



Benita Zahn

Lifting Up the Capital Region

By Jenna Caputo
 Photos by Angela Mia Photography
 & Contributed by Benita Zahn

Benita Zahn, MS, DPS, CHWC is a name most of us in the Capital Region recognize. For 40 years, she brought us our news on WNYT. While some of those stories were hard to hear, many were uplifting and even alerted us to new ways to increase our own wellness. She may no longer be gracing our screens each night, but Benita is still keeping us up to date in making sure our bodies are running top-notch.

Originally from Jericho, NY, Benita grew up loving theater from day one. There was something about the storytelling, the community, the creativity, and the truth of it that appealed to her. When she wasn't acting in the theater, she could be found outside biking or swimming. Going to the beach was a favorite activity as well as playing with the neighborhood kids after dinner. They had a large crew, often with 20 kids playing hide-and-seek around the neighborhood. She also had a hidden talent of walking along the top of almost any kind of fence!

Benita went to SUNY Oswego as a biology major, but something didn't sit right. "When I was in the lab, I wanted to be in the theater, and when in the theater, I should have been in the lab," she explains. "A dear friend was a runaway chemistry major and suggested we take the intro to communications course—we could sit in the back of the room and have a coffee," she laughs.



“Well, for me, the lightbulb went off. I needed my writing skills (I’d been an honor English student in junior and senior high), my science/observation skills, and performance skills from theater—and the rest, as they say, is history. Journalism was a perfect match for me as I was always asking questions, much to my mom’s annoyance. In fact, one of my cabaret shows was called *Always Asking Questions*, and all the songs involved questions! I also don’t sit still very well, so reporting, which provides the potential for something new every day, was a perfect fit.”

Her work at WNYT provided her with many memorable stories from heartwarming to exciting, like the time she got to fly with the Blue Angels. She was thrilled. “Talk about once in a lifetime. The power of the plane! And I have a sensitive equilibrium, so

while I loved the ride, it took hours for my stomach to settle down.” She also got to fly in the Pepsi Bi-Plane—with no roof—for a story as well. That experience was also spectacular, feeling like she was almost floating, but noisy—not like the quiet float she had when on assignment in a hot air balloon. Then there was the time she was flown like Peter Pan at Russell Sage College, too. Not all her stories brought her up in the air, though. She covered every kind of event, including the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. “The kindness of those affected stays with me to this day,” she says. One of her most memorable stories took her to Ground Zero in New York City the night after 9/11.

During her time at WNYT, she also stayed busy moonlighting in various jobs like working the spotlight at the Times Union Center or shooting as a wedding

photographer. “Talk about stress—we were still shooting film!” she exclaims.

But after 40 years, she felt it was time to change tracks and now is spending her time as a certified health and wellness coach, based at Capital Cardiology, although she is open to anyone—not just their patients. “I love working with people to help them find their WHY regarding their health, helping them identify long and short term goals, and encouraging them to get there, realizing they do have the power to make lifelong changes,” she explains.

It is through these life changes that Benita leads her clients to become empowered on their own. She guides them into finding their “why,” then together they create a vision for a year out, listing short- and longer-term goals. “I don’t tell them what to do but help them craft a personal path and find their way. I support them, encourage them, and applaud them but I do ask challenging questions,” she says. There is not just one type of client. She works with anyone looking to reclaim their health and be their best, assisting people with goals like losing weight, stopping smoking, carving out “me” time, and overall, learning to care for themselves.

Even though she’s not in front of the camera anymore, that love of theater and performing is still in her blood. She sings with former co-anchor Jerry Gretzinger in their group, The Singing Anchors. They got their start at the Fort Salem Theater, but now they sing wherever they’re booked (you can find and follow them on their Facebook page). Benita has also performed in a solo cabaret act, and of course, musical theater. She recently completed a run of *Cabaret* with the Two of Us Productions in Copake, NY, playing Fraulein Schneider. She’s also the president of the board for Park Playhouse/Park Stage Company and has performed with them in both *Ragtime* and *Hands on a Hard Body*.

In addition to her theater work, she’s a board member for Building On Love and Kelly’s Angels, which was created in honor of Mark Mulholland’s wife who passed from breast cancer in her 30s, leaving behind two young children. Kelly’s Angels was originally created to



provide fun grants to children who've lost a parent to cancer. They have now broadened their scope to also providing grants to parents who are struggling due to any illness.

Benita is an avid runner and has completed five marathons in Cape Cod, NYC twice, at the inaugural Rock 'n Roll in San Diego, and in Boston as a Dana Farber fundraiser in memory of her former colleague, Norm Sebastian. She's also completed countless 5 & 10K races, as well as a couple of 15K, including the Boilermaker in Utica. Benita still loves to hike, swim, and play golf. In fact, it was her father who taught her to play golf, and she says it's the best gift he has ever given her. "Golf is thoughtful and social. It's opened many doors to friendships and is quite useful in business. And, it's also a good judge of character. A person who throws clubs is not someone I want to spend time with!" she says. She's also an avid reader and will pick up, and enjoy, anything that's around. She jokes that she'd even read the phone book in a pinch!

Benita met her husband, Bob, on a story interviewing Denise Herman, a celebrated local runner and teacher at Saratoga High School where Bob was the athletic director. Bob was celebrated himself. An honoree in the National Wrestling Hall of Fame, he was also an umpire for the USA and South Korea baseball game in the 1984 Olympics. Bob had played ball through college, then went semi-pro. But when his knees started to get creaky after years of catching, he switched to umping. Bob had a stellar reputation, so when the local organizer for umps got the call from the Olympic Committee, Bob was the first one he went to. There are still some longtime coaches who ask him to come back and ump their games.



Benita and Bob live here in Clifton Park with their two rescue dogs, Stanley and Tiki. Benita loves to travel. Her safari trip to South Africa currently tops the list of favorite places she's been to. With the pandemic keeping them home like everyone else, Benita has spent the extra time developing her love of cooking. She jokes that she has cooked her way around the world these last couple of years—all while talking out loud to herself while working. They also love to get outside and explore whenever possible, whether by golfing, snowshoeing, or power walking. During the holidays, they shop for children who need extras, and of course, they attend theater shows whenever they can.

Benita likes to approach everything with gusto and her passion shows in everything she does. "God helps those who help themselves. That was said often in my house as I grew up, and so I, as well as my two younger brothers, are quite independent," she says.

She has been lucky to experience not only the many adventures through her past reporting days, but many aspects of both the Capital Region community and people. She's excited to now work more hands on with the community to increase wellness and help everyone make a positive impact on the world. One of the things she has learned over the years? "Kindness always counts. You never know when your smile, kind word, or deed can lift someone—and once lifted, who knows what they may accomplish!"