

BASILICA

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VOICES FROM THE CITIES

Rick Kupchella

Reporter and TV News Anchor



RICK KUPCHELLA, born in Pennsylvania and raised in Kentucky, and his wife, Leslie, moved to Minneapolis in 1989 when he joined KARE 11 News as an on-air reporter. Kupchella is currently the weekend anchor for the station, but continues to file stories as a reporter — a mix he says that keeps the job interesting. Early on in his career, Kupchella received internships and fellowships at the Voice of America (VOA), White House press corps, AP Radio and CBS Evening News. He became an anchor and reporter in local news in Kentucky and Michigan and traveled extensively as a reporter throughout Asia and North, Central, and South America.

When and why did you join the Basilica

It started as a function of need. The day after I moved here, my sister wanted me to be the godfather of her new baby and I needed a letter from a church saying I was eligible. We lived downtown at the time and the Basilica was the closest church — and the most breathtaking. It seemed like such a different place then, far fewer parishioners, but we became members and have watched it grow. Though we have since moved out of the city, both my daughters were baptized here and my oldest recently took her first communion here.

What drew you to journalism

I've been in journalism since I was a kid. I started with a five-state NPR affiliate in Kentucky as a junior in high school. I find anchoring most interesting when everything explodes in the newsroom, but reporting is always exciting. For example, I've been up since 4 A.M. this morning working on a two-part report about potential causes for the warmer Minnesota winters. My wife came in

By **Molly Kelash**

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to my home-office at 6:30 A.M. and said, “How many days have you been sitting here?”

Journalists are expected to be objective observers of society and to make judgments about the newsworthiness of events. With that in mind, what role do you think your faith or spirituality plays in the integrity of your work, if at all?

As far as my belief system goes, I don't think there is any one way to worship — I believe people of all different religions have a relationship with God. My own faith/core/religion has never taken the form of “believe as I believe,” so I've never allowed that kind of bias into my work. There are some interesting parallels between the tenets of journalism and Catholicism, however: giving voice to voiceless, and having respect for other people and their gifts. Those are a huge part of what journalism is supposed to be about.

You are the author of two children's books, with a third in the works. What inspired you to write books for children? Does your faith play any role in the topics you choose? Why did you focus on empowering young girls in “Girls Can!”?

I always thought I'd write a book, but not necessarily for children. The idea for my first, “Tell Me What We Did Today,” came from the bedtime routine with my girls. After I'd read to them, my daughter Caroline would demand, “Tell me what we did today.” I decided I wanted them to participate, which this book gets kids to do. It's a way of reinforcing in children that their lives, even the minor details, matter. It's one thing to do the news and deliver messages about the events of the day to adults, but it's entirely different to deliver them in the form of a book to be shared between parents and children. In a promotion for the book I explained it as an almost spiritual experience. A priest friend of mine called me after he saw the quote and said I could drop the qualifier,

because it is a spiritual experience. He's absolutely right.

My second book, “Girls Can!,” also came from life with my girls. One night I was talking to my daughter Elizabeth, four then, about all the things she might grow up to be. We got to governor and senator. She said, “Daaad, those are for boys!” The book started out as generic inspirational verse to show girls they can accomplish anything they envision, but I had a post-contractual brainstorm (my publisher nearly had a heart attack). Within weeks I had agreements from Sandra Day O'Connor, Jackie Joiner Kersee and Sally Ride to do the book with me. Now it tells their stories in verse. My third book is for boys — Scott Hamilton and BB King have agreed to participate and I am working on finding a third subject.

You will have completed a volunteer trip to Peru by the time this interview is published. Tell me about that trip and about your and your family's passion for travel.

I'll be in Lima on a mission with a group called Smile Network International — they provide free cleft palate surgeries in poverty-stricken parts of the world. I've helped out in small ways in the past, but this year I'm going to be a gofer for the doctors and do whatever I can. I'm also going to make a promotional video for them while I'm there.

A few years ago, I learned about another mission through my work in television, run by the New Ulm Diocese in a very poor town in Guatemala. These people have *nothing*, yet what struck me more than the magnitude of their poverty was their mood, their brightness, their beaming smiles — they live in terrible conditions, but you'd never know it. I want to continue to raise awareness about them and I want my children to be involved. I don't consider it charity — it's just pulling my weight.

Travel in general? I think travel is *it*. It's what life is about, a way to experience more completely what we're a part of. As a kid my

travel experience was limited to living in a few states and it wasn't until college that I started exploring the world. By taking my kids on international trips, I hope to give them perspective. So many people in this country don't realize that they're born on third base — you might be born poor here but the opportunity to change your life and get out of it is staggering. The only way to really get that is to travel. ✦

Molly Kelash is a communications consultant and former broadcast journalist, and the new co-editor of the Basilica magazine. She is constantly amazed by the small-world connections she has made in the Basilica community, not the least of which was made during this interview. Not only did she discover that Kupchella worked at VOA six years before she did, but that he counts her father, a former VOA news chief, among his most influential early mentors