

Gretchen Carlson, Anoka High School, Class of 1984, anchor/journalist, CBS News

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As a student at Anoka High School in the 1980s Gretchen Carlson did not plan on becoming a TV journalist and news anchor. Back then, playing the violin was her focus, and as an undergraduate at Stanford University she planned to go to law school. Instead she chose journalism, and last spring, after more than a decade in the business, Carlson was promoted to co-anchor of The Saturday Early Show on CBS.

To many Minnesotans Carlson is known best as the winner of the 1989 Miss America pageant - the event that led her to a career in broadcast journalism, she said. As a talented young violinist, Carlson performed for radio and TV, and later as Miss America she dealt with the media and made many TV appearances. So instead of going to law school, Carlson embarked on a career in which she worked both behind the camera as a reporter and in front of it as an anchor.

"Fourteen years later I'm still at it," said Carlson. While being on TV may look like a glamorous job, it is not, she said. Her CBS News appointment is the payoff for years of hard work and sacrifice. Carlson's career path to CBS is a familiar one for journalists: she started in small towns for small pay, moved frequently to bigger and bigger markets and slowly advanced her career, she said.

Living and working in Texas, Ohio, Virginia and now New York City, Carlson has seen the quality of education - public and private - offered in other parts of the country. "Minnesota and Anoka-Hennepin public schools were so good you didn't need to go to a private school," she said. "Anoka High School offered me the chance to get a great education, to go on to Stanford and I wouldn't change that."

Carlson lives in New York City with her husband Casey Close and the two are expecting their first child in May, she said. She keeps close ties with family and friends in Minnesota, and she remains a die-hard Vikings football fan, she said. "Every now and then my co-workers at CBS will hear my Minnesota accent, it seems to come back after I visit home for a while."

When asked what advice she would give to high school students, Carlson cites a good basic education as most important - "kids might say how much of a drag it is to go to school, but it is what will turn your life in a positive direction." When they consider a career students should seek out people who work in jobs that interest them, she said. Internships are not only a good way to start a career, but to get familiar with what is required in a job. "Try and do as much as you can to see if you really want to do it," she said.

Carlson was "a serious student" at Anoka High School and graduated as valedictorian of her 1984 class, she said. She had many great teachers at Anoka High School and when asked to talk about one in particular she names Jack Nabedrick, an English teacher who retired in 1995 She recalled that instead of a grade on one of her papers he wrote "carpe diem."

"Shuddering in my boots that I didn't get an 'A,' I asked him what it meant," said Carlson. Nabedrick told her to look it up, and she discovered its meaning: "seize the day," but she still wondered why he put it on her paper. "He wanted to make his students think about everything in a slightly different way," she said. "We were so used to seeing grades ... he shook it up a bit. He was telling me I did a good job ... but he wanted to challenge me even further. ... 'Carpe diem' for me is synonymous with what I do, and I think about that just about everyday."

