

July 2014

Q&A: ABC's Dan Harris '93

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Recommended Citation

Dong, Christina (2014) "Q&A: ABC's Dan Harris '93," *Colby Magazine*: Vol. 103: Iss. 1, Article 10.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine/vol103/iss1/10>

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Q&A

QUIETING THE VOICE IN HIS HEAD

ABC NEWSMAN DAN HARRIS '93 ON HIS BESTSELLING MEMOIR AND WHY WE SHOULD MEDITATE EVERY DAY

Christina Dong '17 INTERVIEW

Q Have you been surprised by how successful it's been?

Surprised is too weak of a word.

Q Then what word would you use?

Well, I'm shocked. I used to joke with my wife, Bianca. I would get up from the couch where we were hanging out and I would say, "Okay, I'm gonna go work on the worst book ever written, the book that nobody is ever gonna read." It became a running joke for us.

Q A joke?

We just thought it was hilarious. You know, I think she had more confidence in the book than I did—I know she did. ... I wrote this thing over four years, and it was like a collection of Word documents on my computer. It didn't feel real in any way. And now it's like a physical object and out there in the world, and I'm hearing from people who read it and [it's been] an incredible experience. It will probably go down as one of the most meaningful things I've ever done.

Q What was it like reconciling yourself to the fact that you needed to make some pretty big lifestyle changes?

Well, one thing I needed was a shrink, and he pointed out that I had almost ruined my career. ... It was immediately and powerfully obvious that I needed to get my act together.

Dan Harris '93 (@danbharris) is co-anchor of ABC's *Nightline* and weekend editions of *Good Morning America* and the author of the bestselling memoir *10% Happier: How I Tamed the Voice in My Head, Reduced Stress Without Losing My Edge, and Found Self-Help That Actually Works—A True Story*.

Q How did you come to the decision to write the book—and put yourself out there?

I'll be honest. I worried about it a lot. My mom actually sent me an e-mail not long before the book came out begging me not to publish the book, which freaked me out. And actually, I considered not publishing the book. I had a meeting with Diane Sawyer and told her I was thinking about not publishing the book and she talked me out of it. She told me she had my back and that an awful lot of people at work would. I'm glad I followed her advice.

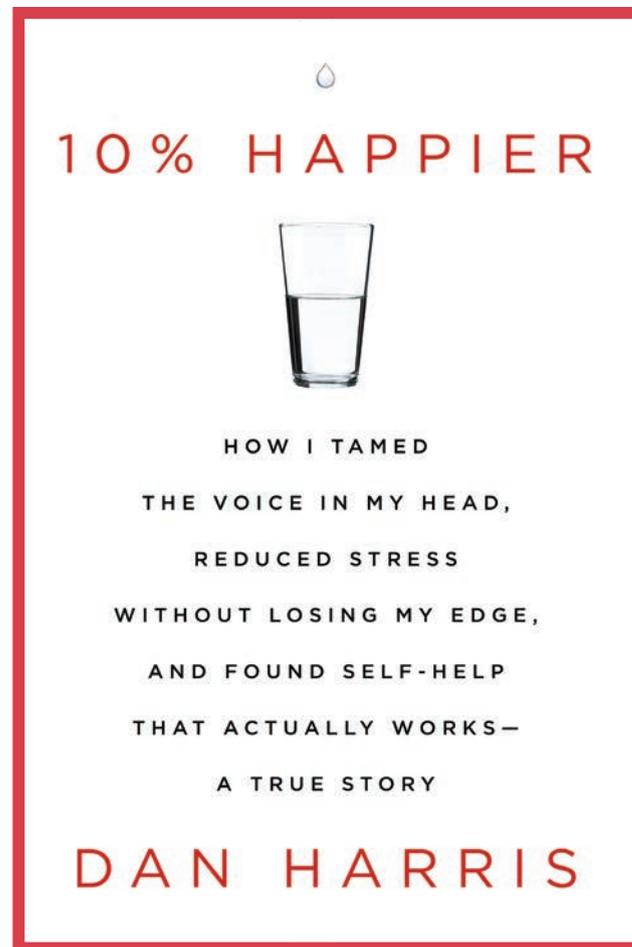
I knew I would need oversight in terms of quitting drugs, and I really wanted to get to the bottom of why I'd been so stupid. And so it just seemed like the right first step.

Q Do you meditate every day?

I definitely still meditate every day and I believe everybody should. I think it should join the pantheon of no-brainers, like brushing your teeth, exercising, and eating healthy. And I think we'll see that happen within our lifetime. Science, which has driven every other public health revolution I just mentioned, such as exercise and dietary changes and oral hygiene, now strongly suggests that meditation is really, really good for you. So I tell people they should do five minutes a day. That's enough to change the relationship that you have with your voice in your head, which is the central feature in your life, whether you're aware of it or not.

Q How does mindfulness manifest itself in your reporting?

Off the air, my relationships with my colleagues are improving. That's not to say that I'm never a jerk, but I'm much calmer and a lot better at listening to people. The other thing is that I'm more sensitive to the people I'm covering. So while I continue to believe that it's my job to ask questions, I'm a little less gruff than I was in my young Turk days, some of which were in Maine. And it really helped me in terms of my anchoring. ... I'm not perfect, but I'm a lot better at listening to what people are actually



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—DAN HARRIS

saying and responding in a spontaneous way, and that really helped me be a more relaxed and jovial presence.

Q Are you considering writing another book?

I don't know if I'll write another book. I mean, this one almost killed me. ... It is so much work. And it took me four years and I was constantly carrying around sheets of paper in my pocket. On airplanes, in taxis, waiting for an elevator, I was constantly working on paragraphs or chapters, trying to figure out the order of the ideas and fixing sentences, and it was just torturous.

Q How did you develop an interest in writing?

I took three semesters away from Colby: one in Washington, D.C., where I had an internship with a news organization, and Paris, where I worked for a TV production house, and I also took a semester at NYU film school. So my time away from Colby was where I figured out what I wanted to do with my life. At Colby I learned a lot about writing, about having ideas and handing them to other groups of people. And it was the first time that I really got initiated and fell in love with academics. ... Colby isn't a vocational school; it's not where you go to learn how to do a specific job. It's where you go to learn how to learn, and, I think, where you go to have your eyes opened and your beliefs challenged. ©