

“Up Close & Personal: A Look Behind The Scenes”

**Producer
Whitney
Patterson
details her
role and
journey at
WWL-TV**

By Anita Oubre



While most New Orleanians are still sleeping, Whitney Patterson is wide awake and hard at work.

As the producer of WWL-TV's "Eyewitness Morning News" program, she is the model of professionalism and journalistic integrity.

Whitney explained that as a producer she wears many hats. She communicates with the anchors, making sure they have all the information they need, whether it's for an interview or background for a story. She also books all the talent for the show, including bands and featured guests.

"I'm kind of wrangling and overseeing everything and I'm also still writing and putting the information out that our community needs most," Whitney said. "Sometimes there is so much happening simultaneously I have to stop and remember to have a sip of water, eat or use the restroom. People think the job is so cool and glamorous but it is really long hours of hard work, I have to set my Apple watch to remember to breathe," she joked.

A graduate of Dillard University Whitney was always interested in journalism. As a young girl attending school at West Jefferson High School, Whitney excelled in her advanced placement English courses and enjoyed writing. The trials and tribulations she faced as a teen were managed with paper and pen. Whitney escaped family issues and teen pressures by curling up in her room and writing. She stayed focused on tasks at hand by studying and working hard.

The youngest of three children, Whitney was a self-proclaimed "daddy's girl." As she proudly stated, "I'd say I grew up faster than most kids. My parents are older and as a kid, so I had more responsibility. I also learned early on that love comes in many different forms."

Whitney was thrilled when she got into Dillard, which was her first choice when selecting a college. She studied multimedia communications with a concentration in broadcast journalism. During her tenure at Dillard, she wrote for the student newspaper, "Courtbouillon," and was editor in chief during her senior year.

"Attending a great Black institution was a

wonderful opportunity for me and I appreciate my time there," said Whitney.

There are special people in everyone's life journey who make a difference by lending support and encouragement. For Whitney that person was Dr. Cleo Allen.

"Dr. Allen molded me in the field of journalism," Whitney recalled. "She was not going to let any of her students enter into the business unprepared. She was more than an instructor; she was a mentor and she let me know what was expected."

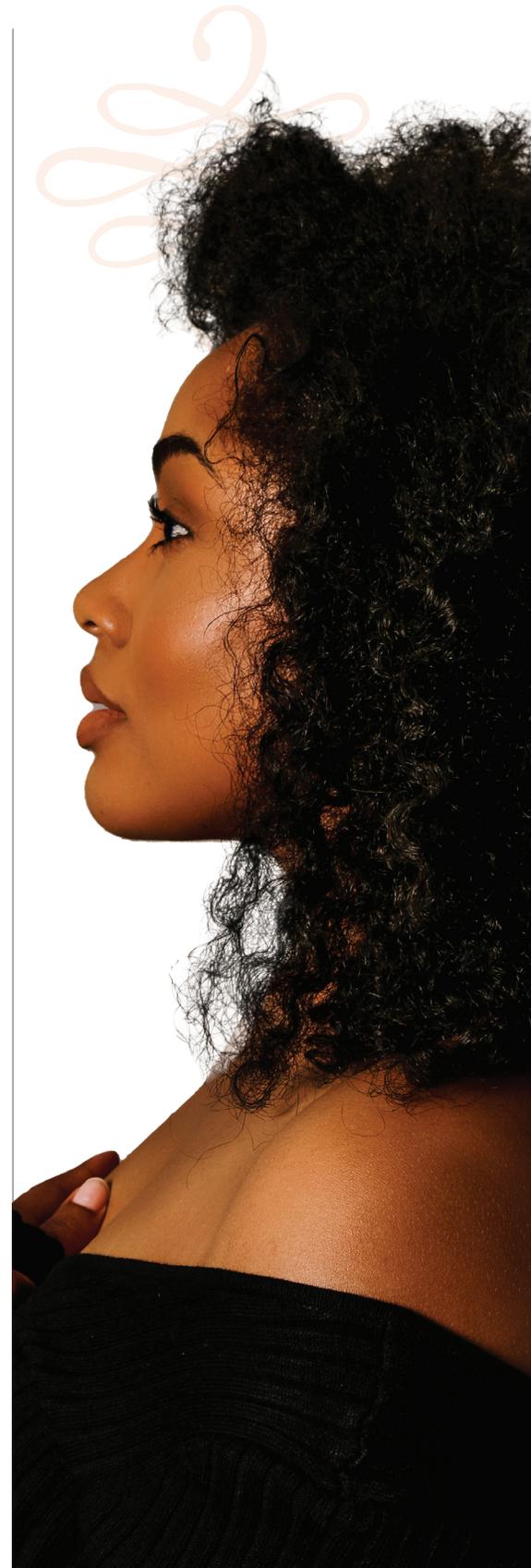
A defining moment in Whitney's life was losing her father two weeks before her graduation. Prior to that she was working multiple jobs while helping as a caretaker to her father who was diagnosed with lung cancer. She could have easily given up at this point in her life but she learned just how resilient she was.

"So much was happening at that time," Whitney said. "I not only had my school work but I also had a job in retail and then I was offered a job as a production assistant at Channel 4. My instructor, Mr. Mark Raymond Sr., had recommended me for this job and there I was working, dealing with my father's passing and trying to graduate. It was a lot but I learned to keep going and I appreciate all my experiences. There was so much for me to take advantage of."

Whitney said that her earliest aspiration was to be a reporter. She envisioned herself on the air delivering the news but then she realized what an important role it was being behind the scenes.

"It's not the glitz and glamour of the job that is important to me," she said. "I want to ensure that the people who need the information know the information. It's a package. Some want to be entertained and I make sure that is happening as well."

Whitney is serious about making sure the news is appealing to all of her audiences. She notes that each viewer is looking for something different. But the people responsible for the news content are still people with everyday problems and needs. Taking the pulse of the newsroom upon entering each day is important to her.



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“You never know what you are walking into in the morning,” Whitney said. “Overnight there could be murders, robberies or a kidnapping, so I want to get a feel for everyone’s mood because these stories affect all of us differently.”

Whitney knows firsthand how exhausting crime reports can be and that’s why she really enjoys working on stories that resonate positively in the community. Stories that are inspirational, as well as informative, appeal to her and she appreciates the opportunity to share these stories with the viewers.

“Stories that are uplifting and show our community in the best light possible are the ones that I really enjoy making,” Whitney happily stated. An example that she shared was the story about David Price.

A Loyola University student at the time, Price created the safety pouch which has been credited with saving lives. The pouch comes in the universal safety color of orange and it holds documents that are needed for traffic stops. It is readily accessible from the car window so that anyone

stopped by law enforcement can retrieve the documents without making any movements that can be interpreted as potentially threatening.

“I booked this young man for an interview and his story was beautiful to me,” Whitney fondly recounted. “I want to showcase young Black people in the light that isn’t negative. These are the stories young people need to see while watching the news with their families. They need to know about the game changers and problem solvers in their communities.”

Whitney is also passionate about bringing informative, educational stories to the audience. She made the delicate decision to share her own story about her struggle with fibroids. A three-part series gave viewers firsthand information about this mystery illness with Whitney and her colleague, April Dupre, sharing the intimate details of their diagnosis, surgery and recovery.

“Black women are diagnosed with fibroids disproportionately more than women of other races,” Whitney explained. “This hit home to me and I wanted other

women to know they were not alone and should not be afraid to be examined and ask questions. I felt really good about this, promoting awareness and emphasizing the importance of an annual exam.”

When Whitney is away from the newsroom, she enjoys spending time with her family: especially her twin nephews. She says that family time is her favorite time.

“What I’m most grateful for is my family,” Whitney said. “I feel like so much has happened to people my age.

I’m just grateful to be here. I’m grateful to be breathing. And I’m grateful to be a blessing to my family. However that may look, I try my best to be a light in any way that I can be.”



*Shyne and Shane Butler,
Whitney Patterson's nephews*

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