Janet St. James Article

From working at several television networks to now overseeing communications at a major health system, Janet St. James has surpassed even the greatest of expectations.

One of St. James’ biggest influences was her mother, who gave her the original idea to become a reporter. “Never question your mom. That’s the lesson,” said St. James when fondly talking about her mother’s advice during her early career.

While working in Oklahoma City to her time at WFAA-TV, Channel 8 in Dallas, St. James admits she was surrounded by supportive women. “I always worked hard, maybe harder than most,” St. James said when discussing her time in the different newsrooms. From working the police beat in Oklahoma City to the medical beat in Dallas, she has always given her best effort to make each story meaningful.

“There’s no question that journalists are the voice of the voiceless,” stated St. James. She says that it is important to shine a light on people and situations that might not always get the full attention that they deserve.

St. James was one of the first journalists on the scene of the Murrah Federal Building bombing in Oklahoma City and credits the impact covering the story so early in her career for her outlook as a journalist. She recounted how she was given warm socks after standing in the freezing rain for hours, calling it a shining example of human decency and coming together as a community. “It changed my life in a couple of ways,” said St. James. “...it totally changed my approach to people in moments of crisis,” she mentioned when speaking about dealing with those affected by any sort of traumatic situation.

This approach would aid her in covering both the police and medical beats over her 25-year career in journalism. St. James could easily be most well known in Dallas for breaking the story about the Ebola case at Texas Health Dallas hospital in 2014. She worked day and night gathering as much information as possible. She also said that during the time of panic, she wanted to “be a voice of reason and calm” while other reporters may have further sensationalized the situation out of fear or lack of knowledge. As the longtime medical reporter who had built respectful relationships within the healthcare community, she earned an exclusive interview with Dr. Gary Weinstein, the physician who treated the original Ebola patient, Thomas Eric Duncan and survivor Nina Pham, who was a nurse of Duncan’s.. Her insight helped to humanize the incident and bring understanding to the Dallas area - and to the American people.

She said that the best thing about being a journalist is “…not necessarily the big stories. The stories that touched my heart, I think, and touched other people's hearts.”
St. James now works in the medical field at Medical City Healthcare as the Assistant Vice President of Communications, but admits she misses the environment of the newsroom every day. “I really loved everything about North Texas. It has a small enough town feel, but big town issues,” commented St. James.

As for her advice for future journalists, she says “...don't listen to those who say, ‘you can't.’ You have to believe in yourself. And if it's what you want, then believe in yourself and go get it.”