

(201)

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JOURNALIST, ACTRESS AND
HEALTH & WELLNESS EXPERT

HILARY RUSSO

THRIVES ON-CAMERA





HILARY RUSSO HAS NEWS FOR YOU

Journalist, actress and health and wellness expert thrives on-camera

WRITTEN BY KAITLYN KANZLER

One of the first big stories that Hilary Russo covered was Woodstock.

No. Not that one.

While doing a college summer internship at WVIP-TV, a small local radio and television station in Mount Kisco, Russo persuaded her boss to let her and other interns go to Woodstock '94, the 25th anniversary concert in Saugerties, New York.

"Who wouldn't want to know what it's like to be at Woodstock," said Russo. "Even if it's 25 years later?"

Turns out, it was pretty similar to the first one: Hundreds of thousands of people gathered, slept in tents (or not) and, after much rain, the field became a muddy mess.

"We documented it and I found that to be just the most amazing experience for me," Russo says. "That really piqued my interest in the broadcast

field — to be able to listen to people and let them share their stories and their experiences and not always having to be the one heard, but to be the active listener."

Since then, Russo, who grew up in Westchester and lives in Englewood, has been a journalist, producer, college professor, multimedia host, health coach and actress. Though her pursuits may seem varied, they have one thing in common: They all allow her to communicate with the public, most often on camera.

"Ambitious and a go-getter," says Russo's best friend Jennifer Orsini, a Maywood native and wedding and event planner. But she gets what she wants "with care, compassion and integrity."

Russo started her career interning while majoring radio and television and minoring in theater at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. She was working for the local NBC affiliate, KXAS, when America stopped to watch O.J. Simpson's white Bronco lead a slow chase on

the Los Angeles interstate. She transcribed voice-mails about the chase left for prominent attorney Gerry Spence, who was often a guest on the channel. "It was a totally different experience and everything just grew from there," Russo says.

After college, Russo had several jobs in Louisiana, including one as an overnight radio DJ at a light rock station in Shreveport, one as a production assistant at KTBS and another as a morning producer at KTVE in Monroe, before she was moved to being an anchor. "I also hosted an art show on public access," Russo says. "I was really trying to get myself in anywhere possible."

GOING SOLO

After leaving the television station in the wake of 9/11, Russo settled in North Carolina, where she determined it would be the last time she worked for anyone full-time. "I own my own life and I write my own narrative," Russo says. "I wanted the freedom to tell the stories I want to tell." >

RUSSO ON-AIR (Top left) Russo on the set of Daily Burn 365; (center) hosting on location in Times Square, NYC for *Healthy Communities News*; (right) on the set of QVC. (Opposite page) Russo prepares for a social media posting.

DAILY BURN 365: RYAN KELLY; TIMES SQUARE AND QVC: COURTESY OF HILARY RUSSO; OPPOSITE: MICHELLE RAY PHOTOGRAPHY



media personality



She took another route to story-telling, and began doing professional theater. She was a co-producer for the professional theater company Hot Summer Nights at the Kennedy (now called Theatre Raleigh) alongside Broadway stars Lauren Kennedy and Alan Campbell. Russo also performed with the company (and North Carolina Theatre) and served as its publicity and media relations director. “It was the break I needed for a while,” Russo says. “It was cathartic and therapeutic to find my voice in a different way.”

She eventually got back into television and was a host of *Second Cinema*, a program about independent films on Time Warner Cable, and as a host of pledge drives and a travel correspondent for NC Weekend at local UNC-TV. “Second Cinema was a saving grace because ... it was therapy. I needed to get back and have those conversations,” Russo says. During this time, she also acted in commercials, which she continues to do today. After 10 years, she moved back to her native New York.

HILISTICALLY SPEAKING

After her move, Russo had a brief stint as an anchor and writer for The Financial News Network Online. Then the opportunity arose for her to audition to be part of the talent lineup at QVC. She pulled from her experience hosting telethons for UNC-TV in North Carolina, and served as QVC’s home and garden guest, helping sell solar lights before she found a subject that animated her: health and wellness.

“When I found health and wellness, I knew this is where my voice needs to be,” Russo says. She has created her own brand called HIListically Speaking.

“It is my work as a certified holistic integrative nutrition health coach and certified havening techniques practitioner,” she says. (Havening is an experimental psycho-sensory therapy to help treat trauma, anxiety and phobias through touch.)

She is one of the original studio members of Daily Burn 365, an online streaming workout program that she participates in to this day. Russo says she truly found a community to belong in when she discovered holistic living and health and wellness. She also hosts *Healthy Communities News*, a monthly travel show for CVS’s health division.

Orsini says it is rare to find people who can combine their passion for helping others with a knowledge of media. “I think the way her career organically manifested, her dedication to health and wellness is really coming through,” she says. The pair are not only friends but have worked together and supported each other professionally; Russo has dressed up for a Gatsby-themed birthday party Orsini was staging and helped her greet guests.

“Everyone has a story to tell,” Russo says.

THE NEXT GENERATION

Russo has taken the lessons she’s learned as a multimedia whirlwind and begun teaching the next generation of journalists. For the past 10 years, she has been an adjunct professor at St. John’s University in Queens. She teaches three classes at the school and helps students learn the ins and outs of broadcasting and being on-air.

“I’m teaching them to be compassionate journalists,” Russo says. “To not always be heard, but to know what it’s like to be balanced and unbiased.”

And, maybe, to convince a boss to let them cover a big story. ■



FRONT AND CENTER (Top) Russo on-air with her first Anchor/Producer Job at KTVE-TV, an NBC affiliate in Monroe, Louisiana. (Middle) Professor Russo with her students in the TV studio classroom at St John’s University. (Bottom) Russo stars in a TV commercial for Blue Buffalo cat food with her own cat, Eliza Doolittle.