

With John in the Park

Andrea Riccio (August 30, 2009)



Did you know that John Schiumo, the host of "The Call", is Italian/American? We have met him and had an informal chat about his roots and his profession

Friendly as always, [John Schiumo](#) [2], the host of "[The Call](#) [3]", the most famous evening show on [New York 1](#) [4], has suggested to me a very informal location for this interview: Union Square Garden. So, why not?

We are seated around a small table, as two old friends having a chat about their daily lives. John is a very communicative guy; he's able to speak with all sort of people and to make them feel comfortable, as his work on TV attests. "The Call", in fact, is an informative show that lets the audience choose its own "agenda" about current affairs and city life, and, then talk about the



“selected” topic through live phone calls.

It has been a very interesting conversation: John is a pro in his field, he has strong values, and a lot of humanity. We have spoke of a multiplicity of topics, from his italian roots to his job as an university professor at [CUNY](#) [5], passing through his family life and his childhood. But now it's time to discover what we asked him exactly...

How connected do you feel to your Italian origin?

I feel really connected. My father was born on the corner of Mott Street and Grand Street, in the heart of Little Italy. Both of his parents couldn't speak English, but they forced their nine kids to learn it so that they could feel American. My father's side is from Matera, while my mother's side is from Vasto. She grew up in South Philadelphia, in the Italian neighborhood and her parents were both Italian, but they were able to speak English. As a result, we have a lot of Italian traditions in our family and “family first” is the rule among us.

As an Italian/American, and as a journalist as well, what do you know about Italian journalism?

My introduction to italian journalism is from a dear friend of mine, Federica Cellini, who works for RAI. She told me all the good and bad aspects about Italian journalism. In particular, she told me that there are some problems with the Italian media: about how they run and how they are organized. But, you know, we have enough problems here in the States with our journalism. This is one of the reasons I'm teaching at CUNY Graduate School of Journalism. I am trying to instill what is right in the students of today.

And what about Italian TV?

I have been to Italy five times, on vacation or for work, and I have never put the t.v. on. Not once. I think that television is a poor way to learn about a culture. People can tell you so much more than television stations, because their version of what is happening is not necessarily the version of what is happening. I see this in the US and especially overseas.

Your show, The Call, is based on the public's contribution. So, do you believe in citizen journalism?

How can audiences help journalists with their work?

Yes I do. People can have good intuitions, so why not ask them, and then rely only on yourself to determine what is important? It has never been easier than now to be in contact with people, thanks to the internet and social networking. Think of all the changes that have happened in the last decade as far as reaching your audience. So, if your audience can help you in telling what's news, why not listen to them? I think giving editorial control to the viewers is risky and potentially dangerous for many reasons, but, in the end, it is like the “rule of the curve”: you can find fringes, or extremes; but in the middle, you will always find the average people and their thoughts.

Why did you decide to become a journalist?

My first introduction was when I was young: my father sold insurance and one of his clients was [Charles Kuralt](#) [6]. I can remember his stories on CBS Sunday morning news. They were simple stories about regular Americans and they were very well done.

Now I think that that was journalism done in the right way, based on daily life, on events that affected a lot of people. So, as a kid, I was 7 years old, and walked around the house holding everything that looked like a microphone and I wanted to report, mimicking Charles Kuralt. Moreover, my mom was, and still is, a professional actress. So, if you mix my mom's desire to be in front of people and tell stories with my dad's very practical approach to life, and his connection with Charles Kuralt, you can easily imagine how I become a journalist.

9/11 John Schiumo's reporting for New York 1. He told us that after that tragic event he won't be able to be a "traditional" reporter anymore

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[5] <http://www.journalism.cuny.edu>

[6] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Kuralt