

As managing editor of CNN's Middle East hub, Becky Anderson is at the heart of breaking news – and she wouldn't want to be anywhere else

Photography ALEXANDER WOLFE  
Words CHRISTINE VAN DEEMTER



# In her PRIME

It's a special sight to witness a woman in her prime – focused, astute, perceptive, empathetic. She moves with clear intention, speaks with confidence, weighs things carefully. She commands attention, while giving it generously.

Becky Anderson is absolutely a woman in her prime.

As the person in charge of CNN's Middle Eastern hub, based in Abu Dhabi, she has quite a bit on her plate. Her average day – as average as it can be for someone who travels roughly 200 days a year, sometimes at the drop of a hat – starts at 8am with a bout of exercise. She then heads to the office to prepare for her daily prime-time current affairs show, *Connect*

*the World with Becky Anderson*, which is broadcast live from the studios in Abu Dhabi every weeknight at 7pm. Her day is a whirlwind of editorial meetings with her team in Abu Dhabi, as well as the other main CNN hubs in London and Atlanta. She has to track where the big stories are, where their correspondents are, and how they want to cover both breaking and deeper reports. Of course, given the immediate nature of news, even the best-laid plans often go out the window, with Anderson and her cameraman and producer regularly jumping on a plane overnight to Riyadh, Istanbul, or Beirut to cover stories.

Toned and lean – the result of that 90 minutes of tennis each morning – Anderson has a commanding voice and open

demeanor. It's easy to see why world leaders, superstars, and normal people alike open up to her. It helps that she approaches every interview and story with impeccable research in hand and a genuine interest people. "I want to learn who it is I'm speaking to," she says. "You can report on a story or you can reveal the truth and the characters behind a story. Humanizing people in TV interviews is massively important." Think of some of the biggest news stories of the past decade. Chances are Anderson was right on the front lines. From the Arab Spring and conflicts in Chechnya and Lebanon, to the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan and the birth of Prince George of Cambridge in 2013, her unflappable presence and clear analysis guide the viewer through the often murky waters that is news in the 21st century. "A good news show is like a good dinner party," is how she loves

Liverpool, his current home town, getting to know the man inside the myth. "We were driving around the city and every time we'd stop at a traffic light, people would knock on the window. It was a rental car and we couldn't figure out how to open the windows! It was amazing to be with him and realize what celebrity really is. Yet he's so humble, focused and brilliant. I always go into an interview hoping I can reveal to the viewer who this person really is." Of course, there are times when the stories and people she covers are immensely difficult, especially when it involves crises or conflict. But, paradoxically, these are often the best stories, because it reveals the humanity behind the sound bites. She tells the story of a visit to Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan with Prince Ali bin Hussein: "There were kids who were born there; the refugee camp was all they've ever known. The prince had funded a football

“You can REPORT on a story or you can *reveal the truth* and the characters *behind a story*. HUMANIZING people is important”



explaining it. "You might start out talking about the news of the region but then you move on to art, culture, music, events."

She moved to Abu Dhabi almost five years ago to run one of CNN's four global hubs – and, arguably, the most volatile and interesting one. Her path to the capital started by cutting her teeth in business journalism, joining CNN in 1999. Along the way she's sat down with former UN Secretary-Generals Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-moon, Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Beyoncé, Brad Pitt, and Jennifer Lopez (who she describes as "absolutely fantastic"). A recent favorite interview was with Egyptian superstar footballer Mo Salah – but instead of a static sit-down interview about how he's helping to knock back misperceptions about Muslims, Anderson took him on a tour of

pitch and these kids were absolutely focused on their game. You see the impact of conflict on their faces, but you also see the hope. This region has its fair share of issues but it also has its fair share of exciting opportunities so to be here now, to witness the evolution of a new era for the Middle East, is amazing."

She's optimistic about the region and the UAE's role in particular. "For me, it's important that the world learns about this region in its entirety. There are so many facets to the Middle East which are just absolutely vibrant. I've never enjoyed my job more." □

BECKY ANDERSON ON LOCATION IN JORDAN, 2016



STYLE MOHAMMAD HAZEM REZO HAIR AND MAKEUP HANNA USA PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANT KATHLEEN HOARE