

SEEKING THE EXTRAORDINARY

Ep 5 - Broadcasting to the World: Cynthia Hudson

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[00:00:00] Lisa: **[00:00:00]** Seeking the Extraordinary is sponsored by The Colony Group, a national wealth and business management company that seeks the extraordinary by pursuing an unrelenting mission of providing clients with peace of mind and empowering their visions of tomorrow. To learn more about how The Colony Group manages beyond money, visit thecolonygroup.com.

Michael: Welcome fellow seekers of the extraordinary. Welcome to our shared quest. A quest, not for a thing, but for an ideal. A quest, not for a place, but into the inner, explored regions of ourselves. A quest to understand how we can achieve our fullest potential by learning from others who have done or are doing exactly that.

May we always have the courage and wisdom to learn from those who have something to teach. Join me now in Seeking the Extraordinary **[00:01:00]** I'm Michael Nathanson, your chief seeker of the extraordinary.

Today's guest saw through the very fabric of broadcasting and journalism, as well as the causes of democracy, inclusion and human compassion, not just in the United States, but internationally as well. Her list of achievements is so long that if I were to try to go through them all right now, we'd never get to speak to her, but here's just a sampling:

She's won eight Emmy awards. Been named one of People en Espanol's most powerful women and been recognized by Fortune magazine as one of the 50 most Powerful Latinas running a leading global company. She won the Lake Valencia Media Award for her dedication to the cause of democracy, and the Palma University of Peru recognized her with the Human Merit Award for a cause of peace for her anti-discrimination campaign.

[00:02:00] The Latin recording Academy has distinguished her with the Leading Ladies of Entertainment Award. And the National Association of Hispanic Journalists recognized her with a Presidential Award for her unwavering commitment to journalism, the pursuit of the truth and her leadership in journalism. Our guest currently oversees all aspects of CNN Spanish language media businesses, including news gathering, editorial content, programming, production, operations, and personnel of the CNN en Espanol 24/7 television news networks, cnnspanol.com, and CNN en Espanol radio. Her community efforts are equally impressive and include being on the boards of the National Epilepsy Foundation and the Nicholas Children's Hospital Foundation.

In her own words, she comes from a lineage of strong warrior women. Please welcome the extraordinary Cynthia Hudson. Welcome Cynthia.

[00:03:00] Cynthia: Thank you so much. How are you?

Michael: Great, great to be here. I'm really excited. I've been learning a lot about you and you have some really interesting things going on in your life. And I thought that it would be helpful for our listeners to begin with where you are right now. And maybe talk a little bit about what you do for CNN. The reach that you have at CNN and, uh, and what you're looking to accomplish at CNN.

Cynthia: So, you know, at CNN en Espanol, it's, it's really a privilege to, to be able to oversee the premier brand of news in not only the world, but in my case, the Spanish speaking world.

I always tell people that the three main languages spoken in the world today are English, Spanish and Mandarin Chinese. Those are the top three languages spoken in the world, and I get to do one of them. And so, and we provide, news, [00:04:00] in so many platforms. It's been a journey I've been with the company for 11 years. I was able to transform it from basically a headline news TV network into a multi-platform business. And that for me has been just such a wonderful challenge. And we're really looking towards the future because it, that keeps evolving as well. So now we've launched very successful podcasts. That's been an exciting part, and so I'm excited to be with you because this is, I think a really interesting and fun way to communicate with audiences. And I find that people who enjoy podcasts really are fans. It's a great way to have a connection in a unique format that allows the listener or the consumer to engage very directly with their fandom of a topic or a, or a personality, and so we're doing that. We're also doing, you know, exploring the direct-to-consumer models, and so it's a moment of great transformation in our industry. And so, I'm excited about being at the cusp of that and looking at all the ways that we will be able to do [00:05:00] that with CNN en Espanol. We reach literally from Alaska to Patagonia, to Spain, anywhere that people speak Spanish, we provide, whether it's digital products, whether it's television channels via cable, whether it's radio, we offer a plethora of opportunities to reach them with news and information. We have reporters all over the regions, and I think the most important thing is that we've really established ourselves as the gold standard of journalism.

More importantly, we have been a beacon for truth, and in this moment in which people are getting bombarded with lies in which this same wonderful moment of transformational opportunity has also become a beacon for really anyone to say anything and add the tagline news to their brand, and [00:06:00] spew misinformation, disinformation. That then becomes really a challenge for us because we're now faced with having to constantly clarify, and the recent attacks on our capital are a perfect example of what happens when people are fed this kind of crazy information. We just did a story today on QAnon. You know, the people actually believe that somehow these pedophile groups were going to be charged, that the President was going to, the ex-President, was going to somehow convict people on mass at the steps of the Capitol, and there was going to be live executions. I mean the level of insanity that's being spread by these crazy portals is insane, and that's very dangerous for society as well. So, at the same time that we're seeing this great moment for connectivity, we're also now facing the [00:07:00] crisis of how do we somehow find the path for protecting individuals from what that crazy expansion of access to media can bring when it's in the hands of people who use it for negative purposes. And so, you know, we shall see what the future holds and how we all manage that, but I'm very happy that at least at CNN, we have been able to stand very firmly with the truth with facts. You know, our campaign of facts first has been very successful. In the last few years, CNN has grown to be the number one news network again, we've proven that the facts are more important than anything else. And I think in Spanish, you know, that's, that's always been the case. We don't have really any other major competitors in the region. And, we just consider that the most important thing is to be on the side of truth and never to allow [00:08:00] anyone to call us the enemy of the people. The minute someone calls the press the enemy of the people, you can bet your, you know, your, your bippy that that person does not want democracy. That is the autocratic dictatorial demagoguery of anyone who does not want, somebody telling the truth. So, um, you know, I just it's a moment of inflection and reflection for all of us. And I just think that we all need to be very careful about the future to make sure that we are, able to figure out how do we navigate information for the future, and where do we stand in terms of being able to come back.

Some of these negative forces that have decided to use the wonderful ability of our new communications opportunities in a way that harms society.

Michael: It sounds like you've delivered that speech before that was very well put. So, I'm going to try to summarize what I think I just heard, what I think I heard is that [00:09:00] you are seeking, and CNN Espanol is seeking to provide truth and facts to disseminate truth and facts, so that people can make informed decisions and to ensure that you're doing it in one of the three most broadly spoken languages in the world.

Cynthia: That's correct.

Michael: Okay. Well thank you for that. How, how large is CNN en Espanol? Is it a large team? Is it, I mean, I, you just talked about the, uh, the reach from Alaska down to Chile and Argentina and, a, you talked about going across the Atlantic to Spain and other Spanish languages. How big of an operation for those of us who don't know what happens behind the scenes is CNN en Espanol?

Cynthia: So, between my, um, digital radio and television teams across, various offices, we have offices, our main offices, Miami, Atlanta, [00:10:00] Mexico, Argentina. We have, um, Bureau offices in Madrid. We have Columbia and then we have our correspondent offices.

We have an office in Los Angeles, uh, New York city and then we have correspondence offices in every single major capital, uh, in Latin America and in Europe, London, Rome, Jerusalem, Abu Dhabi, Hong Kong. I would say that would probably somewhere around the 300 staffers, um, and contractors, and then we also, you know, count on the support of the full-on structure of CNN. And so, you know, it's, it's a huge operation. Um, but CNN Espanol is the smaller part of that huge operation. We're just able to take advantage of the, of the existing structure to translate whatever we need to translate and then do our original content and reporting

Michael: When it comes to news. Is your focus American news or is it international news?

Cynthia: I would say that it's interesting, uh, you know, Latin [00:11:00] America there, there's a famous phrase and I'll say it in Spanish. Um, and then I'll repeat it in English. They say that they say that, " cuando los Estados Unidos tiene catarro, Latinamerica tiene neumonia." When the United States has a cold Latin America has pneumonia. So, uh, you know, the US is very important because obviously we're in the Americas in this hemisphere. And so anything that happens in the US has a direct effect, both economically, politically, um, you know, it, it has a direct effect on that, right.

So American, you know, US news is important, however, we do cover all of the news of Latin America and European news. Okay. So, it is not focused on American stories. It's really from the perspective of how the US affects the people in Latin America and US Hispanics.

Michael: I've spent some time in Latin America, in various countries, including as far South as Chile, is CNN en Espanol the, is it the primary news [00:12:00] source or, at least internationally?

Cynthia: Absolutely. I mean, there are local channels in each country, but when you think about who is the 24 hour news network, it's CNN en Espanol.

Michael: So, I would say that it sounds like a large operation and certainly a very influential one as well. By the way, I did understand your Spanish. I don't want you to challenge me and try and make me speak Spanish because my accent is terrible.

But I do want to share with you that I majored in Spanish language and literature in college. And I did a semester abroad in Seville, Spain, and I have a great passion for Latin American literature in particular, I'm a big fan of certain authors and, um, pretty well-read in that space. So, let's continue and make sure that our listeners understand why I've selected you as someone who I think is quite extraordinary. You've had a great career getting to CNN as well. Could you talk a little bit about some of your [00:13:00] vocational adventures leading to CNN?

Cynthia: Sure. I mean, I started as a news reporter, I started in English. I never thought I was actually gonna work in Spanish. Um, so when I graduated from University of Miami, I started working at the local CBS affiliate and an opportunity arose because at that time, the Univision group, it wasn't even called Univision at the time. But the station in Miami was very powerful because Miami was such a bilingual city, which it was interesting, my grandmother and her friends and, you know, people that I knew, the parents of all of our friends would watch the Spanish language channel. And a friend of mine said, you know, while you're waiting to get into English language, why don't you. I spoke perfect Spanish. Thanks to my parents. My mother was a PhD in Spanish literature and had gotten her PhD at Emory University and taught at Georgetown.

And we had moved to Miami because my father, who was a PhD as well, had gotten an opportunity to, um, become a professor at the University of Miami School of Business. [00:14:00] And so I moved here in my junior high school and I said ahhh Spanish. Okay. Well, you know, it might as well. So, I applied for a job and I got hired as a reporter. Funny enough, because they said, I looked like a Latina Diane Sawyer,

Michael: We'll have to get a picture of you on our on our website.

Cynthia: So, I started off as the nighttime reporter, for the 11 o'clock news. And of course, I started realizing that I was getting, of course the typical, you know, nighttime beat, which was covering at that time, orange bowl fan stories, and, uh, city council meetings in Miami at that time were very explosive. And, you know, the drug car explosions and all this stuff that was happening in the early eighties in Miami. And I realized very quickly the fun stuff and the important stuff was really being decided behind the scenes. So, I went to my bosses and of course my father was thrilled and my [00:15:00] grandmother were thrilled.

They were like, Oh my, my, my, my daughter's on TV. And they thought I was crazy when I went to the bosses and said, you know, I really think I'd rather be behind the scenes. Because I, I felt that I wasn't being challenged, and I really wasn't able to make the decisions about the stories that I wanted to do and important work, and they actually told me that they said, are you kidding? You know, most people want to be in front of the camera, but I didn't. I wanted to be behind. I really wanted to be able to make the decisions and do something more meaningful and be able to choose developing ideas and stories.

And so that, that became a very interesting moment for me. And so, I became a producer and I started growing and realizing that Spanish offered me really big opportunities to do things that probably had, I stayed in English would have taken me a lot longer to be able to get to do. And so, I stayed at Univision at that point for several years. Almost [00:16:00] 10. Then I was hired to become a vice president of programming at Telemundo, which was a new network at the time, Saul Steinberg had, had created it with junk bonds and, uh, he actually hired me, which was interesting because I met him in New York at the time. He was the most powerful man in New York, and he wanted to compete against Univision, which was kind of the monopoly of Spanish language broadcast television. So, it was an interesting time to go there and launch, relaunch Telemundo. And then the Apollo group, basically came calling on their junk bonds and he had to sell, and that became a nightmare. But at that moment, you know, lo and behold, I, I guess I get, I get the opportunity. I've always been at the moment of critical changes in the market. Cable TV was exploding.

And so, I started working for one of the big, what they called the older Cowboys of cable, which was Gene Schneider and the group that was part of United Cable.

And he had launched in Latin America with Liberty and Malone. [00:17:00] And so I was able to work in Latin America, developing, not only some cable opportunities for them, but also launching, some channels. And part of that was a, home and garden channel for Latin America called Casa Club and rebranding and relaunching the family channel with Pat Robertson. So, I had some interesting experiences there. And then I was tapped by the Hearst group, Hearst Entertainment, to launch Cosmo TV and create Cosmo. And that was so much fun because I was able to work with Helen Gurley Brown, who was such an icon. Uh, for women in the world. And I launched Cosmo TV in Spain, which is still today, then one of the top five channels in the world in Spain for women. And I created and worked on the branding and how do you create this women's brand into television? We launched the first, website that had TV and the magazine together. Uh, and this was in the year 2000, but in addition to that, I was the first person to buy Sex in the City [00:18:00] for cable TV, in Spanish, outside of the U S, so that was, uh, that was fun. Everybody thought I was crazy, and it was, it was a success. And then, I launched it for Latin America, and I helped develop the, the version for Cosmo TV in Canada.

Michael: When you say Cosmo TV that's Cosmopolitan?

Cynthia: Exactly, I was at Cosmopolitan magazine for eight years. Uh, that was, that was a great time. It was wonderful, and I was able to meet fascinating people, working both with the magazine brand, with the Hearst group, you know, they had such an incredible catalog of movies and it was, the idea was how do you take the experience of the magazine and create a channel that, that feels like you're part of, your Cosmo girl and you have that fun, fearless female for you. So, I took the news idea and turned it into how do you expand that? Right. And how do you turn content into engagement and lifestyle? And so, then came a moment of, of serious inflection because [00:19:00] my father, Cosmo wanted, uh, you know, they were looking at expanding into other markets at that point. And I, the possibility was about me moving to New York. And at that moment, I was still in Miami and traveling a lot, all the time, actually. And I had little children, and my father got really sick, and I needed to be with my dad, and I made a decision to not be away from my dad at the end of his life.

And so, I stayed in Miami and I was offered to create and launch Mega TV for Spanish broadcasting system, which is the largest Spanish radio business in the US, private, private radio, and they own mega mega radio in New York and, uh, La Raza in Los Angeles and several stations in Miami, Houston, Puerto Rico. And Mega TV was a huge success here, and I was able to get the [00:20:00] deal for them to be on a DirecTV. And so, it's a, it's an independent Spanish, smaller competitor to Univision and Telemundo, but it's done well. And SBS is now in the middle of, you know, finally re negotiating their debt. So that then became the, you know, a new adventure of you know launching, so I basically, since Univision and Telemundo, I, I have launched independent networks. I've created and launched Casa Club, Family, Cosmo, and Mega. So that's four networks I've created and launched in addition to then taking over CNN, which they came calling. Just at the right time, because what happened was when I was at Mega, after being there for seven years, and I think this is where you and I kind of have a very interesting connection. My middle daughter, Laura had a, [00:21:00] uh, a brain tumor and she had a, um, a massive, grand mal seizure. That's how we found out she had a brain tumor. And it was in the middle of the financial crisis of 2009, and it became really, truly a moment of devastating consequences for me personally, not just because of her illness, but because it also made me reevaluate everything in my life. Partly because I was so type A, I still am. I realized that I didn't drive a bus. I didn't drive the bus. I didn't drive the car. I was really just a passenger and my grandmother used to, this is the, I always tell people I, and I, and I've already told you this and you know that I have two grandmothers. I have a Cuban grandmother who is Cuban of Sephardic [00:22:00] Jewish descent. And I have an American grandmother who is good old Southern stock. You know my Cuban grandmother used to always tell me that you don't control anything. Don't think you control things. And I never really understood that until my daughter got sick.

And when she did get sick, I, I made some really conscientious decisions about, about my life and the one of the things my grandmother would say is if you can solve the problem with a check. It isn't a problem. And no check in the world could fix my daughter. No amount of money could solve the problem.

And so, I truly had a huge problem and, at that moment after getting out of the hospital and fortunately she was able to have surgery. She was able to, have the tumor was not cancer. It was a benign tumor, thankfully. Yes. And she was able to get onto medication because the [00:23:00] surgery resulted in her, then having, seizures that were controlled by medication for a while. But the result of that made me reflect on everything in my life. And so several things happened. I realized that I needed to make some big changes. One of them was that I also, she was in junior high school, and I really wanted her to start clean, in high school and not have to be the girl with the tumor. Right. Because everybody in Miami knew about this. And in her circle, everyone knew that she was in the private school world and it was like, Oh, you know, she's the girl that had the tumor and, and so I was offered the opportunity to work at CNN. And I had lived in Atlanta as a little girl for four years while my parents got their PhD. I knew Phil Kent, who was at that time, the president of Turner. And he and I had met when I was at Cosmo, and the folks that were running CNN and the gentleman that hired me, Tony Maddix and Jim Walton, um, you know, I [00:24:00] went to the interviews and I thought, this is an interesting opportunity.

Here's this great brand in Spanish that I had competed against with other networks in Latin America, that really is kind of tired. It hadn't, they hadn't really evolved the channel in years. They had kept it as a headline channel. And I thought I can do so much with this. What a great opportunity for me and for my family. I can take my girls instead of me being the one to travel. Their father can travel. Let's flip this. I can bring the girls to Atlanta and give them a fresh start kind of away from all of the, the noise of all of the drama from the, from the tumor and the surgery and all of that. And I can also reevaluate my personal relationship with their father, because that was, that was also in turmoil. There were a lot of other issues that had developed my father had already passed away, and I just felt that I needed a real change in my life. And so all of that confluence of issues [00:25:00] occurred and I said, I'm going to go for it. I didn't think they were going to hire me because I basically went in and said, I think the channel is awful.

Michael: They probably loved that. They probably loved your honesty, and your vision..

Cynthia: And I haven't done news in a while, but I, I know news and this is not compelling and we need to do a website and I think you're going to need to open up some, some bureaus eventually in Miami, and we need to get this thing to be more, uh, you know, program driven and not headline driven and we need to get, you know, it needs to have a different energy. But it worked and it's been just such a wonderful ride and it's been just such a great opportunity. And it helped me to kind of do a, a restart and a reset. And so, you know, I guess everything happens for a reason.

Michael: Yeah. I'd like to, I like to offer some, some commentary. So My cause is brain tumors. I have an inoperable brain tumor, a three centimeter [00:26:00] macroadenoma. Um, which is sits right under where my optic nerves cross. And I'm fine. It's not cancer. Um, but it's something that it's a burden on me and it's something I have to live with for the rest of my life. And I take medications and see lots of doctors. And I was the six-year chair of the national brain tumor society. Do you, do you happen to know the type of tumor that your daughter had?

Cynthia: She, she had a developmental tumor. It was a ganglioglioma.

Michael: Ganglioglioma

Cynthia: Ganglioglioma. It was the size, we didn't even know she had it.

Michael: But it wasn't cancerous?,

Cynthia: No. And it was, um, an interesting thing about this, this tumor. It was the size of a dill pickle when they discovered it, they discovered it because at the age of, actually she was not 13 yet she was 12. At the age of 12, she had a grand mal seizure out of the blue, but I can tell you that the signs were there, and I didn't know what they were. So she, at the age of about five. [00:27:00] This very bright child could not read well. And we thought she had a visual perceptual disorder. So, they kept sending her to do all these tests. And they said, well, she has a genius IQ, super high IQ, but she's, she's having, she might be dyslexic, and they would do all these visual tests. And so, she would draw things but backward and she would write mirror writing. And she's a lefty we thought, well, maybe it's because she's, left-handed, no one's thought to do a brain scan. Had they done a brain scan, they would have realized it was a tumor there. So, I'm a big advocate that if a child is diagnosed with some kind of a reading disorder or a learning disability as a young child, they should do a brain scan.

Anyway, they didn't do it. And when she got a little bit older, she started saying, Mom, you know, um, I had like a little thing in my ear. I'm hearing something. And it was in the, it was in her left temporal lobe. And I said, well, it was the summertime. I said, when school starts again, listen to how [00:28:00] silly, you know, the, the innocence of a parent, not imagining that there's something wrong. I said, when school starts again and they do the tests, let's make sure that they do the hearing tests. You know, when they do the normal tests at school, that they do that your eyes and your ears, you know, let's make sure we tell the hearing people to check your hearing. I didn't even think, it was basically auras. And it was that summer that she was getting those hearing auras that she had, right the minute school started that September, she had the thing and they said that we took her, obviously that was straight to the hospital with this huge grand mal seizure. I was at the gym when they called me to say, I thought, Oh, she probably forgot her lunchbox. Never imagining that my daughter was at the hospital. It was horrible, horrible. And I insisted that they do, they didn't want to do the, I'm in Miami, so they didn't want to do, it was Yom Kippur on a Friday and nobody wanted to do the, there was nobody to read the MRI and I was like, I'm sorry, I'm [00:29:00] not leaving this hospital. You can take me with a crane. That's where Cuban grandma came out. Okay. Cuban grandma came out and I'm like, you're not getting me out of this damn hospital until my child gets an MRI. You're not moving me from here. I am not leaving, on top of that she's Cuban and Jewish. So, no way is Cynthia Hudson leaving this hospital until my daughter gets an MRI.

And so, um, it was very funny because they did the MRI, it was the last MRI of the evening. And I was in the room with her, in the MRI space. And I could see that they were measuring something, and my heart sank, you know, I I'm a woman I've had mammograms. I knew they were measuring something. And that, of course the tech won't tell you anything and they're saying "No, no, you'll have to talk to the doctor." I said, you're seeing something right? And they wouldn't say anything, but I knew it. And so, I walked out and I was just heartbroken. And, um, we waited for the doctor [00:30:00] and they were reading it from afar. You know, now it's all sent by phones and it was sent to somebody's computer. And sure enough, I got a call and they said, look, there's something there. We're going to, we're going to admit her to the hospital. And so, it was agonizing because it took weeks and weeks of all kinds of measuring and probes. And it was awful, but fortunately it was not cancer and it was operable, but they did leave, at that time the laser surgery was not yet as advanced as it is now. And so, the decision was made to do a resection. And that in and of itself was, you know, traumatizing for a little girl and they decided they didn't want to affect her speech and the area of her, functional abilities and her cognitive. That's why they chose to do this, the surgery awake. So, it was a 12-hour procedure. In which they would wake her up and let her go back to sleep, wake her up and let her go back to sleep, to make sure that they [00:31:00] weren't cutting anything critical in her ability to comprehend or speak. And the piece that was left behind, which was a small tongue, you could see it in the MRI from this huge pickle that was in her head. And it grew because she was hitting adolescence. So, when her body started, the growth spurt hit, the tumor grew and that's what caused the seizure. But it was that tumor that was causing her to have the visual perceptual mix-ups that had been inhibiting her with math and reading.

Interestingly enough, it had affected her ability to play piano for example, her sisters could play piano, for her it was very difficult. Interestingly enough, as soon as we stopped. As soon as she had the surgery within one year, she became, I have three daughters, my best pianist, she's still today, she's the one that loves the piano and plays better than any of them. She immediately became my most voracious reader [00:32:00] and the best writer of mine, that's why she's going to go to law school. The other one's a dentist, the oldest one, the youngest one is still at Tulane. She's she wants to be an actress. And so interestingly enough, that it unlocked for her, things that had been difficult for her. So, getting rid of the tumor became really an opportunity for her to explore things that had been difficult for her as a child. But then what came with it was epilepsy, right. So, the surgery unleashed this horrible thing, which is grand mal seizures, and that was controlled with medicine for a while. And then it became uncontrollable, every six months she would get a seizure during college, at the gym, on a plane, and she was such an independent, you know, she said, "I'm going away to college. I'm going on an internship." She, and of course, you know, the typical, you know, I didn't want her to feel like she was different. So, I let her go. I let her go to Spain and live in a university hostel while she was doing an internship in Spain, dying every [00:33:00] day, thinking, Oh my God, I'm going to get a call. Finally, she had a really bad seizure in the parking lot, about to get in her car and she realized she was getting it cause an aura came on. And she had just turned on the car. She was about to start driving. And the reason she knew she was getting a seizure is that she would lose hearing and she started honking the horn and couldn't hear it. So, she turned off the car and was able to turn off the car and hang herself out of the car door and then she blacked out and had the seizure.

So, I got a call. It was the day of the Emmys, the daytime Emmys. I was in Los Angeles. We were nominated for Cafe CNN, which is a morning show that I created for CNN en Espanol. And I had arrived in LA. It was five o'clock in the afternoon Thursday night. The Emmys were Friday. That night, that morning, or that night at around midnight, I get a call. So, it was 5:00 AM, New Orleans time. She had [00:34:00] gone to the gym early in the morning and it was, the EMTs saying, is your daughter Laura Fernandez? I said, yes. And they said, well, we have her here. She's just had a grand mal seizure in the parking lot. We're taking her to the hospital. So, I got the first flight out to New Orleans. We did win the Emmy. I didn't pick up the Emmy, I wasn't there. I was in New Orleans at the hospital. But interestingly enough she was really in a dark place and she, she looked at me for the first time and said, you know, I've realized Mom, you know, I'm an adult, and I get to choose the life I want to live, and I don't want to live this life.

Michael: Yeah.

Cynthia: That was the first time I, I even realized that she was going into a dark place. And I said, well, what are you saying to me? This is not an option. Are you saying what I think you're saying to me? That's when Cuban Cynthia went into action again, and I said, we've got to find a solution. If medicine is not enough and therapy is not enough, we're going to have another surgery. [00:35:00] We'll do anything. I'm sorry.

Michael: You know, Cynthia, I can completely relate. Dave and I were just talking, I have a, a son with some severe medical needs as well, and I can completely relate to, to how you feel right now. Just recalling your child, being in that kind of position.

Cynthia: It's helpless.

Michael: Yeah, I completely understand and empathize.

Cynthia: We live to give them the best that we can.

Michael: Yeah yeah.

Dave: You want to, you want to trade? You want to trade spots with them, don't you?

Cynthia: Oh, I did. Let me, let me tell you. I wrote a piece for myself called Negotiations with God, because I negotiated with God every night at the hospital. And the first night I negotiated, and I said, you know God, this is when we didn't know what her tumor was. I said, give me, give me the cancer. I thought it was cancer. Right? We all thought it was brain cancer. I said, I don't need my breasts. I don't need my uterus. I'm not gonna have any more [00:36:00] babies. Give me whatever you want just leave my daughter alone. So, it was night number one. Night number two, it was, you know, I really don't need my arms. You want to take my arms, go ahead take my arms, my legs. By the end of the day, by the end of the process, I was like, I don't need to be here. I've had a great life. I've done everything I've wanted to do in my life. And I really believe that I, you know, at some point you kind of say, you know, give my daughter a life and, and you negotiate, and you can't do anything about it. I'm so sorry.

Dave: It's okay. I have a special needs son myself. So, the three of us are all, we're all part of the club that you didn't, you never asked to be in. Right. As they say,

Michael: I have, my son has congenital heart disease and, uh, we unexpectedly found out on December 16th that he had to have his third open-heart surgery, and I too look to spiritual comfort. And [00:37:00] I had been reflecting on the fact that we all hear about thoughts and prayers. We always hear that term thoughts and prayers. And, um, we hear it a lot from public figures. And I imagine Cynthia, in your business that you probably have recorded a number of politicians, for example, after a big gun incident and another senseless, um, shooting. People say, well, my thoughts and prayers are with the families of the victims, et cetera. And we hear that, and it can be a real turnoff to hear that because we all are looking for action. But at that time, what I realized was I needed thoughts and prayers. I need everyone's support because my son was now going to have this open-heart surgery. Every time you have an open-heart surgery, it's more and more dangerous. And I was, I felt the same thing you, you feel. And it was a horrific experience.

Cynthia: You know, and, and in my case, I admittedly tell people that I wish I were more faithful. [00:38:00] You know, I admire those who have deep faith because I think they have more comfort in their lives than those who do not have deep faith. I think those of us who, who hope and pray that there is something more, we suffer more because we, we tend to doubt and we, we wonder. And when you wonder you don't have the comfort and that sense of tranquility, that those who have deep faith do. And so, I always envy those people who can go and really believe that they are going to see someone in the future and that they are going to be reunited somehow, or that they're somehow going to be some kind of moment of reconciliation for things that they may have done or said. I wish I had that faith. So I always tell those who are faithful to please pray for me and to [00:39:00] pray for those who I love, because I hope that their faith will at least give comfort for me because and again, even in the darkest moments, as I say, I negotiate with God. I literally say things like, if you're there, if you're up there, if you exist, if there's some kind of otherness than, than what we experience in our daily lives, I really hope and again, I think maybe mine comes from the concept of, of wondering that if that were the case, if there were that reality and it weren't just nature because I sometimes, you know, in my mind, my spirituality comes from the concept that to me, God is nature. And God is really more about the circle of life and new beginnings in terms of, I think life and God, and being faithful as being a good human on earth when you're alive. Right. So, to me, I have a problem with people who profess faith and don't behave in a faithful manner. [00:40:00] I have a real problem with people who say that they're faithful and then do horrible things to their brethren. How can you say that you have any kind of humanity or any kind of care and you are capable of being cruel? And capable of doing horrible things to our earth, to, to the people around you? And have no, no consideration. So, to me that is, hypocrisy at its worst. I don't want somebody to forgive me later. I would much rather be an authentic person today and live by the rules that I consider to be, the basic rules of humanity, which I do believe come from our original Judeo-Christian traditional values. Do unto others. It starts with do unto others as you would have done unto you. And so, if you can start by that basic premise, you, then you live a life of [00:41:00] great spiritual wealth.

And to me, that's so much more valuable than other things. There comes a, a much, we could be here for a long time and a longer conversation, I do think it's important too, to feel that other people at least send you the good, the good karma and the good vibes and that they do have that good intentions because then comes the question are the good intentions enough? Cause it's good intentions followed by good actions. Because I think it's not just put your money where your mouth is. Right. Don't just say, you're that you care about someone, don't just say that you care for others, but do things about it. And it's not just money. A lot of people don't realize, and I'll give you an example of the things that I've done with my daughters. For me, it wasn't necessarily, I know many people and we live in a materialistic society where, you know, oh, I get the big check. It's not just about the big check.

It's about the action. [00:42:00] So don't just show your children to show up at the fashion show gala every year and wear their latest Gucci purse. And make sure you got the highlights this week. And, that's not, to me, the spirit of it, it's do the things that need to be done for the people that need things to be done for them.

Michael: Yeah.

Cynthia: So, for example, my youngest daughter, I sent her to the Dominican Republic. And I made her, uh, go on a charity called, Blue Mission. They literally dug trenches up in the mountains to get water to towns and villages that don't have water in the mountains in Dominican Republic and lived in these little huts that had mosquito tents. And she learned how important the value of fresh water is because those children were missing hours of school every day to help their families to go get fresh water down at the bottom of the mountain, [00:43:00] where, where the river was. And the joy of that village, when they actually got fresh water from the pipes that they were able to lay from the trenches that they built. My other daughter, I sent her to Guatemala, the Kidney Project. And she was able to help translate except that when she got there, they didn't realize that the people in those remote villages, many of them don't actually speak Spanish. They speak kachina. They are really truly native Americans. And so, she said, Mom, I was there to translate into Spanish because I've made sure that they're bilingual the girls and because their fathers is Cuban and I speak both languages. The girls were like, I had to show people how to explain things with drawings because they speak a native language, but she was helpful and, and the doctors were thrilled and she was able to, come back in a way that was motivated. So, each one of the girls has done something where have had to really see that, that they were [00:44:00] blessed. And I think that sometimes we don't, I've had Thanksgivings where the minute we finish eating, instead of storing away leftovers, that we're going to throw away in three days, we've literally taken all the food, gotten in the car and taken it to The Millis house.

I said, we're not going to sit here while everybody else is watching football. Your dad can go watch football. My ex-husband. We're going to get in the car and we're going to take all of this and we're going to take it to people who need the food. I think sometimes it's, it's not just saying and showing up with a check, it's really having that ability to take action and show that you're willing to do more than just give it lip service.

Michael: Yeah, I agree I also think about spirituality a little bit differently. I do believe in some form of God, um, because I choose to, and I gained comfort from believing that there is something greater than all of us.

Cynthia: You're one of my [00:45:00] prayer warriors.

Michael: Yeah. And I think a lot about, about the meaning of our lives and this sort of goes with the theme of this concept of searching for the extraordinary. And for me, the meaning of life is actually pretty simple. For me the meaning of life is that we are all here to be part of a great evolution towards something that will exist long after we're gone, something far greater and far more important than any of us individually, and the way we can best help that evolution is through helping others. It's just serving others. And I love what you're saying. Giving money is very important to important causes.

And yet it's also the actions that we take. I love that. I'm pleased to hear that your daughter is doing well. That's the most important thing. Thank you for acknowledging our connection, with your daughter. I'd like to make an observation [00:46:00] about your professional and I guess, personal life as well. And see how you react to it. So there are some people who are great planners and they plan from an early age as to how they're going to progress through life socially and professionally, personally. And then there were some people that I would say are sort of at the whim of life, things happen to them and they react. And to some extent they might not feel that they're in control of what's happening, but there are some other people, and this might be you, I'm just curious how you would respond to this, who don't necessarily have a grand plan for what the future is going to look like but are good listeners to the universe and are aware of what the world might be telling them. They see opportunities in a way that some others don't [00:47:00] see them. They see challenges in a way that might be an invitation to take certain courses of action or certain courses in our life. Do you think that describes maybe the way you've progressed through life as someone who's just been a good listener, not ever thought of yourself as at the whim of the universe, but rather was willing to go in a certain direction that the world was taking you in?

Cynthia: I think so, but I also think that, and again, I always go back to all these wonderful sayings. I think I'm going to write a book someday about all of the great sage wisdom I've received from so many brilliant women in my life.

Michael: I'm coming to that, by the way, I'm going to get to that in a minute, because I did some more reading on you and I'm going to get to that in a minute, but go ahead, continue your thought.

Cynthia: One day I, I remember my father actually saying that some people always say, get on the train because it's going to pass you [00:48:00] by. And he said, but the train doesn't pass people by. The train is always there. They just have to know when and how to open the door.

Michael: I love that.

Cynthia: And so, what I found in my life is that opportunity is always knocking. And you have to be willing to know if you're ready and willing to make that jump. So many times, I've had opportunities that have come my way and I wasn't ready or willing to make a certain change. In fact, I have been called at many times to do different things. I was called at one point to run a different network and I wasn't willing or ready to change or move to the location that they wanted me to move to. And I actually made the right decision for myself. But each circumstance has to be measured with your personal circumstance and also with the opportunity. And it's not just about money. And I remember the first time that I took the reporter job, my father said, take [00:49:00] the job the money will follow, because they were offering me terrible money. Spanish TV was not paying anything. And he said, take the job the money will follow, and he was right. Because I needed to prove myself, I was a nobody, I was a kid that had just graduated from college and I had graduated early because I CLEP'd out in those days, you could take all these exams and I was pretty smart. And so, I had CLEP'd out like a full year and a half of courses. And so, I'd graduated young. I was only 21 years old when I, when I graduated. I think sometimes you just have to be willing to listen to your instinct and also think about where things fit in with your life at that moment. And so, I think, yeah, you've probably described me pretty well,

Michael: Actually, I'm just reading one of the quotes that I wrote down that you had said, at some point recently where you said "Each day I thank the universe for being born at this moment in history when I have the opportunity to [00:50:00] knock on any door. And dream any dream in my work," and then you say, "It's not just about opportunity, being successful also requires determination, fearlessness, and grit, all of which I learned from the women in my family." And I think that fits with what you were just saying and now I'd like to just read one other quote about the women in your family and have you talk a little bit about that because you've made several references and clearly these were people that had great influence on you.

So, in a 2019 interview, you said “I come from a lineage of strong warrior women who have influenced me in my daughters. As a girl I would listen to my grandmother, TiTi, as we used to call her, and my mother, Ofelia, a professor of Spanish literature as they recounted the pivotal moments in which they found the courage to stand up for what they believed in and spoke out against injustice.” And I read about the story about your, I think it was your great grandmother and [00:51:00] Cuba. And dealing with Jews that were fleeing Germany and what happened there. And your grandmother met Dr. Martin Luther King. I want you to talk about all these things and, uh, because I think our listeners would, would be interested to hear some of these stories and how they had an impact on you and what you have become. So, the story about your great-grandmother, your grandmother, and it looks like your mother also, had a, a run in with segregationist New Orleans, and I read the story as well, about what happened to her on a bus.

Cynthia: On a trolley.

Michael: On a trolley okay. Sorry. Maybe talk about some of these things.

Cynthia: So I'll start with Cuba, 1939. So it was the year that the St. Louis, which was the ship that had been basically, boarded by a bunch of, of Jewish German families that had, decided to try to escape Germany and they, pulled together their resources and hired the [00:52:00] ship to try to go to originally the U S. And they were rejected as you know, the long story became the famous voyage of the damned they, um, they ended up getting to Cuba. When they arrived at the port in Havana, the authorities, they allowed a couple of people off the ship who had family members in Havana, but people were saying, you should let them off and we should allow these immigrants to get here, and we should give them the chance to get off. The U S had already rejected them. Ultimately, they were not allowed to come get off the ship and they were not allowed to get off on any port and they ended up being, going back to Europe and ultimately, perishing in the camps. It was a horrible story. It's a horrible moment of humanity rejecting immigrants and refugees who desperately needed to be taken in and we should all be embarrassed by that moment as human beings. But at that moment, my, my great-grandmother, who was the first [00:53:00] generation of her family of Sephardics, they were called secret Sephardics crypto Jews, who had been generations in Cuba hiding the fact that they were Jewish because their ancestors had left Spain during the inquisition. And a lot of people don't know this the most of the founding families of Latin America were originally, Sephardics who were given and granted the opportunity to become colonizers for the Spanish kingdom and the leading families of Latin America. To protect the kingdom because Spain realized after these back and forth trips that if they didn't create colonies, they were going to have to be fighting every time they arrived to steal the gold and the great riches from Latin America. So, they figured that the best way to do that was to work with the Sephardics and say, look, if you guys will eventually convert to Catholicism we'll give you land, we'll make you the protectors of our kingdom, but you've got to change your religion. So anyway, her family [00:54:00] had not converted until, um, most of them actually did not convert. In fact, she had never become a Catholic. And in fact, my grandmother had never been baptized and had never, had a communion or anything until she married my grandfather. And she did that in order to marry my grandfather. My family had all gone to secular schools, even though they were private schools and so my great-grandmother, uh, was very upset about what was going on and she was going to protest, and my grandmother accompanied her, and it was very frowned upon because they were society ladies. And she said, I don't care. I'm going, this is horrible. And they went to the port and they stood with all of the protesters to protest that these people were being sent back and not allowed to get off of the ship.

She told us “we had meat this week” because we would eat chicken and eggs and you know, other things, we really didn't have a lot of money. We were living off the commissary and, kind of spreading this among all these children that needed formula and baby food. And, you know, the money was tight. My father was in Vietnam and we were living off of the small stipend that families get. And then those days it was tight. And I think that they were sending money still at that time to Cuba. So, so my grandmother would tell us “we ate meat this week, thanks to Dr. Martin Luther King.”

I was told every day and when he died, you know, she said, “this is an injustice because this was a kind man who never questioned my race. Why should anybody have killed someone for their race?” And I heard this my whole life and then my mother prior to the coming to the US the way she met my father was that during the 1950s, in 1958, she was a [00:58:00] visiting foreign student at Tulane university. She was obviously from a well-to-do wealthy family and had, was a visiting foreign student at Tulane at the time it was a Sophie Newcomb college for women. Tulane wasn’t a women’s and men’s college. And my father and mother dated there, but before she met my dad, she was invited on a date by another, American young man. And they went on the trolley. And she, boarded the trolley and it was raining. It rains a lot in New Orleans, just like Miami. And she was very upset when an elderly African-American lady got onto the trolley and the trolley was full and the driver of the trolley said, you have to go to the back. And there were no seats and my mother saw that she was carrying some bags and was standing in the trolley and it was rickety. And she said, no, no, no, please give her your seat. Cuba had racism, but not like that. There was no, there was no [00:59:00] issue of using bathrooms or being the restaurant, or they had other types of veiled racism, but not that kind of segregation where you couldn’t use bathrooms or be in a bus or in a trolley or in a restaurant, and so she was shocked. She was not used to that. And so she said, what do you mean you’re not going to get up? This is an elderly woman you must let her sit in your seats. And so, she couldn’t believe that nobody was standing for this elderly woman. It had nothing to do with her skin. It was, this is an elderly woman. If there’s a lady on the train and you’re a man, you get up and you give her your seat. And so, nobody would stand, and my mother got up and said, ma’am please take my seat. And they all, literally the driver of the trolley stopped, and they all looked at her and he said, you can’t do that. And she said, what do you mean I can’t do this? This is an elderly person. You do not let an elderly woman stand in a trolley. She has to have a seat. How dare none of you stand up. What is this? We don’t do this in my country. And [01:00:00] the trolley driver made my mother get out of the trolley and my mother started yelling at everybody in the trolley and said, this is inhumane. This is horrible what you’re doing. I can’t believe, in my country we don’t do this. You should be embarrassed to make anyone stand in a trolley. It doesn’t matter what color they are. And so, I heard that story my whole life. So, you know, I was very fortunate to have women that were had a voice.

Michael: Yeah, I understand what you mean when you say warrior women.

Cynthia: That’s right and I’ve told them I’ve repeated the stories, they heard it from them as well, to my daughters. And my daughters have marched in their respective cities for various causes and I’ve always encouraged that they have their voice. I’ve always told them that injustice is injustice. And if you’re silent, you’re complicit.

Michael: Yeah and you actually have a nice quote about your daughters as well you say” I’m proud when they tell me that thanks to me, they will follow in the [01:01:00] footsteps of strong women that came before them. I cannot help, but smile because love is also learned.”

Cynthia: It’s true, and I, and I think you learn to love others when you stand in their footsteps and you understand their pain.

Michael: So Cynthia, you do have a, I have to use the word, extraordinary story. I could talk to you all day, but what I like to do with our guests is what we call our teaching moment, and this podcast is all about learning from people like you and understanding the things that have made you extraordinary. And you’ve told us a lot of that history, and I think we’re getting a good sense for that, but I do have three questions for you and here’s question number one. What single habit technique, tip, whatever you want to call it, would you offer that has helped you be your most extraordinary self?

Cynthia: I would say that I do try every single day [01:02:00] to practice gratitude. I think that’s a really important thing.

What I mean by gratitude is I think it's important to thank people when people have been kind and gracious and done something for you, and sometimes we're in such a rush, we forget to say, thank you. And we forget to say it in a meaningful way. So, I still am that person that sends thank you notes.

And sometimes in today's world, I don't necessarily expect them to be handwritten as often as they were before the snail mail has become complex, but I do think it's important to send a note and I think it's important to be authentic and to say how you feel and be real about the message. It can't just be something generic. I think it's important to really put your voice into telling somebody. Thank you. So that's one of the things that I would say is really important.,

Michael: Yeah, well you and I are very much aligned on [01:03:00] that point. Question number two. Do you have a personal mission?

Cynthia: I do. So, in my moment of rebirth, I read a wonderful book by a Harvard professor called *The Swerve: How the world became modern* by Stephen Greenblatt, and that book, which won the Pulitzer prize for nonfiction and the National book award, is the story of how a monk in the middle ages discovered a seminal work by one of the great Roman poets and he translated it and it became one of the most widely read epic pieces of the Renaissance. And it describes the pursuit of happiness. And it is the work that influenced John Adams, [01:04:00] Thomas Jefferson, all of the masons that were the founding fathers of the United States. And in fact, they quote those words from that poem in their letters, upon their deathbeds, both Jefferson and Adams. It became my mantra, and I realized that life had to be about the pursuit of happiness. There is no end game. We already know what the end is. So that means that we have to be able to live each day with the concept of at least finding happiness. And so happiness has to be the satisfaction of feeling peace. And so I look for having inner peace and happiness every single day.

Michael: Great answer. That was well done just for, for our listeners. Cynthia does not have these questions in advance.

Cynthia: No, I don't.

Michael: All right. Here's your last question? What's the best [01:05:00] advice you've ever given to someone else?

Cynthia: The best advice I've given someone is not to be afraid of being who they are. I think a lot of times we are afraid of showing our emotions, showing our personality. Sometimes people will say, Oh, she thinks she's smart or she's too smart. Sometimes people get intimidated by a person who has intellectual depth, and that intimidates people. And so, I realized that I couldn't change that and I, and I don't want to dumb down for anyone. Why should I? So, I think that that is actually something that a lot of women do. I think some people don't have the intellectual depth and capacity and that's fine, and I would challenge them to read a book, and learn more and open up their minds and give themselves the opportunity to, to become bigger and brighter. God gave us this [01:06:00] wonderful thing called a brain to be able to explore so many things that go beyond what we just see on a TV set or on a screen. What a great thing the podcasts have been to open up people's minds in a way that, you know, they didn't perhaps have before. But I think, you know, being your authentic self is so important. And I think for many years when I was younger, I sometimes was afraid of sharing some of the things that I knew, because I was afraid that somebody might be intimidated by that. And now as I've gotten older, I don't care. So now if you can't hang with it, then it's okay.

Michael: What a great, thoughtful, open, interesting and sharing interview Cynthia, thank you so much. Ladies and gentlemen, that is the extraordinary Cynthia Hudson. And thank you to our sponsor, The Colony Group. The Colony Group is a national wealth and business management company with 15 [01:07:00] offices across the country.

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