.

"The cynics will always argue covering a convention is a waste of time, that it's when the party is selling its wares. I find that argument very hard to justify."

"We had no idea what Condeleeza Rice or Colin Powell were going to say. I just think you could carry that argument to ridiculous extremes."

"What, you don't cover the inauguration because you know what's going to happen minute-by-minute? It's absurd."

Zahn pointedly refers to their work as "fair and very balanced," citing the network's marketing pitch but also an indication she's aware that some believe Fox News Channel leans to the right. (Fox

News Channel is owned by News Corporation, the owners of this newspaper.)

Asked directly and she says simply, "I'm amused every time I hear that. I ask people who say that to give me an example of where they see something biased on my show."

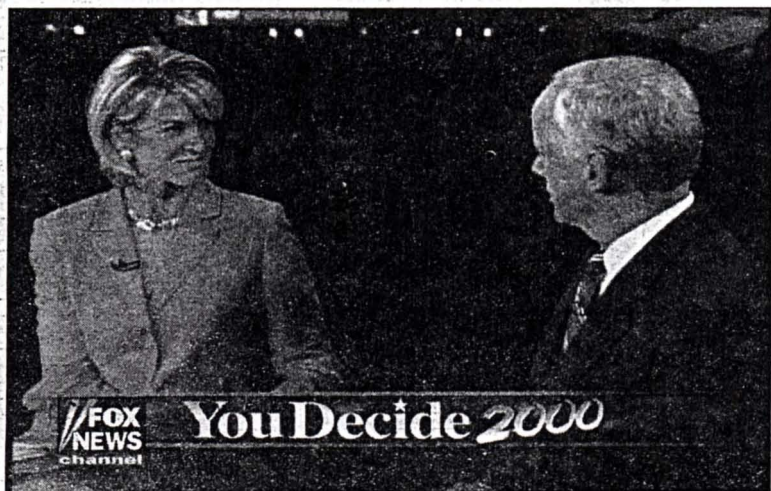
"No one who has ever made that charge can ever come up with a real example of what they think is a bias to the right."

It was an issue Zahn treated very seriously before making her decision to join Fox News Channel.

"Clearly when you hear stories like that you want to know whether there is any basis for them," says Zahn, who describes the editorial process as virtually the same as it was at ABC and CBS.

"Before I came to interview with See **ZAHN** on Page 106

The perils of Paula



Paula Zahn (top, interviewing Oklahoma Gov. Frank Keating during last month's GOP convention) is relieved she no longer has to call some network suit to get permission to break in with a news bulletin. How she looked (at right) when she broke in with ABC News in early 1980s. Bryant Gumbel (above) who replaced her, still hasn't been able to catch up to her ratings.



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Roger Ailes, I spent a lot of time watching Fox News Channel to make sure I had a comfort level with what was being put on the air. I really think some of those charges come out of marketing jealousy."

Now, Zahn says, some of her co-workers back at the networks are jealous of her opportunity to cover breaking news without having to "phone a vice president of entertainment and get permission to break into regular programming."

"This transition has been unbelievably good for me," says Zahn. "When I came to Fox I walked into some major stories. My first four months here, war broke out in Kosovo; we had the Columbine massacre; the Atlanta shootings and that horrible series of tornadoes we saw throughout the Midwest."

On a personal level, the transition has been even sweeter.

"That alarm clock no longer goes off at 4:30 in the morning," laughs Zahn, who is married and has three children. "I have to confess, it took a good year for my body not to naturally wake up at that time."

"After 10 years on that shift, there's no way out of it. But six o'clock is a lot more reasonable than 4:30."

"I have a life for the first time in many, many years," she says.

"Clearly I travel and work some very long hours. But my kids actually know who I am now," she jokes.

"My daughter had a very distorted notion of what mommy's life was like when I was doing the morning news. She told her nursery school teacher that her mother lived in a box."

Best of all, that personal satisfaction comes from a career decision that seems more right every day.

"Twenty years ago," says Zahn, "those of us in network news were highly cynical about cable. We weren't convinced cable would ever have an impact on the news business."

"And guess what folks, that's where the action is today."

"Harry [Smith] and I had the longest run of any team in CBS morning history and our ratings were significantly higher than CBS' are today."