

FYI ASSIGNMENTS

STORY	LOCATION	TIME	REPORTER	OUT	ETA	IN
ROSS	PORTLAND	7:00	JONES	6:50	7:45	?
BIZARRE	GREEN	7:05	HARLOWE	7:00	7:29	7:29
SPAGHETTI	WASH DC	7:10	WASHINGTON	7:05	7:21	—
SMITH	WASH DC	7:15	SMITH	7:10	7:26	—
WELLS	WASH DC	7:20	WELLS	7:15	7:40 AM	—



The characters of *Murphy Brown*, from left: Miles Silverberg (Grant Shaud), Frank Fontana (Joe Regalbuto), Murphy Brown (Candice Bergen), Jim Dial (Charles Kimbrough) and Corky Sherwood (Faith Ford).

BY JIM COLUCCI

Politics as Unusual

A PIONEER IN POLITICAL
ISSUES AND WOMEN'S
RIGHTS, *MURPHY BROWN'S*
CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED
COMEDIC RUN WAS
NEARLY A NO-GO. HERE'S
THE STORY BEHIND THE
CLASSIC SHOW, MORE THAN
20 YEARS AFTER ITS DEBUT.

When CBS executives first heard writer Diane English's idea for a new sitcom to be called *Murphy Brown*, they didn't like many things about its core character. They didn't want Murphy to be returning from the Betty Ford Center. They didn't want her to be as old as 40. And they didn't want Candice Bergen.

Although Bergen had grown up comedy royalty as the daughter of ventriloquist Edgar, she had been known throughout her career mostly for her blond beauty. The now 63-year-old actress points out that most of her best film roles up to that point had had elements of comedy—such as her Oscar-nominated turn in *Starting Over*, where she was called upon to sing deliberately badly, a skill she would again employ in the *Murphy* pilot. She admits that *Murphy* was a role “that no one who knew me ever would have thought I was right for. But for me reading it, the character of *Murphy Brown* came with the most detailed road map. She was so specific and tart and strong, and such fun to play for 10 years that I can't even tell you.”

With her big-screen career flourishing, she had never before been tempted to take a regular role on television. But English's pilot script “had that crispness of 1930s/'40s comedy,” Bergen remembers. “It was so far superior to most film scripts I ever got.” After flying to New York to meet with Bergen privately, English stood up to the network, ensuring that she landed with the historic part. It was just the latest in a string of crucial decisions in which the writer, luckily for TV posterity, got her way.



MURPHY ♥'S MOTOWN

When *Murphy Brown* premiered in the fall of 1988, it was groundbreaking in many ways. The show featured a strong female lead. It trafficked in political humor. And it had no theme song.

Series creator Diane English reveals that she had written a theme, but then scrapped it in favor of a rotating selection of Motown music that she and her lead character, as baby boomers, loved from their youth. In the process, English introduced a change to the format, where *Murphy's* "cold open" scenes—underscored by such classic performers as Stevie Wonder and Martha Reeves and the Vandellas—hooked viewers directly into the episode's story. "We just didn't see the point in using that precious screen time doing an opening title sequence that's exactly the same, week after week, and then going to a commercial and allowing people to change the channel," the producer remembers.

In the show's pilot, Murphy bops around her Georgetown townhouse, singing along—badly—to Aretha Franklin's "Natural Woman." And the episode's opening sequence, set to Franklin's "Respect," tested so well with audiences that English was encouraged to dig further into the Warner/Chappell Music catalog to introduce and even set up the story of each week's show.

For Candice Bergen, Murphy's love of music was one trait that she says helped her get to the core of the character. And for English, it could often serve as a springboard for stories. In the beginning of the series' fourth season, Murphy nearly misses her chance to interview her idol Franklin, only to ultimately get the even bigger thrill of sitting beside her on the piano bench. To film that sequence, "it was such an exciting moment for us to fly to New York" to meet the famously airplane-phobic singer, big fan Bergen remembers. "Fantastic. I mean terrifying, but fantastic!"

RIGHT FROM ITS FIRST DRAFT

English had worked on several CBS sitcoms—she created the short-lived but critically acclaimed *Foley Square* before taking over *My Sister Sam*—when she got the rare opportunity, particularly for a woman, to create something of her own. Having started out as a journalist herself, English decided to place her alter ego in the world of network news, where, she notes, "anchorwomen such as Barbara Walters and Diane Sawyer were suddenly becoming more famous than their interview subjects." Herself half Italian and raised in what she remembers as "a blue-collar neighborhood" in Buffalo, N.Y., English figured that a patrician WASP was likely to have a last name doubling as her first. So she chose "Murphy" and "Brown" from the phone book, as placeholders.

But when the 1988 writers' strike hit, CBS needed a pilot to film for the ensuing fall season. And by union law, English was not allowed to change a word. "They weren't allowed to give me any notes, and so we shot my actual first draft," she remembers. In quick succession, that pilot episode introduced a cast of characters destined to become a beloved, decade-long ensemble. Corky Sherwood (Faith Ford) was a vapid blond Miss America, brought in originally to replace Murphy during her stint at Betty Ford. Frank Fontana (Joe Regalbutto) was a rugged, adventure-seeking reporter, albeit one obsessed with vanity and his troublesome toupee. Jim Dial (Charles Kimbrough) was the stoic, Cronkite-like veteran anchorman. And, patterned after English's husband and fellow executive producer, Joel Shukovsky, 25-year-old wunderkind Miles Silverberg (Grant Shaud) became the boss of the fictional *FYI*. When Shaud left *Murphy* after Season 8, he was replaced by Lily Tomlin as the hard-driven—and unfortunately for Murphy, even harder to fool—veteran producer Kay Carter-Shepley.

Of all the interwoven comedy dynamics among its fabulous fivesome, Bergen says it was in her moments with Shaud where *Murphy* most often made magic.

"I had my most fun with Grant comedically, just the way the parts were written," Bergen remembers. Their scenes together—with Type-A Murphy driving the neurotic Miles to pop antacids—"had a great comic energy. And we had the worst problems together with breaking up on the set. They couldn't stop us from laughing."

CAREFULLY CHOSEN TEXTURES

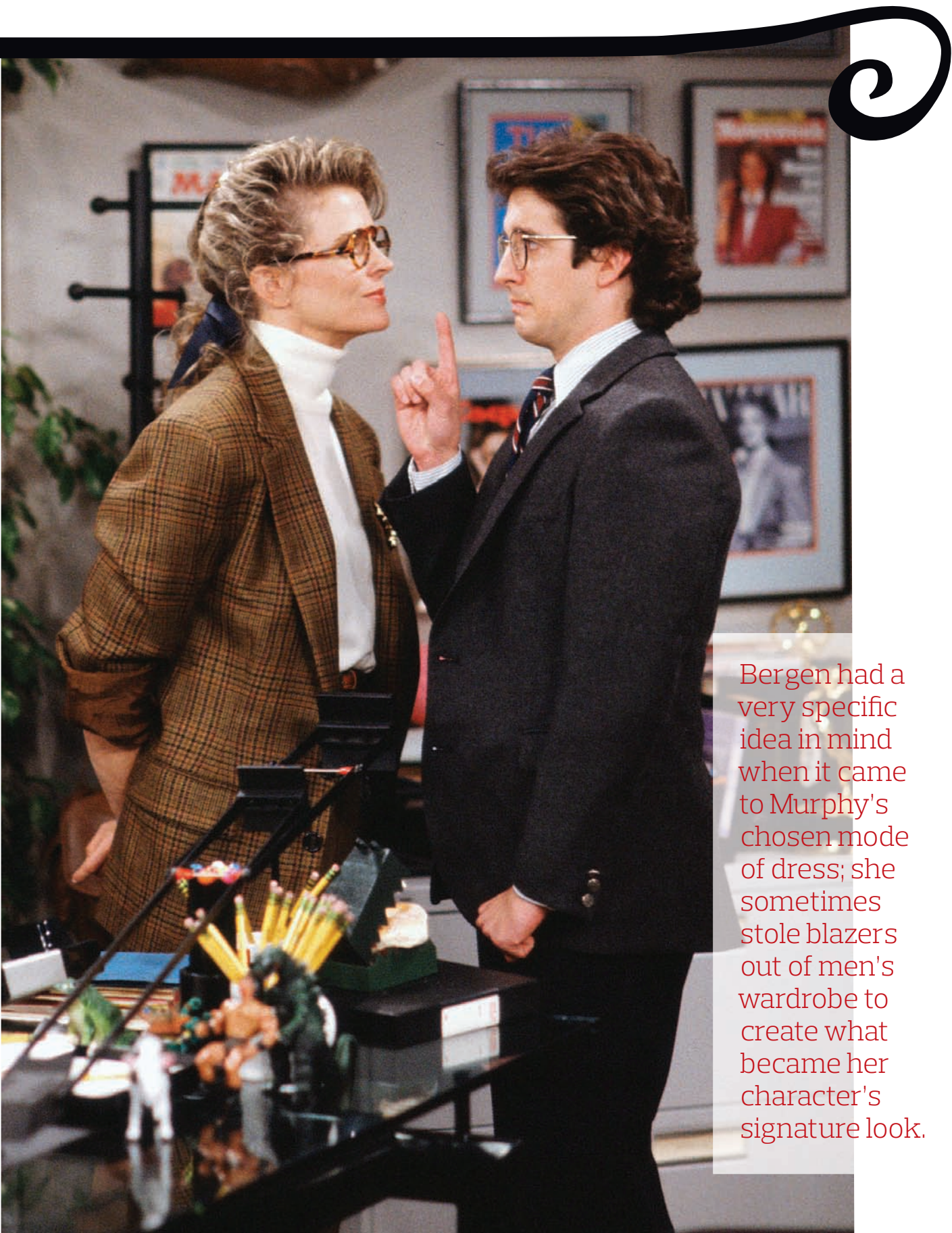
Whenever a patron entered Murphy's second home, the bar run by the all-knowing Phil (Pat Corley), "everybody would scream, 'Close the door!'" Bergen remembers, laughing. And as successful as she was at everything else, Murphy never did manage to find an assistant who wasn't, well, a complete loser (see sidebar). It was a comedic bit inspired by English's own troubles finding someone suitable from among the Warner Bros. secretarial pool. "Diane incorporated touches like those that you haven't seen in other sitcoms," Bergen says admiringly. "The texture of the show was unique. That's what I loved about it as much as anything."

And Bergen, too, was involved when it came literally to choosing *Murphy's* texture. She had a very specific idea in mind when it came to Murphy's mode of dress; she sometimes stole blazers out of men's wardrobe to create what became her character's signature look. And whereas the original design for Murphy's townhouse was more "taupe and modern," she remembers, Bergen requested some Oriental rugs and Tiffany lamps, to create an eclectic and heirloom-filled home more in keeping with her character. By the end, "I loved that set, and wanted everything in it," Bergen says—apparently a huge compliment for Murphy's workman Eldin Bernecky (Robert Pastorelli), who in 10 years never got around to finishing painting the place.

THE POLITICS OF REAL LIFE

With its debut in September of 1988, *Murphy Brown* was critically acclaimed. But the show did not turn into a ratings hit until its second season. By the time

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The Revolving Secretarial Pool



Preeminent journalist Murphy Brown traveled the globe and hobnobbed with world leaders. But she couldn't hire a good secretary to save her life. Throughout 10 seasons, it seemed like every wack job within the Beltway managed to find his or her way to spend an episode at that desk in *FYT's* bullpen. Among them were the listless and lazy, the chronically cranky—one time, even a chimp. For Murphy, good help may have been hard to find—but we sure had fun while she tried.

1 ANNABELLE GURWITCH, "I WOULD HAVE DANCED ALL NIGHT," JAN. 9, 1989

New York theater actress and *Guiding Light* alum Annabelle Gurwitch had just moved to L.A.—and didn't yet own a television, never mind watch the show—when she landed a *Murphy* audition. But from the moment she first saw the script, she became a lifelong fan. As an aspiring actress insisting on staying in character as *My Fair Lady's* Eliza Doolittle, Gurwitch's curtsying Secretary No. 10 would speak only as Henry Higgins might have instructed. "I was married to a Brit at the time, so I felt my accent was good—but I was actually probably doing a good job of playing a terrible actress who thinks she's doing a good job," Gurwitch remembers. Today, the actress and writer, 47, is working on her second book, *You Say Tomato, I Say Shut Up*, and hosts environmental program *WaSted* on the Planet Green channel.

2 CAROL ANN SUSI, "GOING TO THE CHAPEL," MAY 21, 1990

When prolific character actress Carol Ann Susi had her third audition for a *Murphy* secretary, "I just decided to go for broke," she remembers. "They said this woman [Secretary No. 37, an angry divorcée named Judy] hated her husband,

so I went in and gave it the vengeance of life. Later, I realized I had totally ignored Candice Bergen, so I asked the director Barnet Kellman if I should say the lines differently, to relate to Murphy. And he said, 'No! Do what you're doing! It's perfect!'" Unusual for one of Murphy's ex-employees, Judy later resurfaced in a second episode, as a grocery cashier with a grudge against her former boss. And Susi went on to myriad other sitcoms, including her current gig as the off-screen voice of Wolowitz's mother on *The Big Bang Theory*.

3 MARCIA WALLACE, "ANYTHING BUT CURED," MARCH 14, 1994

In 1994, Marcia Wallace's husband had recently died, his long illness racking up debt for the actress best known as super-secretary Carol Kester on the 1972–78 sitcom *The Bob Newhart Show*. To help her out, *Murphy* executive producer Gary Dontzig convinced his fellow writers that Wallace should reprise Carol as Secretary No. 66—but only if Newhart would also appear as his character Bob Hartley, begging for Carol to return to his employ. "From beginning to end, this was one of the magic gigs of my life," says Wallace appreciatively. Not only did the comedy legend agree to step out of Murphy's famous elevator—"a job he needed like a hole in

the head," Wallace points out—but he gave his entire *Murphy* salary to the then-struggling actress. And because Newhart's old show was a flagship of Nick at Nite at the time, "from the moment I walked out on stage—and then when Bob appeared—the audience went wild." Wallace eventually received an Emmy nomination for the episode. Today at 66, she is beloved by fans of *The Simpsons* as the voice of the teacher Mrs. Krabappel, and has begun a recurring role on *The Young and the Restless*. She also currently tours the country, reading about surviving breast cancer from her memoir, *Don't Look Back, We're Not Going That Way*.

4 PAUL REUBENS, "THE GOOD NEPHEW," MARCH 13, 1995

When Paul Reubens got the call to become Murphy's 76th secretary, "I said yes, without hearing anything more about it. Because whenever I would be in Florida visiting my parents, we would watch *Murphy Brown*," he explains. Although Reubens had already achieved superstardom playing alter-ego Pee-wee Herman on CBS' Saturday morning *Pee-wee's Playhouse*, "I couldn't wait to hang up the phone and call my folks to say, 'Guess what show I'm going to be on!'" Andrew Lansing turned out to be one of Murphy's most capable secretaries—not to



mention the most hilariously officious and underhanded. And so, after his first, Emmy-nominated appearance, Andrew was promoted to recurring character. For Reubens, this meant more time working with comedy idols like Candice Bergen and Garry Marshall, who played his uncle, network president Stan. "Faith Ford, Grant Shaud, Charles Kimbrough, Joe Regalbuto—I was such an admirer of every regular character on that show," the actor says. Now 56, Reubens recently shot appearances in several upcoming films and is "putting the final rewrite" on a third Pee-wee movie.

5 KATHRYN JOOSTEN, "THAT'S THE WAY THE CORKY CRUMBLES," OCT. 28, 1996

A late bloomer, former Illinois housewife Kathryn Joosten had lived for only a few years in Los Angeles before she began popping up all over the TV dial. At the time, Joosten made a specialty out of delivering what she calls "Bite me!" lines—as she did as Murphy's cantankerous Secretary No. 83. "It was a plum spot getting to be one of Murphy's secretaries," she remembers. "You knew you wouldn't have many lines, but what you would have would be choice." The appearance led to other work—including ironically her best-known role as the

president's competent and beloved secretary Mrs. Landingham on *The West Wing*. And backstage waiting for their cues at *Murphy*, Joosten struck up a friendship with Lily Tomlin, who would go on to play her sister on *Desperate Housewives*.

6 JULIE BROWN, "FROM THE TERRACE," DEC. 17, 1997

When actress/comedian Julie Brown first read the part of Secretary No. 88, a seemingly demure woman who snaps after being fired, locking the cast out on a balcony as she trashes the office, "I thought it was hilarious, and said to myself—and I don't usually feel this way—I'll just die if anybody else gets this part," she remembers. "I went for it as hard as I could, performing like my hair was on fire." The episode reunited Brown with Lily Tomlin, who had provided her first break, via a role in Tomlin's 1981 film *The Incredible Shrinking Woman*. Now 54, Brown continues to write and perform music and comedy, most recently penning and appearing in the hit Disney Channel movie *Camp Rock*.

7 ROSIE O'DONNELL, "A MAN AND A WOMAN," APRIL 27, 1998

Rosie O'Donnell was appearing in her self-titled talk show when she asked to become the 92nd

and penultimate secretary—a role specially tailored to her well-known obsession with Broadway musicals. She performed her scenes as the singing Ann Marie Delaney in less than an hour, and now regrets that she wasn't able to linger on the set "and get the feeling of that beautiful family that happens when you're doing a musical or a sitcom." But O'Donnell, 47, does have one fun memento by which to remember her turn in Murphy's bullpen. "I keep very, very few show business things in my house," she explains. "But I have a photo from that episode with two incredible legends. I remember at the time feeling, 'This is so weird—Candice Bergen and Lily Tomlin—and me?'"

8 BETTE MIDLER, "NEVER CAN SAY GOODBYE," MAY 18, 1998

In 1992, Bette Midler had famously serenaded a teary Johnny Carson as the final guest on his version of *The Tonight Show*. So six years later, it only seemed fitting that she should become Secretary No. 93, the last to sit behind that now infamous desk. "I still can't believe that I was the last," enthuses Midler, now 63 and performing her concert show *The Showgirl Must Go On* in Las Vegas. "It was a thrill to be one of so many terrific comic performers, like being voted into some delirious Comedy Hall of Fame."



BLURRING THE LINES OF NEWS AND SITCOMS

In the fall of 1989, Connie Chung was a CBS anchor, one of merely a handful of women at the top of the network news game. And so *Murphy* creator Diane English was eager to recruit Chung for a cameo appearance beside her TV counterpart. "I kept telling her that yes, I know Walter Cronkite had done *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*—but if you're Walter Cronkite, you can do anything you want. For the rest of us, I said, I just didn't think it was appropriate for news people to do walk-ons on sitcoms, because it ruins our credibility," the news veteran remembers.

But ultimately, English prevailed—by promising Chung she could say just that, and even script the lines herself. And so, in a second season episode airing on Oct. 16, *Murphy* makes a disastrous cameo on a sitcom inspired by her news show *FYI*—and colleague Chung shows up to scold her. "I think it's wrong for a journalist of your stature to appear in a sitcom," Chung chides, with a wink to *Murphy's* audience.

"It was perfect," Chung says, "because we all knew that I totally was making fun of myself for being such a stick-in-the-mud." The appearance, she adds, was well-received, even by her co-workers who all "certainly had been aware" of the new sitcom depicting their profession, but few of them, as they trotted the globe, had had much chance to tune in. In the seasons that ensued, *Murphy*

would host such journalistic luminaries as Irving R. Levine, Morley Safer, Mike Wallace, Charles Kuralt, Lesley Stahl, Tom Snyder and Cronkite himself—three times.

In the series' 100th episode in 1992, *Murphy* found herself at a baby shower thrown by Katie Couric, Paula Zahn, Mary Alice Williams, Joan Lunden and other famous faces. "We had almost every female anchor in TV fly in from New York, some right after their morning shows, so that they could film on Friday afternoon," Candice Bergen remembers. "And they were fantastic. They didn't need rehearsal, and they nailed it in every take."

Perhaps that's because, as Chung points out, especially today, there's not all that much difference between showbiz and the news. While making on-stage appearances such as at affiliates meetings, she explains, TV news stars are often required to walk to "marks" on the floor, as would an actor in a multi-camera sitcom. And today's anchors are more skilled than ever before in being able to "walk and talk." The two worlds, she laments, can sometimes come "perilously close." But in the end, as *Murphy Brown* proved, there is definitely room for crossover. "A lot of people in the news business take themselves too seriously, too," Chung says. "So it's great when you can see they're having fun."

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of the 1992 election, this sitcom about the news business had itself made the front page, after vice presidential candidate Dan Quayle singled out fictional *Murphy* as a symbol of bad "family values" when she became a single mother. Ironically, Bergen remembers, the baby storyline had not been devised without careful planning, including introducing the baby's father as *Murphy's* ex-husband Jake, rather than some one-night stand. And ultimately, although campaigning against *Murphy* gave Quayle a national platform, Bergen believes that the strategy backfired. "There was no question that [*Murphy Brown*] affected the election."

Murphy continued to effect real-life change right through its final season, in which the seemingly invulnerable *Murphy Brown* battled breast cancer. "The show tackled something so delicate with such sensitivity, humor, intelligence and depth," Bergen says proudly. "It was a very emotional year, because we used a lot of actors who were real cancer survivors in the show." And even more tellingly about *Murphy's* continued popularity, the storyline "had a real impact," Bergen adds, in persuading women to undergo mammogram testing for themselves.

In its near record-setting run, *Murphy Brown* spanned both Republican and Democratic presidential administrations, and took on the foibles of both. That's why in the beginning, as Diane English remembers, "the network was very worried about the show being 'too smart.' People actually had to read the newspaper to understand the jokes." As did, she points out, her writers. "We had this gigantic burden of trying to predict what the headlines were going to be three weeks hence, so that the show would always feel fresh. And sometimes we even surprised ourselves how close we would get to current events," English, now 60, remembers. "In a way, we were *The Daily Show* of that time, because people were actually getting news from watching our show. And so I'm proud of that." ❖

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FOR THE SEVENTH YEAR IN A ROW, CBS WILL CELEBRATE JULY FOURTH
WITH THE ANNUAL **BOSTON POPS FIREWORKS SPECTACULAR**

By Jennifer Goddard



The skies over Boston have seen their share of explosions, providing a dramatic backdrop for the first skirmishes that helped create a country like no other before it. Boston's skies continue to burst every Fourth of July with musical notes, fireworks and patriotic pride courtesy of the *Boston Pops Fireworks Spectacular*, now in its seventh year on CBS.





Keith Lockhart conducts the Boston Pops during the city's annual Fourth of July celebration on the banks of the Charles River.