



ROAD SCHOLAR

BY GREG ARCHER

ANDERSON COOPER OPENS UP ABOUT HIS MANY TRAVELS
AND HOW EVERYDAY HEROES CONTINUE TO FUEL HIS PASSION
TO CAPTURE THE HUMAN SPIRIT

RECENTLY, ANDERSON COOPER HAS REAL-LIFE HEROES ON HIS MIND. You see, he can't quite get the people of Haiti out of his head. He can't shove aside the images he saw earlier this year when he was covering the earthquake-stricken region of Port-au-Prince, where, in the face of such harrowing life-and-death situations, he saw first-hand just how resilient human beings actually can be.

"One missionary said to me, 'You know, Haiti gets you, and when it gets you, you continue to want to go back; you continue to think about it even when you are not there,'" Cooper relays. "And it's true. To see people facing adversity and loss—loss of loved ones, or a way of life, or an income; to learn from them and see them continue on, and wake up and still put one foot in front of the other ... It is incredibly inspiring."

"There is this remarkable spirit in Haiti, remarkable strength."

Spirit and strength are like food to Cooper. In fact, he's become a seasoned journalist for how well he captures it. It's fed his soul so much that now, a significant part of his work—on the CNN juggernaut that is *Anderson Cooper 360*—seems devoted to spotlighting individuals that generate a powerful ripple effect in the world. You can see it in his passionate appeals

online at AC360.blogs.cnn.com. And we're looking forward to seeing even more on his new daytime talk show. Also, witness it in *CNN Heroes: An All-Star Tribute*, the mesmerizing special Cooper hosts on Thanksgiving night.

The annual salute, held at the Kodak Theatre, began in 2007 and quickly became one of the more heartwarming broadcast events of the year, mostly because it so aptly captures the potency of that human spirit Cooper has grown to revere.

"The thing that I take away from the special every year is the amazing power individuals have to make a difference. I know that sounds like a complete cliché, but it's really true," he says.

CNN Heroes unravels with the help of viewers. Throughout the year, audiences nominate and then vote for the heroes they want to be honored. Often that posse comprises amazing souls and this year's crop holds a number of champions and advocates—from the Cambodian tour guide who used her own cash tips to assist rural children needing schooling, to the man who released more than half a million baby turtles back into the wild by preserving their endangered eggs on the beaches of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. >>>

CNN HEROES:
An All-Star Tribute
NOV 25/8/7pm C

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“Travel is a continuing education that I value hugely. It opens your eyes.”

— Anderson Cooper

KEEPING HIM HONEST

The phrase ‘Keeping Them Honest’ was coined on Cooper’s show. We do the same here—with him:

cl: What do you think America needs to be paying more attention to right now?

AC: The war in Afghanistan.

cl: What are you most confident about?

AC: Hmm... Gosh, I don't really know. I tend to second guess everything and I tend to be really critical of myself. I think things over multiple times in my head—rethink them after I've done them. So... I guess I am relatively confident. I never really thought about it in those terms.

cl: What do you do for fun?

AC: [Laughs] A lot of my days are taken up with work, which is actually fun for me. I would much rather go to a place and shoot a story than sit on a beach and just hang out. I am not very good at ‘vacation.’ Honestly... my greatest indulgence right now is sleeping. Weekends that I get off, I tend to crash, which is incredibly boring. I'm actually very ‘boring.’

cl: What makes you laugh most?

AC: The Soup [on E!]. Joel McHale is great. And there's another show, Tosh.o [on Comedy Central]. His show is amazing. I just stumbled upon it but it's the new show I am watching.

cl: Best advice you've been given about life?

AC: My mom was asked: ‘What would you attempt to do if you knew you could not fail?’ It's an interesting question based on what you would do if you didn't have doubt. It's hard to think in those terms and not always something I am able to do, but I do think it's good advice.

“These are people who don't necessarily have access to money or power, and yet in their own communities, have made remarkable differences,” Cooper quickly points out. “A lot of us think, ‘Well, you know, there's really not a lot any of us can do because I don't have enough money to do it, or the time.’ But it does open up this world of possibility of what individuals can achieve, even if they can start off small. It shows you the power of thinking and how changing your own life can help bring change to other people's lives.”

Whether he's aware of it or not—and he's probably not because the man comes across as humble to the bone—Cooper has changed the lives and perspectives of modern-day television audiences behind imagination. And mostly by doing what he enjoys most—trying to make sense of what's going on in the world, a desire he began realizing at an early age.

His first glimpse of his fate arrived in the form of an admiration of journalist Gordon Parks, a friend of his father, Wyatt Cooper, and mother, design maven Gloria Vanderbilt. He thought Parks was “cool” but so, too, was watching television newscasts with his family—he couldn't help but scrutinize how the telecasts were put together and produced.

“I was sort of a strange little child that way, I guess,” he recalls with a chuckle. “I was really interested in events as they were happening and it didn't really occur to me that I could actually do it myself, but it was like watching history, watching a living history.”

Some early events in his own life became historic, too—the death of his father when Cooper was 10, and then years later, his brother Carter's untimely passing—but he retained a hunger to explore life with fervor. To that end, he left high school early to travel South Africa in a truck, an excursion that only fueled a deeper desire to see more of the world and learn from the people walking its fertile soil.

“Travel is a continuing education that I value hugely,” he says. “It opens your eyes.”

For Cooper, it also opened doors.

Upon graduating Yale, where he ventured into political science and, fittingly, international relations, he immediately turned heads when he secured a fake ID and his own video camera—all so that he could travel abroad to cover students fighting the Burmese government. The segments, which aired on Channel One, were hauntingly realistic. But he didn't stop there. Soon, he was off to Vietnam to study the language at the University of Hanoi and in a curi-

ous twist—something that could only unfold in his world—Cooper managed to capture a surprisingly vivid look at Vietnamese life on film. He went on to cover the war-torn regions of Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda. By 1994 he was reporting on ABC News and eventually moved on to create a real legacy: his work at CNN, which began in 2001 and brought him significant accolades when AC360 launched four years later. In fact, his reports from Afghanistan and Iraq and, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans were groundbreaking.

“It's been a realization of how little I know,” Cooper says of his travels. “When you're just watching stuff on TV or reading about it, it's easy to see things in black and white. But when you actually go out into the world, there are many more shades of gray. Things are far more complex than we see from a distance. You begin to see the world in a better context, a more realistic way.”

When asked how he remains grounded in the midst of covering what are often dire circumstances, Cooper is candid.

“You know, it's not a question of staying grounded, it's a question of not becoming overwhelmed by all the things that you see,” he says. “At times, it's hugely depressing. A lot of the places I go, horrific things have happened. You see people at their worst, but also, often, people at their best—people who really rise to the occasion; people who, in the face of great adversity, show themselves to have enormous stores of strength, enormous stores of kindness for, sometimes, complete strangers.”

Does he feel, then, that hope always outshines the darkness?

“I am not a complete starry-eyed optimist. I am pretty realistic,” he tells me. “But there is a lot of hope—it's sometimes hard to see it. I mean, this year, a lot of people have died, and the world doesn't stop spinning. When one experiences loss, you kind of feel your world has stopped, and it's kind of a shock to realize that everyone else just continues on.”

He adds knowingly, “All of us who travel, and with the kind of work we do, we see a lot of death, a lot of loss, and it's very real and it has an impact. But it's good to remember, and important to remember, that people are resilient; that humans, even in the face of horror, can choose to act with a great deal of compassion and kindness.” **d**

