

Interview with Yvonne Ridley

31 Jan. 04

Source: *Journalism.co.uk*

Award-winning journalist Yvonne Ridley says there is still a great deal of snobbery in the print media towards web journalism.

What was your first job in journalism? I worked for the Durham Advertiser Series as a cub reporter and went through three years training because I entered journalism straight from school as a teenager.

How did you get your first big break? I've had many milestones. In my first week as a reporter I got the splash - but I didn't know how to write it!

How has journalism changed since you started?

Apart from the editor, the most influential person in the newsroom was the chief sub-editor. Bylines were earned; I had to wait six months for my first one. Now they are used more as style devices.

Newsrooms employed many more journalists, so there were more investigative units. Now investigative journalism is regarded as more of a luxury, which is a great shame.

I started off with a typewriter and never lost a story until new technology came along to make our lives easier. I still remember when I lost a 1600-word feature on a computer while working for the Newcastle Journal. That was painful.

How did you train to be a journalist? I trained at the sharp end doing weddings, funerals and county shows. If I spelled anyone's name incorrectly they didn't ring in to complain - they arrived at the office and confronted you!

How did you begin working as a web journalist? I first began filing stories for an intelligence website called Globe-Intel, run by veteran journalist Gordon Thomas.

But I became a fully fledged web hack when I began working in July for Al-Jazeera's English web site.

Have you had to adapt your skills to write for the internet? Not really. As a former tabloid journalist I reverted back to tight copy and short paragraphs for easy reading.

Should print journalists embrace new media? I still think there's a great deal of snobbery in the print media regarding internet journalism.

This is misplaced because the internet is a powerful medium used globally by all sorts of people who are looking for something different than print media has to offer.



المسكين

How did your attitude to your work change after your capture in Afghanistan? The experience forced me to change from undercover reporting which I really enjoyed.

After my release my face was everywhere, so I re-invented myself and began covering humanitarian issues.

What was the most important thing that you learnt from the experience? Don't believe your own publicity!

Did you consider leaving journalism? Never. It is in my blood and will always play a part in my life, although I have expanded into other areas now.

I've just written a fictional thriller - based on journalism - and I am hoping to write more books.

What makes the internet such a powerful platform for news publishing? It is instant and the feedback is likewise.

As a reporter I would get a kick out of seeing someone read my story on a bus or train. With the internet the feedback can happen within minutes, and even if it is negative it is good to get a response or reaction to your work.

What is the biggest challenge of working online? The same as in any media - being first with the news.

How will the development of digital media influence traditional news publishing? I think it will affect daily newspapers, but I still think that there's nothing better on a Sunday than to stretch out on the carpet with your favorite newspaper.

Do you think the media industry is equally fair to men and women? No. It never has been and there are still huge pay differentials among national newspapers with women earning less.

The big discriminatory factor looming though is ageism.

Which web sites do you use regularly? The Guardian, Globe-Intel, BBC and Al-Jazeera.

What advice would you give to new journalists? Focus early on in your career exactly where you want to go and never lose sight of your ultimate goal. But more importantly enjoy what you do - this is not a 9-5 job!

Yvonne Ridley has now left Al-Jazeera: see http://majdur.htmlplanet.com/al-Masakin/Volume1/yvonne_ridley_fired.19nov03.pdf.

Her latest book *Ticket to Paradise* is available through US publisher Carol Adler at <http://www.dandelionbooks.net>.

Compiled by Jemima Kiss

Al-Masakin
<http://majdur.htmlplanet.com>