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WEB OF HOPE

Former CNN anchor Daryn Kagan puts a positive spin on her latest career move

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By **Dave Walker**
TV columnist

Daryn Kagan's own story would be right at home at DarynKagan.com.

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After more than a decade at CNN, Kagan learned early last year that her contract would not be renewed, though the news network gave her several months to knit her parachute while she still worked on-air.

"The first few months of that was being sad, saying goodbye to a life I really liked," Kagan said. "It's never nice to hear, 'Oh, we really don't want you anymore.' "

After quickly eliminating the possibility of pursuing another TV-anchor job -- done it, she said, both at CNN and local stations in California and Arizona -- Kagan got busy on reinvention.

Surfing the Web, she came across "Kevin Sites in the Hot Zone," a sub-site of Yahoo News for which lone-wolf telejournalist Sites tours the globe's trouble spots.

"The idea was to go to every bad place in the world and report on war zones," she said. "I had no desire to do that."

Rather, her desire was to tell the opposite kind of stories.

"My favorite stories have always been inspiring stories, the ones that make your heart sing," Kagan said.

So the template of Sites' site was morphed to fit Kagan's world view, which can be summed up by the slogan: "Show the world what is possible."

Once she was convinced of the burgeoning video capabilities of broadband Internet -- which would allow her to employ her core skills, and elevate the site beyond static text -- she took the uplift idea to Yahoo, which passed.

So she struck out on her own. The site's main content is TV-news style stories assembled from photos and videos submitted by story subjects. One there now is about a woman who's created a crafts clearinghouse on the Internet that finances women artisans in emerging countries; another is about a one-legged ballroom dancer.

The interviews are done by telephone, with the subject videotaping the answers to Kagan's speakerphone-delivered questions. Kagan shoots the introductory stand-ups in and around her Atlanta home.

Accordingly, production overhead is low. Kagan does employ a small staff, including a publicist, and says that less than a year after launching, the site is profitable, Kagan said.

"The big question I get is, 'How do you make money on a Web site?' " she said. "The answer is, I don't have a Web site. I have a media company. It's a like a big salad bowl."

From which spring speaking engagements, a book deal (a collection of inspirational stories, some submitted to the site by users, titled "What's Possible: Creating Possibilities Beyond Life's 5 Biggest Obstacles," has a May 2008 publication date) and broadcast spinoff projects.

One of which, "Breaking the Curse with Daryn Kagan," airs next week on WLAE. Co-produced by Brian Kosisky, another CNN vet, the film tells the story of Becky Douglas, an Atlanta-area mother of nine, and her efforts to end leprosy in India.

The subject of the next TV special could be just one submission click away on Kagan's Web site.

And she's still accepting stories for the book, one of which could be her own.

"Most people will never get to be net news anchor, and most people will never launch their own Web site, but most people have a chapter in their life where they have to reinvent themselves -- the thing they had or did goes away," she said. "It might be a job, or something like Katrina that comes through and takes your home away."

"We all get to a point where you're going to have to figure out what the next thing is."

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BREAKING THE CURSE WITH DARYN KAGAN

8 p.m. Monday

on WLAE-Channel 32

Former CNN anchor Daryn Kagan, right, has launched a multimedia company that aims to tell inspiring stories from around the world.