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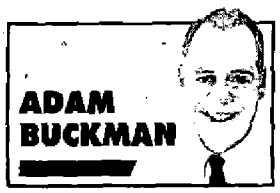
Only melodrama at CBS is the soaps



CALL it "The Dan and Andy Show."

Just two regular guys in white shirts and ties.

One of their ties was loose. That was Dan, as in Dan Rather, the one on the right wearing suspenders — network anchor, grizzled newsman, all-around sensitive guy.

His co-host: Andy Heyward, CBS News president — the dashing one with the mustache, his tie neatly knotted, his top button securely buttoned.

Their topic yesterday? "Anthrax at CBS: You've got questions? We've got answers."

In a studio beneath a huge CBS logo, Dan and Andy faced the media — just the two of them seated on matching upholstered chairs on a small stage.

Missing was the entourage of public officials that flanked the executives of ABC and NBC when they held their own anthrax news conferences in recent days. No Mayor Giuliani, no Police Commissioner Kerik, no Gov. Pataki and no Fire Commissioner Von Essen.

No, Dan and Andy would go it alone — together.

They were even on multiple channels — Fox News, MSNBC, CNN — but curiously not on CBS.

Their own network stuck with "The Young and the Restless."

But if Dan and Andy were aware that their own network deemed their debut in the daytime talk-show arena to be less airworthy than a venerable old soap, they didn't let on.

They gave it their all.

Dan spoke of the courage of his unnamed assistant — who has continued working but not necessarily opening his mail — even as she recovers from anthrax.

He and Andy boldly predicted she'll make a complete recovery.

Speaking of courage, when Dan was asked by a reporter if he would agree to be tested for anthrax, Dan said calmly that he had no plans to undergo testing, as in, "Ha! Not on your life!"

Andy talked of the assistant's confusion earlier this month over a noticeable change in her complexion that she attributed initially to "a bug bite."

A biopsy revealed something different, something new. CBS got the news yesterday from the Centers for Disease Control.

It was anthrax.

As usual, Dan waxed philosophical about the nature of news.

"We're in the news business," he said sternly, "and I'm trying to report this as straight up as any other story. And we know in news that assumption is the mother of a fouled-up story.

"We make no assumptions about how she contracted this."

That part of the story would have to wait until another day.



AIRING OUT: CBS showed "The Young and the Restless" (above) yesterday even as Dan Rather and boss Andy Heyward held a press conference. CBS

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