

The “Voice of Fairmont” – Annabel Webb

Annabel Webb was born and raised in Faribault, Minnesota. She attended and graduated from Carlton College and became a teacher. She taught in Ellendale, Minnesota, then came to Fairmont as an English and Latin teacher, and later taught in Granada. Fairmont is where she met and married Dr. Howard Webb, a local dentist. As her family grew, she eventually left teaching and soon became active in the community. In the years that followed, she proved to be instrumental in making a lasting and positive influence on Fairmont and Martin County in many ways, perhaps most notably through her radio program.

Annabel Webb, recognized by her friendly voice as well as her flamboyant attire, was well known for more than thirty years for her KSUM radio show, “*A Date with A. Webb.*” Her family was directly involved with her work as her morning show was broadcast live from the kitchen in her home at 705 Albion Avenue on weekdays until she retired in 1980.

Webb, known as the “Queen of Segue” because of the ease in which she went from interview to commercials, interviewed a wide variety of personalities from high profile movie stars to regular, everyday citizens. Some of her more prominent interviews included actress Joan Crawford, actors Gig Young and Bob Newhart, pianist Liberace, and Minnesota Senator Hubert H. Humphrey. It was well known that regardless of whom she interviewed, they were all treated with the utmost of kindness and respect.

Perhaps one of her most interesting and unforgettable broadcasts originated in her bathtub. She had decided to do a program on bathtubs after seeing a book about the history of bathtubs that had sparked her interest. Annabel thought it would be fun to put one of her children in the tub to splash around while pretending she hadn’t gotten up in time for the show and was just getting ready to broadcast her program. Frank Endersbe, KSUM station manager at that time, heard the splashing on his car radio and promptly sent a telegram telling Annabel to get out of the tub before she electrocuted herself.

Similar stunts, which were actually not the least bit uncommon for her, once involved a broadcast from an airplane where she stated, “So far, nothing has come up but conversation,” in reference to her queasy stomach as quoted in a *Sentinel* article from February 16, 1980. Another time, while broadcasting from her home, the family dog was having puppies and her children announced each new arrival on the air. In addition, her Christmas morning broadcast became a local holiday tradition and also involved her family. It included her three children reading from the Bible and the family singing Christmas Carols.

She had what might be considered somewhat eccentric traits as well. In addition to never learning to drive a car, she was well recognized for her many hats, and later for adding exotic sunglasses to her repertoire. It was said that she would first buy a hat, and then find suitable attire to match it.

Webb felt that the secret to her success was attributable to her listening to people and being well aware of the fact that everyone has a story to tell. She felt that to be successful, it was important to think about the person being interviewed, not yourself or your next question.

Annabel Webb's activities were not limited to radio. She was also well known for her keen sense of humor as well as being a talented singer and actress. She performed in a number of Civic Summer Theater productions, and was part of the original group that started the Civic Summer Theater as well. In addition, she was elected "Community Queen" in a Jaycee sponsored event in 1940.

Upon her retirement in 1980, the previously cited *Sentinel* article quoted Elizabeth Woodward as follows: "There's no one that can replace Annabel. She's really been a very unique, unusual individual who is game for anything, a great personality and a warm person. It's kind of a tough thing for all of us."

Annabel Webb was unmistakably unique in the somewhat unconventional delivery of her entertaining interviews to the listeners in Martin County, and beyond, over the course of her thirty years in radio. It is very evident that she had the character and creativity to develop her program in a distinctive manner which obviously created a great deal of interest in her many listeners over the years. She was undeniably one of a kind, a distinctive and gifted individual whose legacy will long be remembered. Martin County can be proud to be able to share her legacy.

To find out more about local history, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.