

Dann Cuellar

Since joining the Action News team in 1988, Dann Cuellar has covered some of the most significant events of our time, both locally and nationally. Most notably, he has reported on the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, both in 1993 and 2001, as well as the massacre at Columbine High School and the bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City. He has traveled to the Persian Gulf during the conflict of 1991, and most recently, he brought Action News on location to the war in Iraq.



A job like this is not for the faint of heart or the physically unfit. Here, Cuellar tells us what it's like to keep up with a job that many people consider "glamorous." He also describes how the considerable challenges and conflicts of a reporter's high-pressure job impact health and nutrition.

You often brave fierce storms (like the recent one at the Jersey shore) in order to bring the story to the people of the Delaware Valley. I would imagine that you need to be very fit to battle those winds and sea gusts!

Yes, there have been times where if I hadn't been working out in some fashion, I would not have been able to hold my own against hurricane-force winds, not to mention rain coming so hard at you. It feels like needles piercing your body.

How important is exercise in a career like yours?

Very important. The combination of stress and always eating on the run can really work against you. That's why I pack my own lunch to insure that I am eating the right things when there's little if any time to be looking for a healthy meal somewhere. It just isn't practical in a job where you're constantly on the phone. You have to continually manage the story you are currently working on, but also develop stories for the future.

How do you manage to balance your fitness routine with such a demanding schedule?

It is a challenge. But, like some people don't feel right without their cup of coffee in the morning, I don't feel right when I don't get a workout somewhere in the day. Sometimes I have to abbreviate my workouts, but the point is to do something on a daily basis and be creative. If I am going to be on the phone awhile with a news source, I'll pace the room or climb up and down stairs or something rather than just sit in a chair. When I am out of town on assignment, you might find me doing sit-ups in my hotel room. While on assignment in Doha, Qatar before the war in Iraq, I went jogging in the desert, not just for the exercise but also to relieve the tension that can build up on that kind of assignment.

With such a time-consuming career, what steps do you take to assure that you eat right and that your body is receiving the right nutrition?

It helps that my girlfriend, Elaine, is a nutritionist and highly skilled chef. She is always on my case about eating the right things. In many ways, she has been an inspiration. Most importantly she has taught me not just to gulp down my food in the rush of time, but to enjoy it like you would a piece of art. In that light, you become very picky about what you put in your body.

What are your favorite ways to stay in shape?

I have a number of ways that I vary depending on the weather, time of year and circumstances. More often than not, I start out by doing about 15 minutes on a moderate speed on the treadmill for aerobics. Then I move on to an ab workout and then a combination of Nautilus and free weights. Other times, I start out with



a 45-minute cycling/spinning class and then I move on to the weights. From time to time, I like to jog down some of the tree-lined quiet streets in my neighborhood, which also have some pretty good rolling hills. I usually hit the gym an average of about five or six times a week.

You have an avid interest in sailing. Is that a good way to stay fit? How specifically?

Yes it is. Every time you do a tack (sail from port side to

starboard and vice versa), there are many lines to tug. Depending on how strong the winds are that day, it can be a pretty good workout. Ever try lifting an anchor out of the mud in the Chesapeake? That can be a good little workout as well. Trimming the jib and the mainsail can also put a strain on your body, so you better be doing something other than lifting beer cans before you go out on a sailboat.

Are there any types of exercise that you absolutely dread?

I absolutely dread dead lifts and good-morning's (a stiff leg version of dead lifts). It's like the position the Japanese use to greet people in the morning. They are brutal, but I do know that if done properly and if you have a strong back, they can be very beneficial.

You've covered important stories for Action News all over the world. Do you have any recommendations on exercise and nutrition while traveling?

Pack along some good protein bars and/or powder and any other nutritional supplements that you use, because chances are they might not be available or you may not have the time to go out and get them.

Are you ever tempted by an overwhelming feeling to just "bag" the workout and instead have a lazy day?

Yes. And sometimes I take that lazy day because there's more to life than working out all the time. Occasionally, I bag the workout in favor of a picnic with Elaine, especially in the spring and fall.

What does it feel like to be approached in the street by viewers and to be considered so familiar to so many?

It is an honor and privilege for me to be recognized and I am sometimes overwhelmed with just how people see us. I get embarrassed by the fuss some people make when they realize who

I am, because after all, I am just a man lucky enough to have a job at Action News, sharing with people the events of our times.

What advice do you have for young people who may want to follow a career path similar to yours?

Don't ever let anyone tell you that you're not cut out for it. The more someone tells you that it can't be done, the more you should use that as a catalyst to prove them wrong. That's what I did.

If you weren't doing what you are doing now, what would you be doing instead (career-wise)?

I'd like to be a doctor and be able to save somebody's life, or a criminal investigator solving horrendous crimes that have gone unsolved, bringing justice to the innocent. I could also be a singer. After all, it was music that got me here in the first place. As for the music aspect, I got into the business originally because I loved music so much. I wanted to share it with others by being a DJ. So I worked in radio for a while as a DJ, then one day I got a call from the manager of a TV station in Victoria--the office was the transmitter site in the middle of a corn field--and he said, 'Hey listen, I think I have a job you could do.' The rest is history.

Sidebar

Birthplace: Beeville, Texas

Favorite healthy food: One of Elaine's delicious meals with a symphony of flavors.

Favorite "guilty pleasure" food: German Chocolate cake

Favorite form of relaxation: Going on a picnic with Elaine in the spring or fall, or sitting by a cozy fire.

Favorite season: spring and fall (hard to choose between the two)

Favorite TV show: Boston Legal

Favorite type of music: I enjoy all types; classical, rock, jazz, new age, R&B, Latin, and some rap.

Any pets? What type? What are their names? One rottweiler, Grizzly, and one English bulldog, Pumbah

Horoscope sign: Aries

Words of wisdom or motto that you live by: Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Do not believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumored by many. Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it (Hindu Prince Gautama Siddharta, the founder of Buddhism, 563-483 B.C.).