

SHE'S **TIMBERLY WHITFIELD**
Journalist and Woman of the World



When Timberly Whitfield was a little girl, she would come home to Arkansas for Christmas and her grandmother would clutch her chest and cry, "Oh my god, what happened to her?"

What happened to Timberly was Africa. After moving to the continent with her missionary parents at the age of 6 and being exposed to children and lifestyles from all over the world, she would return down home to the rural South and say things like, "May I have a ba-nah-nah?" in a crisp British accent.

It was too much for her grandmother. "She'd say, 'Oh my poor baby,'" Timberly remembered with a chuckle. But while her grandmother may have wondered what had gotten into the child, the

broadcast journalist and host of the former "New Morning" show on the Hallmark Channel ("New Morning" had its last broadcast in December 2007) believes it is her unorthodox background—which includes degrees in religion and journalism and visits to 25 countries—that helped make her a success today. In fact, when young people ask what it takes to become a successful journalist, she gives anything but traditional advice.

"I hate to see people who are 25 and say, 'I can't do something because I didn't go to this school,'" said Timberly, who lives in Riverdale, New York, with her husband, former NYPD Lt. Robert Allen, and their 5-year-old daughter Raina. "You don't have to have two years of this and four years of that. I didn't do that."

Timberly's show, "New Morning," was designed to give viewers an alternative to the harsh and often depressing news on network television revolving around the war in Iraq or the struggling economy. The idea behind the hour-long show was to feature "extraordinary people doing extraordinary things," she said.

Now, Timberly is hosting a page-themed "New Morning" on the website faithstreams.com, which will continue her video reflections as well as clips from episodes of the show. She also plans to spend 2008 pursuing an acting career that already has placed her in off-off-Broadway plays and she's developing programs through the production company she runs with her husband.

Back in her childhood: It may have seemed to some people that Timberly was destined to live such an eclectic life. Her parents were active in the civil rights movement and they were Black Panthers, the kind who served food in soup kitchens, Timberly pointed out with a smile. They decided to go full steam ahead with their racial pride and go to Africa. As missionaries for the United Methodist Church, they first moved to rural Makumira,

Tanzania. Her dad taught people better agricultural techniques and her mother taught a variety of subjects, including nutrition and sewing. Timberly remembers the other children calling her a "wazungu," which means White person.

"Even though we were Black, they still saw us as Westfeners, as Americans, as outsiders," she remembered. "We said, 'Wait a minute, we're not wazungu. We're one of you.' I think it was even harder for my parents because they were involved in civil rights and they were like, 'We're one of you.'"

But as time went on, Timberly came to appreciate her experience, which she described as "magical." She could see the snow-capped

Photos by Keith Major

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peak of Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain, from her bedroom window. Sometimes an elephant or giraffe would pass by her home. And she remembers going to school by herself at a young age, carrying her book bag a mile to a bus stop, getting on a van packed with people and animals and being hoisted onto one of the ladies' laps.

"I kind of knew when it was happening that it was special," she said. "I kind of knew to be in the moment, in the present, to enjoy living there." Timberly believes that the most important lesson she learned during those years in Africa was an appreciation for the earth. She remembers eating food from the family's garden or farm, using the same water for several loads of laundry in a wringer washing machine and a regimen of wasting nothing.

"We naturally lived an environmentally-conscious lifestyle because of where we were," she said. "We would filter rainwater coming off our roof, catch it in a container and filter it. We would take baths with only two pitchers of water and get clean. Nothing gets thrown away there. You wouldn't dare throw away a box. If something came to you in a box, it would get utilized for something."

When Timberly turned 14, her family moved to Bambar, Nigeria, and she went to boarding school in Jos, one of that country's larger cities. There, she met young people from all over Africa and the world. They were the children of government employees, doctors, expatriates and others. It was there that her love of journalism took off. She



Timberly on the set

not necessarily religious. She is raising her daughter in the Jewish faith, to which her husband belongs.

Timberly said she is an example of why you don't always have to follow the rules. When she started her career, everyone told her she would need to start at a small station. But she simply decided she was going to start in New York and it

wrote for the school newspaper, *The Gist*, and found that she loved delving into research for her academic papers.

"For some bizarre reason, I would pick all these really heavy, serious subjects—papers on Haitian boat people, on the American infrastructure crumbling," she said.

After she graduated from high school, she returned to the States to study at Clark College, now Clark Atlanta University, where she majored in journalism and religion.

Timberly said that her interest in religion started with her parents and grew from there. "The other part of it is having been around so many people of different faiths—Muslims and Jewish people and Christians; they were my roommates," she recalled. "I would visit them and I would go to the temples and synagogues. I would visit everybody. I was curious about people's beliefs."

After college, she applied to the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and Union Theological Seminary, both in New York. She was accepted at both but decided to go with Columbia.

Where her faith is concerned today, Timberly considers herself spiritual but

happened. She landed a job as a reporter for a cable news program.

"If it's something you really want to do and (are) really passionate about, just go for it," she said. "I think sometimes you just have to say, 'I'm not going to go with the flow.'"

In fact, networking and "not being shy" are probably the most important factors in your career, she said.

With all she has seen in her life and now embarking on a new chapter in her career, Timberly believes that what has kept her grounded is her experience in Africa. Young people in America have a lot—more than they know, she pointed out. She believes all of them should have the experience of visiting a developing country.

In one recent episode of "New Morning," two young people talked of having their lives changed after visiting Uganda. "The girl was saying it was hard for her to get her usual 'grande' or 'vente' sized specialty coffee in the mornings because she realized that the \$5 for that coffee could feed a child she had visited for a week," said Timberly. "We don't think about how much we have here." **S**