

Obituary: Pioneering Lesbian Journalist Deb Price Wrote Column on Gay Issues for Mainstream Media

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

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Deb Price, who in 1992 began writing a groundbreaking column on gay issues for *The Detroit News* that would go on to be syndicated nationally, died Nov. 20 following a nine-year battle with an autoimmune lung disease. She was 62.

Price was born and raised in Bethesda, Maryland. She attended the National Cathedral School in Washington, D.C. before moving to Ann Arbor to attend the University of Michigan. But Price soon transferred to Stanford University where she earned both a bachelor's and master's degree in literature.

Early jobs included working at the *States News Service* and the *Northern Virginia Sun*. Her big breakthrough was landing a job at the *Washington Post* as an assistant editor on the national, news and financial desks. Price left the *Post* for the *Detroit News* in 1989 where she was a deputy bureau chief and a Washington correspondent.

In 1992, five years before Ellen DeGeneres came out as a lesbian – both personally and

as her character Ellen on her popular sitcom – Price had the idea to write a column for the *News* on gay issues. Price brought the idea to Bob Giles, editor and publisher of the *News*, and he gave her the green light.

“It’s hard to overestimate how significant this was,” said Joshua Benton, founder of the Nieman Journalism Lab at Harvard University, in a Twitter post. “This was long before the Internet gave Americans a window

into any topic or community they wanted. Most people got a huge share of their information about the world from the local daily and local TV news. Most Americans in 1992 said they didn’t know a single gay person. Then suddenly there was Deb, on the breakfast table next to the sports section.”

The column quickly grew in popularity and began running in papers across the country. But it wasn’t always met with a positive response. Letters poured in calling the column



Deb Price, shown in 2003 in the *Detroit News*' Washington bureau. Photo: Courtesy Joyce Murdoch

“abominable” and worse. Other letters, however, praised Price for giving a voice to the voiceless. In short, the column stirred up emotion on both sides and that only lent to its success.

“I think it’s really important for me to remember [and] for other people to remember that if there weren’t hostility and if there weren’t misunderstandings about gay people, there would be no point in doing this column,” Price told the *Associated Press*.

Price would go on to write the column for 18 years. During that time she would co-

author two books with her wife, journalist Joyce Murdoch, including “And Say Hi to Joyce: America’s First Gay Column Comes Out” and the Lambda Literary Award-winning “Courting Justice: Gay Men and Lesbians v. The Supreme Court”.

Price and Murdoch married on June 27, 2003, in Toronto, shortly after same-sex marriage became legal in Canada. In 1993, the couple had become the first registered domestic partners in Takoma Park, Maryland. The couple also had a civil union in Vermont in 2000.

After leaving the *News*, Price took part in a journalism fellowship through the Nieman Foundation. Price covered politics in New England for *Agence France-Presse* from 2011-2012. From there Price switched to the *Wall Street Journal* where she was the Southeast Asia editor. Most recently, she was a senior business editor for the *South China Morning Post*.

“She was the center of my universe,” said Murdoch in a Facebook post. “So much of what I’ve achieved personally and professionally was possible because Deb believed in me, encouraged me, loved me. For 35 years we were a helluva team. She will live on in my heart forevermore.”