

Written by Patricia Turnier
Thursday, 06 June 2013 20:36



Elizabeth Sanchez became an alumnus of California State University (where she later served as an Adjunct Professor) in 1991 with a bachelor's degree in broadcast journalism. As a reporter, Sanchez has covered multiple stories on: politics, government, consumer issues, entertainment, and so on. She was the host of the national PBS TV show *A Place of Our Own*. She worked as a Dallas-based National Correspondent for CBS NewsPath

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. After, she was an investigative reporter and anchor in San Diego, California. More specifically, as mentioned Elizabeth Sanchez was a correspondent for CBS NEWSPATH which she joined in October 2002. Prior to that, Sanchez served as a weekend anchor and journalist for KPHO-TV Phoenix (2000-02), where she covered the Arizona wildfires, among many other issues. Sanchez was the weekend morning anchor and reporter at WSOC-TV Charlotte from 1996-2000. She was an anchor and investigative reporter for Channel 10 in San Diego from 2005-08. In addition, she worked as an anchor and journalist for KYMA-TV Yuma, Ariz.

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(1993-94) and as a reporter for KYOU-TV Santa Ana, Calif. (1992-93).

Sanchez's experience also comprises radio reporting. She served as a producer and journalist for KFI-AM Los Angeles (1990-93), where she covered the L.A. riots. Moreover, she reported for KPCC-FM Pasadena, Calif. (1991-92). Hence, Sanchez has more than 20 years of experience as a radio and television news reporter. Sanchez has won several journalism awards. In this regard, she has received several Associated Press prizes, including Best of the West Environmental in 2001, Best Serious Feature in 1993 and Best Newscast in 1992. She has also won a Golden Mike Award for Best Newscast during a morning broadcast in 1991. Furthermore, she is the recipient of Emmys for outstanding investigative reporting.

Currently, Elizabeth Sanchez is the executive director of the non-profit organization *Angel Faces* –

founded by the President

[Lesia Cartelli](#)

President – that provides services to young girls who have suffered severe burns. Donations are the main financial resource of

Angel Faces

. The organization operates with the help of volunteers and professionals (a reconstructive surgeon, an attorney, etc.). This year

Angel Faces

will celebrate its tenth anniversary.

Sanchez is a spokesperson for

Angel Faces

and gave an interview for this organization on Kiro radio.

Angel Faces

has received coverage in other media, such as CNN with Dr. Sanjay Gupta, KPBS and the Associated Press.

Overall, Mrs. Sanchez wears many hats: television host, news correspondent, anchor, author, public speaker and more recently executive director of *Angel Faces*. Elizabeth Sanchez was a national correspondent for CBS News and has worked for CBS affiliates across the country, covering politicians, celebrities, natural disasters, White House affairs, the space shuttle Columbia crash, the death of Michael Jackson, the return of American journalists imprisoned in North Korea, and other major newsworthy events. Elizabeth Sanchez has also worked as an Investigative Reporter in major markets.

Elizabeth Sanchez received two regional Emmy Awards in 2008 for investigative reporting. In

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addition, she was nominated for Daytime Emmy award (the national prize) for the show *A Place of Our Own*

on PBS. Sanchez has just been nominated for another Emmy award for the *Angel Faces*

video on their website

www.angelfacesretreat.org

“Where Girls Face Their Scars”. Elizabeth Sanchez is also a member of the *National Association of Hispanic Journalists*

. She lives in Southern California with her spouse and two daughters.

Last fall, we had the pleasure of speaking to Mrs. Sanchez who provided information about Angel Faces and shared her experience as a journalist. This is the First Canadian interview for Angel Faces.

P.T. Can you tell us about your background and how you embraced a journalism career?

E.S. I have been a journalist for twenty years. It was a means of pursuing the advancement of truth. Since I was 11, I have been drawn to this profession. A station, entitled KFI radio, hired me after my internship. It is worth mentioning that it is an important station in Los Angeles so, for me, it was a great opportunity to start my career there. This station broadcasts news and so on. One of my colleagues, Dr. Laura Schlessinger encouraged me to embrace a television career. This advice changed my outlook of the profession and expanded my vision. In this regard, I started to work in television in Arizona. I later went to Charlotte (North Carolina), Phoenix (Arizona) and Dallas (Texas) as a network correspondent. I returned to local news after I had my first child because travelling 200 days a year with a baby was too difficult. Becoming a parent gave me the opportunity to apply to be a host for a national parenting show called *A Place of Our Own* on PBS. This program aimed to guide young children to succeed in school and in life. The show was sponsored by the BP oil company. After the oil spill, the program was cancelled in 2010.

P.T. How did you end up working for the organisation, *Angel Faces*? Why was it important for you to contribute to this organisation and set aside your journalism career?

E.S. I began to be involved in this organization after I met the founder of *Angel Faces*, [Lexia Cartelli](#), through a mutual friend. I embraced journalism because I wanted to help people. Working for *Angel Faces*

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became a different way to pursue the same goal. Lesia [Cartelli] wanted to get more media exposure for *Angel Faces*

. At the time, I had lived in San Diego for eight years and had never heard about the organization—same thing with my friends. Lesia [Cartelli] and I spoke to see if we could work together. She thought I could be a good fit. Given that I have been involved in the media, we have been on CNN, the local PBS station, the local CBS station and over 300 publications (nationally and internationally). I would not say that I have put my journalism aside. I consider myself to be doing it behind the scenes instead of in front of the camera like I used to. I have a passion for making a difference in the lives of young girls who have been affected by serious burn injuries, and somehow I feel that I have found a new calling.



The retreat is held at the Glen Ivy Retreat Center in Corona, California, which is situated 2.5 hours north of downtown San Diego.

P.T. Talk to us about *Angel Faces* (its history, mission, retreat, etc.).

E.S. Lesia Cartelli worked with burn survivors in 1991, as Director of Support with the Burn Institute, where she launched and directed the first camp for burn-injured kids in southern California (the U.S. has 48 burn camps where the children meet, play together and kind of forget about their accidents). Cartelli became the Community Relations Representative with University of California San Diego, Regional Burn Center and then served as Executive Director of the Orange County Burn Association. Cartelli was on the founding task force developing Critical Incident Stress Management for the San Diego Fire and Rescue Department, providing services for the Urban Search and Rescue, TF -8. She was also supported families and assisted with stress management after the 911 attacks. All these experiences led her eventually to create *Angel Faces*. During her 17 year career, she implemented and directed after-care programs for burn-injured children and adults who have endured serious burn injuries. Lesia Cartelli created the first national retreat for adults who have suffered from severe burn injuries from cooking accidents, chemical accidents in labs, car accidents, etc.

On a more personal level, Cartelli survived a gas explosion, forty years ago, in 1969, at when she was nine at her grandparents' home in Michigan. Her face (including her eyes) and body were severely burned. However, her eyes were saved because when the explosion occurred she was covering her eyes as part of the game of hide-and-seek with her cousins. During her youth, she was bullied, and this experience prompted Mrs. Cartelli to observe the lack of psychosocial services for young girls who went through similar traumas. She realised that more needed to be done, especially on an emotional level because after the playing part stop in burn camps (as described earlier), these children have to go back home and face society at school, etc. So, Cartelli felt that the society cannot be changed but that girls can work on themselves and get the right tools to try handling these challenges. This is how the organisation was founded.

Some girls of *Angel Faces* come to us basically with their heads down with social death. Some hide themselves daily behind their computers (via Facebook, etc.). Others come to us practically broken and our work is to help them regain their self-esteem. Therefore, in terms of services, our organization *Angel Faces*, provides healing for teenage girls. Annually, we implement forty burn camps for children who get the support required for them to be able to go back to society. In addition, we offer the services of hairstylists who go to the *Angel Faces* Retreat to volunteer their talents and treat the girls to complete hair makeovers. We also provide therapeutic touch services (with a facial and/or a massage given by trained professionals in a safe and non-judgemental environment) because certain girls have been only touched in clinical

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settings resulting in pain. The teenage females have access to a clinical corrective cosmetic professional, yoga courses, etc. Furthermore, we grant scholarships.

Overall, *Angel Faces* is a non-profit organization whose mission is to offer healing retreats and ongoing support for teenage girls (ages 11-19) with burn/trauma injuries by providing tools to empower them while teaching them to set healthy boundaries, to develop meaningful relationships for themselves, their families and their communities.

Faces

Angel

is

the sole program of its kind in the U.S. and the world. It was founded in 2003.

P.T. I think that very little work is being done in society to teach people to be tolerant of difference. I believe that it is also the responsibility of academic institutions to educate the population and it should start at a very early age. During my childhood, I saw children being beaten and called names, while the staff at the school just watched and did nothing to protect them. I even saw at the time a staff member who slapped a kid because of his difference. If nothing or very little is done on a grander scale, these dysfunctional behaviors will continue to be transmitted from generations to generations.

E.S. You raise a very important point! It is the responsibility for the society as a whole not to be passive about these issues. The President, Mrs. Cartelli, wanted to do her part by founding *Angel Faces*

in 2003 under the umbrella of another organisation, the University of Irvine Burn Center until 2007, after which it became its own organization. She created, first, a 7-day retreat where girls can look within them and not treat themselves as victims by being empowered. They also have access to intensive workshops with two licensed psychologists. They work with the girls in groups and individual sessions. In addition, the girls do art therapy. We really try to work with the girls as a whole. Again we help them to be empowered and to be strong so that they may educate their communities when they have to go back.

I am going to give an example of some of the workshops we do. We ask the girls to talk about their difficult experiences. Some have said that they have been called Freddy Krueger, scarred face, ugly, etc. We tell them that if they have experienced that, they need to be prepared for this because unfortunately society can be horrible. When they have to go through that again, they must turn the conversation around and move on. If they are stared at, we explain that often it can be done out of curiosity. We suggest that, if they feel like it that day, they can say, "You are probably wondering what happened to me." If you feel comfortable, without telling the whole story, you can give a one-liner such as, "I was in a car accident, there was a fire afterward and I am fine now." There are people who are compassionate and want to express their concern

related to what happened.

We give tools to the girls during and after the retreat. We provide them with monthly webcam sessions (via Skype). In addition, we communicate and share information with the girls through a private "Angels in Flight"—an ongoing support program—Facebook page. Some are fearful when they return to school, so we discuss many issues that they have to deal with. Recently, they had to deal with Halloween because some mean people can say disturbing remarks to them, such as, "Halloween is over, take off your mask".

P.T. It must be really difficult to have to deal with serious issues such as these at a very young age. I am sure that, on some days, they would like to be invisible to the society, but it is not possible.

E.S. This is another very interesting point that you are bringing. Some of the girls, do not want to go to school. Their parents feel guilty and homeschool them, but eventually they will have to face the real world. So, *Angel Faces* really helps them deal with these issues.

P.T. There are males who suffer burn accidents and so on. Why did your organisation decide to focus solely on females?

E.S. Given that the director is a female, she wanted to found an organization based on her gender. It is always easier to start something based on what you know. In addition, she is aware that being a female teenager can be difficult years, especially if you have to deal with all the consequences and impacts of being burned. However, we know that statistically males are burned more than females. So, we would like to help males as well. We will have our first boys' retreat in the fall of 2014. That is the plan but of course, it takes money and we rely on donations. Until we feel that we have the funds and can sustain an annual boys' retreat, we won't take that on by ourselves.

P.T. Do you know why males are burned more, statistically?

E.S. It is because they are more curious during their formative years.

P.T. So, is it more boys than men who have burning accidents?

E.S. Yes.

P.T. Once a year *Angel Faces* provides retreats in Mexico, Canada and Europe. Are you thinking of expanding your organization in the future and establishing it elsewhere in the world?

E.S. Once a year, *Angel Faces* offers retreats in Southern California for adolescent girls, ages 13-19. The next one will be from June 23rd until the 29th, 2013. As you said, we take girls from Mexico, Canada and Europe. We provide transportation to and from the airport including facilities for the girls. Our retreat center is situated in a peaceful setting, with inviting walkways, places for relaxation and reflection. Because of the intensity of the program and the special individual attention that is provided to the girls, *Angel Faces* accepts up to a maximum of twenty-five girls per retreat.

We definitely would like to expand this service to other parts in the U.S. and we welcome girls from all over the world. Again, all of that requires funding to help more people. If future donations permit, we are open to expanding *Angel Faces* elsewhere in the world.

P.T. Many of the girls from *Angel Faces* go to high schools. What are their challenges? In addition, does *Angel Faces* go to schools to educate people and/or work with the staff to ensure that the girls from your organisation are well integrated in an academic environment?

E.S. Let's start with the challenges that they face. Most teenage girls have to deal with self-esteem issues. We discuss about this theme during our retreats. We also offer the services of a corrective cosmetic professional. High school girls love to play with make-up. The cosmetic professional does not necessarily help them to cover their scars but supports them to give symmetry to their faces. For instance, some girls have burns on their eyebrows, so she helps them put another eyebrow on. Appearance is important and if you do not fit within certain norms, you may face name-calling, bullying, staring and so on. Burn/trauma injury at an early

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age can be associated with high rates of psychiatric and social problems; scarring, disfigurement, deformity, and loss of quality of life might cause deep emotional scars, including anger, depression, loneliness, and isolation.

You asked if we go to schools to educate people. Right now, we do not. However, there is a conference in San Diego for school nurses. My sister is a school nurse and suggested that we educate school nurses around the country. So, the first step will be to speak at the next conference to the nurses and present our organization. We will give tools to the nurses who have to work in schools with teenagers that are dealing with their challenges.

Angel Stories: The Struggles of the teenagers

Many teenage females with burn injuries suffer through several physical and emotional challenges. In addition, they endure social challenges. Read below what some of the girls penned about their own social experiences.

P.T. As mentioned earlier, you have health professionals on your team. Do they do outreach and educate people to prevent burn accidents?

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E.S. Our organization does not provide this service for now. The husband of the founder of *Angel Faces*

is a retired fire captain. We know that the fire departments do a very great job of educating the public. They go to schools, etc. On a more personal level, I recently went with my daughters to our local fire station that taught them how to prevent burn accidents. However, we are open seeing how our organization can complement the work of fire stations.

P.T. Can you share with us the successful stories of a woman (18-19) and a girl (11-17) from your organization who managed to overcome her hurdles and were able to heal (psychologically...) from their respective accidents?

E.S. Yes. We meet many girls who come to *Angel Faces*. Their stories are amazing. I can share with you the story of a 16-year-old from Kansas. She was on her way to a birthday party. She was driving her car and it was raining. She did hit a puddle and an electric pole, which caused a fire. People had to pull her out and get her to the hospital. She was badly burned on her body and face. She came to us, shortly after her accident. She had to face the fact that her life had changed. It was hard for her to see that her appearance dramatically changed after the accident. She was a beautiful young woman before the accident, and she is still beautiful. She has attended three of our annual retreats in Southern California and she has grown tremendously. She is amazing and well-rounded. She had the courage this past year to move out from her family home to another state which was a big step for her. She considers herself a better person now. She feels that she used to be mean before her accident. Now, she feels that she has become a more caring and a nicer person.

I can tell you about another young woman who was burned at a Halloween party. She disguised herself as a zombie. She had oil paint on her that caught on fire. It was a chemical fire, so the fact that she tried to have water on her (in the shower) didn't save her. She screamed and her father came to put her in a towel that helped diminish the flame. She is amazing, she is not bitter about her accident and found a way to see it as a purpose in life to educate others. She is very spiritual. She has a tattoo on her back that is about God, and it was not burned during the fire. In other words, it remained intact, unlike the rest of her body, which was burned.

P.T. What are the challenges for women from your organization who are in the workforce? Do they face discrimination, unemployment and so on? If so, what kinds of services does *Angel Faces* provide to help them?

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E.S. These girls believe that they face discrimination. Statistical studies demonstrated that people's looks play an important role in the hiring process. We have a new program, a mentorship-leadership service that will begin in fall 2013, in which teenagers and young adults are given tools related to leadership skills that empower them to go out and enter the workforce. In other words, with this program we will help them to overcome the challenges that they will have to face in the job market.

P.T. For many [women](#) , from all walks of life, self-esteem is closely tied to their appearance, and our world puts a lot of pressure on them in this regard. We briefly touched on this earlier. We live, more than ever, in a highly visual world where [inner beauty](#) is not highly valued. What message do you have for our society, which over-emphasizes the power of images and in which people who do not fit "the ideal image" face consequences, such as bullying?

E.S. As mentioned, we have talked a little bit about that. Unfortunately, we cannot change society. You are right, we live in a highly visual world. Inner beauty is not as valued as it should be, but we try to empower the girls. We tell them what they will get in the society. They cannot change it but we propose them that maybe they can educate one person at a time. We remind them that there is more than their outside appearance: their personality, their heart, etc.

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The official website of Angel Faces is <http://www.angelfaces.org>.
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Elizabeth Sanchez is the Executive Directress of Angel Faces. The whole story from preparing the 24-hour cable news service CBSNews24.com industry