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Cover Story

Just Jane: Pauley gets personal

By Ann Oldenburg
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NEW YORK — Jane Pauley. The name has been part of the television landscape for decades.

See Jane with Tom Brokaw on *Today*.

Now see Jane with Bryant Gumbel. There's Jane with Stone Phillips on *Dateline*.

Go, Jane, go.

Pauley's career has been a steady progression through the NBC hallways, a reflection of her steady Midwestern professionalism. Through 32 years in the TV business, the Indiana-born Pauley has prompted monikers such as Saint Jane and Regular Jane; adjectives used to describe her in interviews usually include "pleasant" and "wholesome," along with "focused" and "direct."

She has carved out a name for herself not as the perky or pretty Pauley (although she was the ingénue on *Today* in 1976) but as a respected news personality. In 1989, she told an interviewer, "Nobody calls me silly. That is not a word that applies to me."

And although she has been high-profile with her 24-year marriage to *Doonesbury* cartoonist Garry Trudeau, she otherwise has avoided celebrity.



See Jane talk: Jane Pauley tapes one of the first episodes of her talk show, which premieres Aug. 30.

She'll proudly tell you that celeb photographers have gotten a photo of her three children only once, and that was when they were babies; they are teenagers now.

As a result, Pauley, 53, has become a symbol of and icon for many baby boomer women: juggling three kids, a husband and a big New York media job, working hard for respect, struggling to find a good haircut and never revealing too much of herself.

"I have been protecting things for so long," she says.

Now all of that might be about to change.

On Tuesday, the story of her life will hit bookstores: *Skywriting: A Life Out of the Blue* (Random House, \$25.95). And her new nationally syndicated talk show, *The Jane Pauley Show*, premieres Aug 30.

If Oprah Winfrey, queen of daytime talk, is any indication, to be successful with the program, Pauley will have to get personal.

Winfrey wheeled out that wagon full of fat and never heard the end of it. Montel Williams has talked about his multiple sclerosis. Dr. Phil does shows with his wife, Robin. And Ellen DeGeneres, although she doesn't gab about her homosexuality, has put her mom in the spotlight.

Even Pauley's executive producer, Michael Weisman, says, "People watch not so much the show; they watch the personality."

Her biggest new competition is Tony Danza, who premieres Sept. 7. *The Jane Pauley Show* has been cleared on 198 stations covering more than 99% of the USA. It will be shown in all top 50 markets; most local station owners plan to air it in the key lead-in slot to their afternoon news, 3 to 5 p.m.

Andrew Tyndall of *The Tyndall Report*, which tracks TV news, says: "She's never not done well. Her strength has always been she's just a nice person, more than journalistic strength. She doesn't annoy people. But she's got a sense of humor. She's got a little twinkle in her eye. And she doesn't take herself too seriously."

Phil Donahue, whose talk show was on for years during Pauley's *Today* tenure, predicts success. "In her time at the *Today* show, there was no world leader she didn't interview. She has gravitas. She's a real live mother. Very informed and experienced. She can fly without notes. She's very good on her feet. She's got a wonderful chance to be a big hit."

Ray Warren of OMD USA, a media specialist company, says "curiosity is high" for the show. "Everyone loves Jane. The question will be how she handles a daily show, and can she carry the full on-air responsibility?"

Taping schedule is demanding

The pressure is on. And Pauley's feeling it.

"It's been a killer launching this," she says, sipping from a can of caffeine-free Diet Coke while sitting on a couch in her office at 30 Rockefeller Plaza. She's elegantly dressed in a beige pants outfit and is gingerly holding the drink because she has just had a manicure.

There's a feeling of temporary calm. Because it's a Friday, no shows are being taped. That happens on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, two shows a day.

"We did one of our test shows yesterday on insomnia," Pauley says. "Whether it's insomnia or the inability

to find more than four hours a night to sleep, it's just a general affliction. Everyone on the staff, I think, we've all aged a few years in the last month."

Because?

"It never stops. You work on a show knowing that you've got to have meetings about next week's show, and you've got to have meetings about shows that are in the works long term. It is relentless."

Seven segments will be in each show; the number of guests will vary. It won't be a news show, nor will it be celebrity-driven, though Matt Damon and his mom have been booked because Pauley is curious about the "shaping of his life."

Her wardrobe supervisor is Mark Agnes, who worked on *Sex and the City*. And Pauley says she would love to run out and greet the audience, but so far she has been having trouble.

"Nothing beats having a theme song, and you walk out, and people cheer and stand up and wildly give you this ovation. My problem is that so far I've been dressed in shoes that I can barely walk in."

The set is art deco elegant. "It is not Jane's living room. It doesn't imply 'At Home With Jane Pauley.'" But because the audience surrounds her in a half circle, "I really feel almost embraced."

The sense of intimacy appeals to her, and she is finding that the audience energizes her. "Their presence brings out more of me."

And it's the same studio, 8G, where Tom Brokaw introduced her on *Today*. She was 25.

"I was four years out of college. I had precocious broadcast skills, but I was still a baby. I wasn't grown up yet,

did not yet have a life — but, arriving at this building in 1976, it was very, very quiet. The floors were polished and the crews had put the equipment away; the staff of the *Today* show was skeletal compared to today. It was not the three-ring circus that the current Today show has at that hour. The scale wasn't daunting."

She adds: "Maybe it was something about the karma of that studio — I don't necessarily think in those terms — but it is a surprisingly comforting environment."

She matured before us on TV

For 13 years in that studio, Pauley was the co-anchor, first with Brokaw, then Gumbel. America watched as she matured, pregnant first with twins (Ross and Rachel, born in 1983) and then another son (Tom, 1986).

Then, in 1989, NBC brought in a younger woman, Deborah Norville, and pushed Pauley aside. Viewers rallied behind her, and Pauley was given her own newsmagazine show and a series of prime-time specials, but it really took until 1992 and *Dateline* for her to hit her stride again.

Through it all, her guard was up.

"I was an unusually private person — in a way, kind of insufferably so,"

she says. "I think I thought the celebrity thing when it happened was a temporary phenomenon, and I was above it."

She was young and in a high place, she says. "I had not intended to be there. It was not the realization of a lifelong ambition; it was a total mystery to me how I had got where I was. I was under the microscope being interviewed like this, and no one knew better than me the secret, which was I had no life. *I had no life.*"

Part of her motivation in protecting her privacy, she says, was to cover that secret. Later, when she did have a life — Trudeau and the kids — she continued to be protective. Celebrity, she says, is "unhealthy." Plus, she had the usual security concerns for her kids.

She had been thinking about doing something relating to women for a while. Then signs appeared last year "like a weathervane."

Her *Dateline* contract with NBC was reaching an end (she left in May 2003); two of her children had been launched into college life; her parents were no longer living; and menopause, she notes, was behind her. As she reviewed her life, keeping a journal every Saturday morning for years, she realized she had something to say.

Pauley already has drawn boundary

lines. "You definitely won't see Garry on the show. He wouldn't do it, and I wouldn't ask him." But daughter Rachel will be featured in an upcoming segment.

Pauley says it's OK now to be more open. "Referencing the children, who are now grown, is different from wheeling a stroller out onto the set. It's the idea of having a shared life experience."

And it's that life experience she wants to explore. "At midlife, I think a woman has more in common with her teenage children than anybody else. We all are kind of uncertain. We realize for the first time in either our lives or decades that we're in charge now."

But even though Pauley will be in charge of the show and plans to be more open, she doesn't sound like a budding Kelly Ripa or Kathie Lee Gifford.

"I have a very good sense of tone, and it's possible to talk about very personal things and maintain a level of dignity and even privacy — to go to the place, to talk about it, but not get icky. I could be wrong about that, but we shall see."