Q&A: ABC's Dan Harris '93

Christina Dong
Colby College
ABC NEWSMAN DAN HARRIS ’93 ON HIS BESTSELLING MEMOIR AND WHY WE SHOULD MEDITATE EVERY DAY

Christina Dong ’17 INTERVIEW

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

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