



Ayah Galal '17

Breaking news, opening doors

INTERVIEW BY BRIAN KOONZ

After working as a producer at WTNH-News 8 in New Haven upon graduation, Ayah Galal began a new job at WFSB-Channel 3 in Hartford last December as the station's first reporter/producer. She also is believed to be the first Connecticut reporter to wear a hijab—a Muslim head covering—on air. Galal grew up in Prospect, Connecticut, not too far from Hamden. Her father is a doctor and her mother is a teacher. After reading the morning news in high school, Galal found her calling at a microphone.

How did you choose your career?

I thought I wanted to follow in my dad's footsteps and be a doctor. But then I took AP calculus and AP biology, and I was miserable. My parents said, 'Do something that makes you happy.' I remember coming to Quinnipiac's Admitted Student Day, and all of the clubs had tables set up. I went over to the Q30 table and met the general manager at the time, Jon Alba '15. We're still friends. He talked about Q30 and student media. I loved politics too, so freshman year I decided to double major in journalism and political science.

What is your schedule like at Channel 3?

When I walk into the newsroom, I usually have no idea what I'm going to cover or where I'm going to be. I don't know if I'm going to be producing my whole

shift. I don't know if I'm going to be reporting my whole shift. Many times, I do both. A while ago, I did a story about goats eating Christmas trees to recycle them. That's definitely one of my favorite stories because it was so unusual. Of course, I also get to report more serious stories—breaking news, politics, things like that.

What's it like on location?

Being a multimedia journalist is not easy—shooting your own stories, editing everything on your own, carrying all that equipment, lugging it all around. But in this day and age, it's good to know how to do it. I would say for 95 percent of my stories, I shoot my own standups. I hit the record button, flip the camera around, and record myself. Sometimes, I look like a crazy person talking to myself on camera!

How do you prep before going on camera?

TV isn't as glamorous as a lot of people think. Some people ask me, 'Do you get your makeup done?' Do people choose your outfits?' Oh no, I do it all myself.

Why is it important to you to wear your hijab?

Not only is it a form of worship, but it also protects women from being objectified. While some view it as oppressive, for me it's not only empowering, but also a big part of my identity. I think that it's great when people are curious and they ask me about it. Most people are very supportive. Unfortunately, there have been a few times when I've gotten hateful messages or emails.

Do you see yourself as a role model?

For a while, I didn't know if I would ever be a reporter wearing a hijab on air. It was this battle in my head. Now that I'm in this job, I hope children see they never have to doubt themselves or doubt their ability.

What is your job like as a producer?

The producer is the individual in charge of putting together the newscast—everything from selecting the stories that go into the show to writing the stories, creating the graphics and timing the show out. They time the show out in the control room and communicate with the anchors, meteorologists and reporters in the field. We're the ones giving them time cues and letting them know about any last-minute changes.

How did student media prepare you?

I wouldn't be where I am without what I did with Q30 and my classwork. Q30 helped me a lot, just in terms of giving me that hands-on TV experience. We dedicated a lot of time every week to a newscast. We always had meetings, and we did a lot of work. We would write stories. We would go out and cover stories on campus. We would build the rundown. All of that was excellent experience.

Whose broadcast work do you admire the most?

I really admire ["CBS This Morning" co-host and Channel 3 alumna] Gayle King. If you watched her demeanor during her interview with R. Kelly, she's always so composed and prepared. I'm also a big fan of ["NBC Nightly News" anchor] Lester Holt. He has such a great broadcast voice. And CBS's Steve Hartman, too. He's such a good writer. His stories give you goosebumps.

What are your long-term goals as a journalist?

I'm so happy to be reporting in my home state where I grew up. But I think one day, I would definitely like to work at the network level, whether it's covering politics in Washington, D.C., or working in New York City. Right now, I just have to keep learning and keep working hard.