NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Emmy-winning news anchor's journey began with the sisters

Sr. Camille D'Arienzo | Jul. 10, 2012 Conversations with Sr. Camille

Mary Murphy, the oldest of four children born to of Irish immigrants, Mary and James, grew up in Queens, N.Y. While her mother waitressed and her father drove a city bus, Mary couldn't have guessed that one day she would be inside the homes he passed. That's precisely where her profession has taken her as a popular news anchor and reporter, first for WCBS-TV and later for WPIX. While awards for her superb newsgathering and interviewing skills include (but are not limited to) 18 Emmys, an Edward R. Murrow writing award and numerous first-place plaques from the Associated Press Broadcasters Association, Mary's ordinary childhood did not signal the approach of such a stellar career. We begin this conversation by asking her what that childhood was like.

Murphy: From the time I was 6, we lived on a block that held about 100 children. We played stickball in the street and I played guitar in the folk Mass at Our Lady of Lourdes parish, where I attended elementary school. I received a scholarship to a small, private high school -- Delehanty -- in Jamaica, N.Y., and then a B.A. from Queens College in 1981.

What did you learn from your parents?

My mother was my first role model and remains one to this very day. She believed in the power of prayer and the power of faith. She faced adversity with dignity. She taught me not to judge people.

We didn't have a lot of money, but we knew the true meaning of Christmas, and we learned a strong work ethic from both parents. When I was 13, I started volunteer work at a nursing home run by the Little Sisters of the Poor. When I was 15, the sisters gave me my first paying job. I worked in the pantry and the medical division all through high school and college. Near the end of college, I was a receptionist for the sisters. They also used to ask me to write plays for the elderly residents to perform.

When did you first feel want to work in television?

One day, when I was in the eighth grade, my mother and I were watching WABC Eyewitness News. We noticed

a nice Italian-American girl named Rose Ann Scamardella reporting from the field. My mother turned to me and said, "You can do that."

What prepared you for this career?

In college, I double-majored in English and public communications, but the most important preparation came from on-the-job training in a television newsroom. I was accepted for a college internship at WCBS-New York in 1981. After graduation, I was hired for "summer relief work" there. I never left the business, working intermittently at WCBS and WPIX.

What do you consider high points in your career?

At WCBS in 1988, I covered the Joel Steinberg trial. He was a criminal defense lawyer charged with beating his 6-year-old adopted (though not legally) daughter to death while under the influence of cocaine. Hedda Nussbaum, Steinberg's live-in girlfriend and the child's mother, was discovered to be a battered woman. When she took the stand against Steinberg, WCBS did "wall-to-wall" coverage of her testimony, and the ratings tripled. I did commentary from the hallway every time the judge called a sidebar, so I had a lot of talking to do.

I seem to remember that some good came to you despite that tragic situation.

Yes. Brian Williams, long before he became anchor of the NBC Nightly News, was anchoring from the WCBS studio. When the Steinberg verdict came in, we did team coverage and won an Emmy award. It was my first Emmy.

That was one of many criminal cases you covered, wasn't it?

I covered the John Gotti federal trial in 1992, the trial in which the "Teflon don" finally got convicted. He knew every reporter by name and designated seat in the courtroom. When I didn't turn up one day because I was covering a plane crash at LaGuardia Airport, he asked where I was.

I covered both bombings at the World Trade Center.

What other significant stories did you report on?

1995 was the year I became weekend anchor for WPIX 11 News. I held the job for 14 years and, during that time, I played a key role in steering our weekend coverage through some huge news stories. I was working when Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated. Princess Diana was killed in a car crash on a Saturday night, John F. Kennedy Jr.'s private plane went down near Massachusetts on a Friday night, and the space shuttle Columbia exploded on a Saturday morning.

All of these are tragedies. Have there been happy times?

On a joyful note, I was six months pregnant with my son when I covered the return visit of Pope John Paul II to New York and New Jersey in 1995. He tapped my microphone at Newark Airport.

The Sisters of Mercy have asked me to emcee their "Evening of Mercy" for a number of years now. I recently produced a video for Mercy Home to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the sisters' work with children and developmentally disabled adults. When Sr. Kay Crumlish asked me to do the video, I was preparing to leave for Rome for New York's Archbishop Timothy Dolan's elevation to cardinal. I felt that getting the Rome trip was a blessing and helping the sisters was a way of giving back.

Have any stories had a personal impact?

I'd like to pay tribute to federal corrections officer, Louis Pepe. Louie was guarding two terrorism suspects in November 2000 at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in lower Manhattan. They slipped out of their cuffs and started to attack Louie, spraying hot sauce in his eyes while demanding his keys. When he refused to give up the keys, they stabbed Louie through the eye with a comb that was fashioned into a shiv. The shiv penetrated his brain. Louie was left partially paralyzed and his speech was affected. He gave me his first ever television interview in 2003 from his home in Woodside, Queens. Turns out Louis Pepe was the Louis Pepe who lived across the street form me during the first six years of my life. He and his sister, Eileen, remember the Murphy kids who moved away. I still keep in touch with Louie. I thank him for trusting me with his story.

How do you cope with the impact of so much danger and sadness?

I draw strength from my favorite Psalm, 23: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

I used to say that as I left the news studio to do a "live" broadcast. I still bless myself before I report from the field. This psalm makes a difference in my life because my faith makes a difference in it. Even when times get rough, I always believe that things can get better.

Can you recall events you shared with people for whom it didn't seem things could get worse?

When I was working with CBS TV, I was sent to Yonkers to interview the parents of a young college student who was killed on Pan Am Flight 103, the jet that was bombed over Lockerbie, Scotland, right before Christmas in 1988. They had lost their only child; these Irish-born parents had adopted him. I remember walking into their home and the mother was crying. She apologized to me. I apologized to her for intruding on her sadness. In this case, I think she found it cathartic to share her pain. Not every grieving person feels that way.

What is your perception of God?

I think of God as a force that watches over me and wants me to live the best life I can. If I stumble, God is someone I can talk to and ask for guidance. God is also someone I thank when I've received a blessing in my life.

How does your faith affect your life?

I believe in karma. If you do the right thing, usually a blessing will find its way to you. If you make a mistake, you might have to pay a price for it. I know I bring my faith to the workplace. When I started in the news business at the age of 21, colleagues used to call me Sister Mary because I always talked about working with the Little Sisters in the nursing home. I've never hidden my faith or made apologies for it.

How did you meet your husband?

I literally bumped into my future husband on Broadway in lower Manhattan, across from City Hall. He was on lunch hour from his job at police headquarters. I'd just bought a statue of St. Anthony from a religious goods store. Tommy invited me to brunch. I decided to go. When I told him I needed to go home to go to evening Mass, he asked if he could go with me. He knew the way to my heart!

Do you have children?

We have one son, Anthony, and my biggest hope for him is that he'll be happy and peaceful in his life and in the profession he chooses. Many people tell me that he's very respectful. That's the biggest compliment a mother can get. I want him to respect people and treat them with dignity, and I think he does that.

How do you pray?

Mostly in the traditional way, on my knees in church and before I sleep. I also pray while I'm driving.

How have assignments regarding the church affected you?

I was raised in the Catholic faith. I've always wanted it to be a solid foundation for how to live my life. The church has endured some crises in the last 10 years and I was assigned to report on some involving the clergy. That was personally painful for me. I hope the church is on the road to healing. What happened with the clergy proves that we're all human and prone to sin.

How do you relax?

Relaxing was never easy for me, but I'm making greater efforts now to perfect the art of relaxation. In my mid-40s, I started playing tennis, and I finally found a sport I wasn't so bad at. Recently, I started doing yoga and pilates. Stretching really helps.

Do you have favorite movies?

When I was a school kid, I loved "The Sound of Music" and "Ben-Hur." As a teenager, I was moved by Jack Nicholson in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." In my adult years, "Goodfellas" was enjoyable because of all the work I've done covering the mob. Recently, I thought Meryl Streep did an excellent job as Margaret Thatcher in "The Iron Lady."

What makes you happy?

When I see my son doing well at something he loves, when I share a good laugh with friends, when my work receives positive recognition and when I win a tough tennis match!

[Mercy Sr. Camille D'Arienzo, broadcaster and author, narrates *Stories of Forgiveness*, a book about people whose experiences have caused them to consider the possibilities of extending or accepting forgiveness. The audiobook is available through the book's website, storiesofforgiveness.com [1].]

Source URL (retrieved on 07/11/2014 - 23:56): http://ncronline.org/blogs/conversations-sr-camille/emmy-winning-news-anchors-journey-began-pisters

We can send you an email alert every time Conversations with Sr. Camille is updated. Go to this page and follow directions. **Email alert sign-up** [2]. If you already receive email alerts from us, click on the "update my profile" button to add Conversations with Sr. Camille to your list.

Links:

[1] http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/camilledarienzo

[2] http://ncronline.org/email-alert-signup