



FINDING BALANCE:

Deborah Norville

The serene countenance Deborah Norville presents to her daily television audience appears effortless, and her southern roots are evident in the charm and grace she brings to her roles as anchor for the top-rated syndicated news-magazine, Inside Edition and MSNBC's Deborah Norville Tonight. Off camera, Deborah remains poised, her bright eyes sparkling as she speaks of her life, her very public career, and womanhood in general.

While it might appear that the Georgia native is living a charmed life, she cautions that the balance between a successful career and a rewarding personal life can be a day-to-day definition. "Because balance is tenuous, one little gust of wind, and you're off balance. I hope women understand that you can't have it all, all the time. You can have some of it, some of the time. It is very important to know what your own priorities are, to know who you are, what you are all about—the real essence of what makes you *you*," Deborah stresses. She cautions that women must recognize that each person has her own path in life.

"Joseph Campbell once said 'What myth are you living?' and the reality is that many of us try to live someone else's myth, someone else's story. For example, 'it looks so great for Deborah Norville, I want to do it the way she did it.' Well, you only see me when the good stuff is going on, when I've got the makeup on and the hair is combed and a smile is on my face. And you know, that is more days than not, but I have the bad days just like everybody else," Deborah laughs.

"It is so important for women to know who they are, and to know what it is that makes their heart sing. I think that is really the most important information we all need, for once you figure that out—and it is not an easy process—you'll be able to make your choices in a much more effective way. By living by your own precepts, you will make the choice that is right for you," she muses.

Talking with Deborah, it is apparent what makes her heart sing. First is her family, her husband, Karl Wellner, and their three children. Next is the career that has made her name recognizable in most every American household.

Deborah's career was launched when, as a sophomore at the University of Georgia, she landed an internship with Georgia Public Television, which rapidly led to an internship at WAGA-TV in Atlanta. Following college graduation (Phi Beta Kappa with a 4.0 GPA), she became the weekend anchor for the station.

Her career path led to Chicago, then on to New York for a stint on the *Today* show. Deborah faced not only a monumental professional challenge in her new job as co-anchor of a popular morning news program, but also the sting of criticism from those who resented Jane Pauley's exit from the show. As Deborah documents in her book, *Back on Track: How to Straighten Out Your Life When It Throws You A Curve*, it was also a time that opened her eyes to the realities of the competitiveness of television journalism.

Being from the South has sometimes worked to Deborah's advantage. "I have found that because I'm a woman, and a blue-eyed blonde, people just don't expect that I will ask the tough questions," notes the skilled reporter.

She points out the observation made by David Halberstam in his book *The Powers That Be*, an examination of press power in America, that some of the most

BY BARBARA COCKERHAM

Equally comfortable before a television and a live audience, Deborah is much in demand as a speaker. At right, she wows those attending the first annual *Southern Lady Celebration*, held last November in Sandestin, Florida.

savvy and most tenacious reporters at the time of the book's writing were from the South. "The notion was that they were more polite, more likely to not butt in, usually talked slower, and were completely disarming. People who normally would have a wall up tended to lower that a bit, and that is when the reporter came in for the kill, and got the great story," Deborah says. "I remember distinctly a time when I was an intern covering the Georgia Legislature and I interviewed the head of the Senate Appropriations Committee. I asked him a very pointed question, and he literally started, as though he had been punched. It was quite clear he never expected a tough question from me."

Being a Southerner "has probably worked to my disadvantage, too. I'll do my job, and I'll be tenacious, but in office politics, I would say being a genteel Southerner has not worked in my favor. I am not as tough as some of those guys in there. I would probably still be anchoring the *Today* show if I were. But I can sleep well at night," she says with a smile.

"As women, I think our greatest opportunity is also our greatest challenge. As Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Anna Quindlen said, women today have so many more choices. But choosing hasn't gotten any easier. I think it has gotten more difficult, for there aren't barriers, societal or political or otherwise. You can pretty much do anything you please, if you've got a mind to make it happen," Deborah says. "I think the biggest challenge is that we *can* do anything, which means you really do figure out who you want to be and what is right for you, and then move forward."

Self-examination and soul searching will lead women to rightly choose their path in life, Deborah notes. "When you figure out what legend you should be living, you are going to be confident, having made a decision that in your heart and your head you know is right for you. What you may find is that you don't want to do the balancing act between the career, high-powered or not, and the family. Maybe the payoff at the end of the day is not really worth it."



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Deborah stresses that she maintains a separateness in her professional life and home life. At work, she is Deborah Norville, the two-time Emmy Award-winning journalist. At home, she assumes another identity: Deborah Wellner and Mom to Niki, Kyle, and Mikaela.

"I think our job as parents is to give our children roots to grow and wings to fly. I want my kids to be curious, to be interested in a lot of things, to be confident, and to feel they belong in any number of situations," Deborah says. For her children, fostering that sense of belonging is tied to the visits they make to the northwest Georgia town where Deborah grew up, a place that is part of their heritage.

"On a visit there last summer when I couldn't find my little girl, I knew exactly where she was. She was feeding Wonder Bread to the mules and horses in the corral. And I knew where my eight-year-old was—he was there trying to catch a llama," she says. "The kids have decided that one of their favorite kinds of picnics is one they call a Grandpa picnic: you buy little cans of Beanie Weenies, put them on top of the motor, drive up to the mountain, and when you get to the top, pop the can top and lunch is ready. Yes, I want my kids to be at home in all those worlds."

Whether behind the camera or at home with her family, Deborah strives to make each moment count—just part of the determination and charm that make her a success, both on-screen and off.