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The Poynter Sisters

Getting their act together



Climbing journalism's stairway to success at the Poynter Institute, from top to bottom, Poynter Sisters Lee Anne Peck, Judy Buller and Susan Willey.

The name was too good to resist. Susan Willey, Judy Buller, and Lee Anne Peck, all graduate students in Mass Communications, are the latest Poynter fellows at USF in St. Petersburg. And since they're not exactly "fellows," it just made more sense to call them the Poynter Sisters.

It's a Saturday night, but the Sisters are Monday-morning-frazzled. Graduate school, they discovered, is no song and dance. All three have the vaguely frantic look of someone who's got several major papers due yesterday. And all have had to shuffle careers and/or families for the privilege.

No one at the table tonight looks much like a crusader, but there's a common theme to the conversation: Journalism in 1995 needs an ethical shot in the arm, and these three have decided to help administer it. Starting with themselves.

The word was out that USF had a good, young journalism program with a strong emphasis on media ethics. Add to that free access to the prestigious Poynter Institute for Media Studies, and it seemed like the right place to be. Moving to Florida in mid-career was a big step for everyone. Susan, who doubles as religion reporter for the *St. Petersburg Times*, describes it in her own idiom: "It was a real leap of faith."

The senior sister, Susan came to the program in 1993 from Lincoln, Neb. She's been a jour-

nalist for 13 years, doing everything from investigative reporting to humor columns. Coverage of religion became a hot topic in the late 1980s while Susan was working at the *Lincoln Journal*. She returned to school at the College of St. Mary in Lincoln, got her B.A. in 1993 in communications and theology, and proceeded straight to USF.

She's mulling the idea of getting her Ph.D. in order to teach at the university level someday. Still, she says, "starting as an 'entry-level' teacher when you're already in your mid 50s is a little scary." She's leaving her options open.

Susan could easily pass for a teacher, but Judy Buller's nervous energy gives away her background in the faster lane of broadcast journalism. She has spent seven years in a field where stress is a way of life and decisions have to be made in a New York minute. It was the lack of ethical awareness in that environment, she says, that "drove me here in the first place. I felt like I'd attended one too many production meetings where blood, guts and fires took center stage."

Judy and Susan are both single at present, but Lee Peck had the family factor to juggle. Lee came to USF from a job at the *Rocky Mountain News* in Denver where her husband and 16-year-old son remain. "Let me make this comment," she says, waving her fork for emphasis. "If my family were here, I'd never have time to see them anyway. Most days, I'm supposed to be in at least three places at once."

With a long background in newspapering, Lee has been an editor, a feature writer and a teacher of journalism at Colorado State University. Lee is being "recalled" to Denver at the end of this semester: It's that family factor. The rigors of getting

a degree (all heads nod in agreement here) are nothing compared to those of raising a teenager. Luckily, Lee is far enough along in the program that she'll be able to finish long-distance from Denver.

The Sisters are all heading home early tonight to study. Beside massive amounts of reading, there are internships (and papers), research projects for Poynter (and papers), and articles for Saturday's newspaper to be finished.

The Sisters agree that, if they survive, it will have been worth it. The future is a question, but on their way home tonight, they're going to apply some journalistic research methods to figuring it out.

"We're going to see a psychic," says Susan. "Wanna come?"

By *Jacque Bishop, a graduate Journalism student*

The Poynter Institute

Poynter fellowships for graduate studies in journalism at USF were established in 1992 by the Poynter Fund, the philanthropic arm of the Times Publishing Company. Currently, three fellowships are awarded each year and consist of a \$10,000 annual stipend and a waiver of tuition.

Nelson Poynter, publisher of the *St. Petersburg Times* from 1938 until his death in 1978, had two passions. He was determined to leave behind an independent newspaper that was financially secure, and — no less important — to found an institute where journalists could learn how to better practice their craft.

The university began its own graduate program in Mass Communications in 1992, and has worked closely with Poynter to improve the practice and teaching of all forms of journalism. The Poynter Institute lends its considerable resources and prestige to the USF curriculum, and USF in turn contributes the experience and research skills of its students to many Poynter programs.

In 1995, The Poynter Institute will conduct some 38 seminars on everything from "Ethical Decision-Making for Journalists" to "Design and Use of the Quark XPress." USF graduate students will participate in many of these free of charge, exchanging ideas with journalists from all over the world.

For more information regarding Poynter fellowships, contact Professor Mike Killenberg at the Bayboro campus at (813) 893-9174.

