

ANN COTTRELL FREE

Virginia Communications Hall of Fame Program
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In 1936, Ann Cottrell Free won third place in the international Pan-Hellenic essay contest on "Why I Should See New York." They gave her New York, and she took the world.

Free began her career at the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. An early assignment was an interview with contralto Marian Anderson just after her historic concert from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1939. Managers of Constitution Hall had refused to let Anderson sing there because she was black.

She was the first full-time female Washington correspondent for the *New York Herald Tribune*, *Newsweek* and the *Chicago Sun*. Free reported on the Roosevelt administration—and the nine administrations that followed. She covered all aspects of World War II and the post-war years. She chaired Eleanor Roosevelt's press conference association. She was covering the White House when Truman was sworn in.

Covering Washington meant covering the world. She interviewed Mrs. Roosevelt in Geneva while the Declaration of Human Rights was framed by the United Nations. She reported from Europe on post-war conditions and the effects of the Marshall Plan. As a special U.N. correspondent in China in 1946, she covered the war's devastation, focusing on the Chinese government's diversion of relief food from famine victims.

Free saw first-hand the break up of Chiang Kai-shek's China and saw the early stages of war in Indo-China. Free was in Israel at the birth of the modern Hebrew nation. She attended Ghandi's prayer meetings and watched Britain's Lord Mountbatten pass the rule of India to Prime Minister Nehru.

When Free returned home, she continued her career, covering the White House, Joe McCarthy and "red-baiting," the civil rights movement, the environment and animal protection issues. She was a pioneer in covering and promoting animal protection in the 1960s when no federal animal protection laws existed. Her work calling for humane treatment of laboratory animals earned her the Albert Schweitzer Medal in 1963. Her novel on the wild horses of Mongolia, *Forever the Wild Mare*, won several prizes, and her book, *Animals, Nature and Albert Schweitzer*, has enjoyed many printings. These works and her volume of poetry, *No Room Save in the Heart*, are about nature and animals, wild and captive, their beauty and the horror of human cruelty toward them.

A friendship between two writer-environmentalists led to another award, and a victory for the environment. Free and Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring*, were friends. Five years after Carson's death, Free wrote an article about her in *This Week* magazine and suggested that a wildlife refuge be named for her friend. The overwhelming public response led to the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in Maine, the first to be named after a woman. For this and other writing about Carson, Free received the Rachel Carson Legacy Award in 1987 and a certificate of appreciation from the U.S. Department of the Interior in 1995.

Free is listed in *Who's Who in America* and *Who's Who of American Women*.