

STONY BROOK, NY – Used condoms, feces, death threats.

Those are only some of the atrocities Suzyn Waldman, now known as the iconic voice behind New York Yankees radio broadcasts, had to face as a burgeoning female sports reporter.

It would have been hard for anyone to predict that a girl from the outskirts of Boston who came from a theater background and whose mother told her to stop playing baseball would eventually become an indispensable figure in New York sports. But the most daunting challenge Waldman faced was not her origin or background—it was her pronoun.

Suzyn was a “she.” A female in the male-dominated world of sports reporting. She grew up listening to Red Auerbach scream at Bill Russell on the Boston Garden parquet and knew ballparks like the back of her hand, but none of that mattered. At least not at first.

When Waldman first arrived at WFAN in New York, she was unwelcome. Male radio figures thought she was taking a job away from a “real reporter.” She had little choice but to persevere.

“I just kept going,” Waldman, 72 but still full of energy, reflected on February 13. “You make yourself indispensable. You do things that nobody else does.”

It was only fitting that Waldman, widely unwanted, got her start taking unwanted jobs.

When no one wanted to go to Yankee Stadium because the New York Mets had just won the World Series, she went. When the Knicks were being ignored, she covered them, even going up to Westchester to watch the team train under Rick Pitino—an old “friend” from Boston University. She even made the trek to New Jersey to watch the Devils make the playoffs.

Despite her hard work, Waldman continued to face overwhelming odds, but things eased up a bit after a meeting with George Steinbrenner.

“I found out that more people listened to my Yankees report at 5 p.m. than read every single newspaper in the tristate area, so I wrote that all in a letter, and I sent it to Steinbrenner,” she said. “I said, ‘this is why I am important and this is why you should take me seriously. I will be down in Florida a week from Monday and I expect an interview.’”

Waldman was granted that interview, although Steinbrenner seemed unreceptive initially. He told her of his dislike for women in sports, the police, the fire department, and in the army.

“I like women to look good and spend my money,” he told her.

She said she could do that and proceeded to tell Steinbrenner what steps they needed to take together.

The former Yankees owner became an unusual ally and teacher who taught Waldman how to stay ahead of the curve and handle herself. These lessons proved to be invaluable in 1989 when an anonymous person threatened to blow up the Yankee Stadium press box and kill Waldman.

Another adversity Waldman had to deal with was gaining the trust of male players and coaches. In order to do this, she had to pass their “tests.”

One night, Waldman had to cover a Knicks game where former player Gerald Wilkins had a terrible shooting night. The next game, Wilkins was fed the ball twelve times in a row and drained shot after shot. Afterwards, Waldman asked coach Pat Riley if that strategy was by design.

In front of 40 other reporters, Riley shot back, “Are you sure it was twelve?”

“Yeah, I’m sure it was twelve,” Waldman answered. Riley smiled and answered. She had passed his test.

Although Waldman has broken down many barriers, young female reporters still face many of the biases and obstacles she had to endure.

“If you’re a female in this business, it’s not easy because you have to know nobody wants you there,” she said. “That has not changed. There isn’t an 18-year-old intern that doesn’t think they know more than I do. Not one. It’s intrinsic.”

However, she doesn’t want them to get discouraged.

“If you love it and you think you have something to give to somebody, something to contribute, don’t let anything in this world stop you.”

As for herself, she is still highly motivated and excited to continue calling Yankees games for years to come. After all, as she said, it’s baseball—not splitting the atom.