

Cynthia Izaguirre Interview
November 20, 2014

So, just tell us about you, starting with where you grew up.

“Ok, my name is Cynthia Izaguirre, and I was born in Brooklyn, New York and by the time I was one year old my parents decided to move to Dallas, so they came to Dallas when I was one, myself and my older sister Natalie and my younger sister Vanessa was born here, and I basically grew up in Dallas. So, I consider myself a native Texan and a native Dallas-ite. Even though my dad always said ‘Uh uh uh, you’re a native New Yorker’ I’m like ‘Dad, we got here when I was one and I’ve spent the rest of my life in Dallas.’ So, that’s where I’m from, and my mom and my sisters and most of my cousins live here. My parents immigrated here from Ecuador, so they met in New York and they immigrated here for the same reason most people immigrate here, for a better tomorrow. And they didn’t have children but they knew they wanted children and they wanted their children to be born with a lot more opportunities than they had. They met in New York, they had us, and they really brought us up with a great sense of pride that we are Americans. And they said, you know, my dad always says, ‘What a privilege that you’re an American.’ And my mom always instilled in us a great, great pride of our Latino heritage as well. So, its really helped a lot with this job.”

So how did you know that you wanted to be a news anchor?

“Do you know that I’ve always kind of had a flair for the dramatics? I’ve always been very inquisitive, I’ve always been very curious, but more than anything I’ve always been very interested in people. I have a genuine interest, I mean, everyone I meet, I want to know more about. I mean, I’m curious about each one of you, you know, why are you getting your Master’s in journalism, where are you from, and what has brought you to where you are today? And so, I always watched the news, generally, and in the seventh grade I was watching Gloria Campos and my mom came into the room and she was like, ‘you always watch the news, you like Gloria?’ and I was like ‘Yeah I want to do what Gloria does.’ And she said, ‘You can do it. Just work hard and you will get it done. You of anyone I know will do it.’ To have your parent’s support, and to hear a parent encourage you like that, I mean you can take on the world right, when your parents have your back? And so here we are today, all these decades later. Not only do I have the job that Gloria did, I actually sit in the chair where Gloria sat for thirty years. It’s humbling beyond explanation.”

So, I saw that you graduated from UNT also.

“Mhm, I am a proud UNT grad.”

And you did broadcast journalism, right?

“Yes.”

So, did you do any internships while you were there?

"I did. First and foremost, I thank UNT for my career. There are a lot of circumstances to get you where you are, and UNT was a really big part of me accomplishing my dream. And I want to thank all the professors and the staff who cared about all the journalism students and made us go out and do projects like you have been instructed to do today, because that's how you make contacts...that's how you learn. It's by being out in the field as a journalist. And so UNT has a great team of people who know how to do that. So, Go Mean Green, and I proudly tell everyone that I'm a graduate of the Broadcast Journalism Department of UNT. It wasn't the Mayborn School of Journalism then, but it was then what it is called now. And instilled in us was, first and foremost, that you have to be factually correct in every script that you write. They also instilled in us a great sense of work ethic and explained to us that this isn't a nine-to-five job; this is an all-time job. And they prepared us well. They told us that we had to do an internship, and so I did two internships, thanks to UNT requiring it. I interned at Fox 4 here in downtown Dallas, and I interned at KERA in downtown Dallas where I learned so much. And it's just immeasurable what you pick up in an internship, which is what I recommend to any person who wants to go into the field of journalism. And they just had a great program that allowed me to ultimately do exactly what I wanted to do."

So what was your first job after UNT?

"After UNT, Mr. Shelton was one of my professors at UNT, and he gave me great advice. I had a tape that was not good."

Dode walks through the room to go home and she tells him goodbye.

"Dode's one of our awesome crew members. He's great. That's another thing that I've learned, and I've learned this from my parents, is you always take care of the people who haul the water. They haul the water. And to me, they are the ones who make me look good. And so in turn, I'm always appreciative of them and I take care of them however I can. Because they really are the true backbone of this station and we're the ones that get all the credit but they're the ones who make it all happen."

"So anyway, Mr. Shelton said that my tape was really bad and I sent it out to like 50 stations and I didn't get a job interview and here I am about to graduate and so he gave me a great recommendation he said, 'Listen, why don't you go work for Talent Dynamics in Irving. It's a television consulting firm. You're going to make contacts there and you're smart and you're a hard worker, you know, someone there will want to help you get a job. You're talking with a bunch of former TV reporters, news directors, whatnot, who are now consultants.' And I'm like, 'great idea.' I went and I worked there, exactly what he said happened, I made a lot of contacts, they saw my tape, they were like 'This is awful. You need to redo this tape.' And they told me how I should redo it. I redid it, mailed it out, and got my first job in Abilene, Texas. So, in 1998, I got my first gig in Abilene and I worked there for eight months at KTAB-TV, Spirit of the big country, and then from there I got a job in East Texas, Tyler, Texas at KLTU, proud of East Texas. And then from there I actually cut the umbilical chord and left Texas. And, I got my third job in the business at KOAT-TV in Albuquerque,

New Mexico. I went there and started off as a reporter and six months later they promoted me to weekend anchor. A year after that I got promoted to the morning show. And then a year after that I got promoted to five, six and ten evening anchor. So, I was there for eight years in Albuquerque building up my resume in hopes that that would bring me to the ultimate gig that I had dreamed about since seventh grade, and that was to work at WFAA-TV. And sure enough, 10 years in the business, I'll never forget the phone call back at the end of 2007 from the news director here at the time, Michael Valentine, he called me up and I'll never forget what he asked me. He said, 'Cynthia, this is Michael Valentine, news director at WFAA and I have one question for you.' And I mean I'm already stunned that I'm getting a call and I'm like, 'yes sir what's the question?' and he's like, 'Are you ready to back come home?' So I started here in January of 2008, and almost seven years later, I'm anchoring the five and ten. Started off as the morning anchor here."

And when did you start the five and ten?

"In March of this year when Gloria Campos retired after 30 years at Channel 8."

What was your relationship with her like?

"Incredible. Gloria is a true trailblazer in this industry—the first Latina to hold the 10pm chair in DFW. She opened doors for so many of us, and she had to do a lot of heavy lifting that I didn't have to do because of what she had already done. And thanks to her, she opened doors for all Latinos and young women and I really truly admire her for that. So, when I first got here in 2008 she welcomed me with open arms. And I got in the newsroom and I was like 'Gloria, I just want you to know, since seventh grade I have always looked up to you and I am just so honored to be working in the same newsroom as you.' And she's like 'Oh stop!' And from that moment on she has truly been a mentor. And from that it moved to a wonderful friendship between a student and a teacher because she has taught me a lot."

That's cool for us to hear because you hear people talking about how there can't be two prominent women in the same company because they'll fight or they'll be enemies or something.

"No, not the case. And it takes, there are, there are other news anchors across the country that had Gloria status who were, who are, I'm sure, very diva-ish. But not Gloria. Gloria is confident enough in her abilities and her credibility in this community that all she ever wants to do is help. That takes a really incredible person and so the minute I walked in she didn't see me as a threat, please! Please! And none of the other female reporters and anchors either. What she saw us as was true potential and great talent and she wanted to help us get to where we wanted to go."

So how was your first day taking over her chair when you knew you wanted to do that your whole life?

"It was, the pressure is unreal. The pressure, and the nerves, and people are always saying, 'Oh my gosh, YOU replaced Gloria Campos.' And I always correct everyone and I'm like, 'I did not replace her. She is irreplaceable. I am simply the new 10

o'clock anchor. Do not call me her replacement because I will never be able to live up to that.' So it's been, so far, a very humbling, challenging, and nerve wrecking experience. You know, we just did elections for the first time so it was my first general election so you know that was nerve wrecking but you know for me, the way to calm myself down, and the way to build confidence is to prepare, so I was well-prepared for the elections. And I try to come in every night well-prepared for every newscast. To me, that's how I'll prevail, is just preparing for the newscast, knowing the content, so that I can inform North Texans best."

What was it like when you found out that Gloria was retiring? Did you kind of know that you might be the one to take over?

"No, that's a really interesting question because when I found out that Gloria was retiring, something crazy happened. She told me she was retiring and she was like, 'I hope you go for the position.' And at that point in my life, I'm telling you guys, do any of you have children? Children change your life. And all of my life I had wanted this position, when I had my children, my twins, my daughter and my son two and a half years ago, everything changed. My goal had always been to be the 10 o'clock anchor if the station felt I was the best person for the gig. There are so many talented women that I work with. And three and a half years ago when I got pregnant with the twins and then I had the twins shortly afterwards is when I found out that Gloria was retiring, and I actually decided not to go for the 10 o'clock news. And, the reason I decided not to go for it was because this is a very demanding job, and I know what it means for my home life. It's going to take me away from the twins. But, life happens. And the station approached me and said they wanted me to go for the gig. And so at that point when the station approached me, I thought, 'alright then, I'll go for the gig and if it's meant to be, then God is good, and He will help me balance everything.' And sure enough, it was meant to be because I got hired. So it hasn't been a conflict of interest yet because I'm at home with the twins all morning long. It's going to get interesting when the twins start kindergarten, because my shift is 2-10:30. So the kids go to class at seven or eight in the morning... When am I going to see my babies? But, we'll cross that bridge when we get there. For right now, it's working out great."

So does your husband stay home with them?

"Yes! My husband, I call him Captain Awesome. And there's a reason for it. Captain Awesome is an architect, an incredible, classical architect. And when the twins were born, we both had a parent that was home with us and we know the value of having a stay-at-home parent. So, we were like, one of us is going to have to stay home, and, because, when we did all the math for twins, it's a salary. It's a salary to put them in daycare and whatnot. But more than anything we wanted a stay-at-home parent and so I was like, 'well... I make more than you do so I guess it will be you.' So he gave up his career to stay at home with the kids so that I could keep mine. And let me tell you he started up a website because of it, its called toddlersandtools.com - how to raise my kids and still keep my man card. Because here you are, raising kids, feeding them, cooking for them, changing dirty diapers, but he's also Mr. Handy Man. I mean there are projects that my mom has for him, I have for him, his parents have for him,

so he's always got a project going on. So, that's his outlet, he'll post all his projects online. He can fix anything."

How long have you been married?

"Four years. Four years we've been married."

And the twins are two and a half?

"They're two and a half, yeah."

What are their names?

"Karina is my daughter and Simon is my son."

I was going to ask you about the Wednesday Child Reports. What made you want to get involved with that?

"You know, especially now that I have children, to me, I have always asked God to let me use this powerful tool that I have to do good- that tool being television. It is an opportunity, really, for me to make a difference. And my calling, I know now, for this business, is to help foster children find homes. Foster children right here in DFW who have been set aside by their own biological parents who have been neglected and who have been abused, and I am using this powerful tool called television to help them find a family who will love them. It is a job that Gloria held close to her heart for 25 years, and she passed the torch over to me four years ago. And I carry that torch with honor and pride and a privilege that I'm the one who gets to help these kids. And it is what I do every week and it is what I hope I will be remembered for."

Are there any specific children that really stuck out?

"Tons. I remember Jaquavius. Three years ago, when I interviewed him, sixteen years old, plays football, tears coming down his eyes, said 'all I want is a mom and a dad to come to my games.' Yeah, that's all he wanted was a mom and a dad to watch his games. He had been in foster home after foster home since he was a little boy. No place to call home. I've got another young boy we profiled at the circus last April, his name is Jay, and he's 12, and he told me that because he doesn't have a home and because he's a foster child, other kids make fun of him at school. Can you imagine? You already don't have a home, you're getting shuffled from one foster family to another, you just get shuffled you just keep moving and moving. Imagine, you don't know these people and you're packing up your life in a backpack and you're moving into someone's home. And this little boy had been moved from home to home dozens of times. And so when we featured him in April he said, 'I wish these kids wouldn't make fun of me because they don't know what its like. They don't know what it's like not to have a home.' And I said, 'What do you want?' and he said, 'I just want parents to come to my football games.' He again, is another little football player. And, praise God, there's a family who saw that report and are now adopting him. And the reason he came into foster care was because of horrible neglect, his parents left him wandering and he went in and drank something to the equivalent of Drano and it left him damaged physically as well. So, I mean, just the stories."

Terrible stories...terrible. But through it all, there's so much resilience and so much hope. And these kids are so loving that I just don't understand why more people don't adopt."

Have you ever considered adopting?

"Yes. In fact, my husband and I have talked about it very seriously. And we've been blessed with two biological children and when they're a little bit older we will likely adopt a child, if not two. In the next few years that will be the update. Because there's been a child growing in my heart for a long time."

Do you have any advice for journalists? Especially women journalists because we are about to graduate soon and we are coming into the business?

"Yeah, I have lots of advice where should I start? First and foremost, if you don't like to write, get out of this field. You will write every single day of your life in this business, whether its writing your own reports, whether its helping the producers write stories, whether its helping the producers write teases, whether its helping the promotions department promote your story, you are constantly writing. And if you don't love it, this is not the gig for you. Number two, don't expect to make a whole lot of money, in the beginning. Its just not going to happen. They money will come. They money will come. But just not at the beginning, so be prepared for that. You have to be who you are. There are way too many people in this world, and I think this goes for any business, you come into a business and you just think 'ok I have to be this certain person.' Yeah, and that person that you need to be is you. Don't ever, ever allow someone else to tell you they want you to be a certain way. Because it going to happen, especially in this business. 'You know Cynthia we need you be to more like this.' Actually, no I'm going to be more like me. And if someone doesn't like who you are, then there are lots of other places who will like who you are and you can choose to stay or you can choose to leave. But my greatest advice is to be who you are because God made you uniquely you and there is not one other person in this entire world like you. So be it completely and fully. Also in this field of journalism, I think that we all need to practice compassion unlike any other because we are going to cover stories that are going to make you absolutely sick to your stomach. And once the stories are done making you sick to your stomach you're going to be told to go out and interview a family who has lost a loved one in the most horrific of ways and when you approach that family, my advice is that you approach them as if they're a family member of yours. You give them compassion and you teach them compassion because that comes through in everything you do. And, be prepared to work your tail off. And always, always doing more, but again that's not just in our business, it's in every business. If you want to succeed, you have to do more and you have to be better. In this field of journalism, you have to be better because if you're not someone else is going to come in and be better than you. And my goal has always been to be number one. And how am I number one? By being prepared, preparing before every newscast, when I know we're in an election year, making sure I'm doing my homework. The homework doesn't stop, you know? And, being kind and compassionate to others. You know there's a lot of competition in this business. That's fine. Never get caught up with the office gossip, seriously it will

cut you. I act like I don't hear a thing, and I've heard it all. Don't get caught up in it. Because it will catch up to you, and in this business, you know we're naturally chatty and inquisitive. Don't get caught up in it. And especially for those who are just beginning, get those internships in. And for women in specific, it's the same advice I'd give to Tyler, everything I just said to y'all. Just be who you are and always build each other up. Always build your teammates up. Because the better John looks, the better I look. The better John looks, the better we look. Always lift up your coworkers. And you're only as strong as your weakest link. And for the one who's struggling on the team, then teach them. That was the advice given to me by my former general manager, Mary Lynn Roper at KOAT-TV in Albuquerque. I went up to her and I was concerned with some producers, one in particular. Very nice girl but I just felt that she was not a strong producer, and Marilyn looked right at me and said, 'then teach her.' And that taught me from that moment on don't ever, ever complain about one of your coworkers to anyone, much less to your boss. Don't ever do it. Just teach them. Because you're only as strong as your weakest link. It's all about attitude guys. What's your attitude going to be? And that will go with you into whatever field you choose. And, I can tell you I'm not the smartest one in the batch, but I am the one with the best attitude, and that has gotten me far. That's it."