

# entertainment

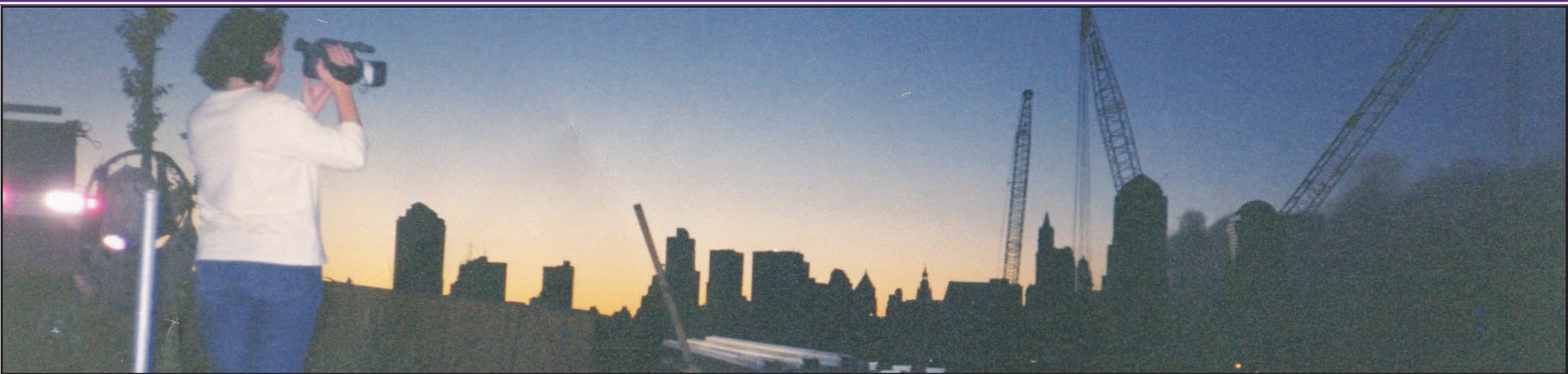


Photo taken by Jess Baker of her classmate Laura Allenbaugh shooting the Manhattan skyline on Sept. 12, 2001, one day after the World Trade Centers fell.

JESS BAKER FACEBOOK

## Alumni spotlight: *The story of Jess Baker*

**ZACH READ**  
Managing Editor

Have you ever been asked the question “what were you doing on Sept. 11, 2001 when the planes hit the Twin Towers?”

For some people, that would be a tough question to answer, but for others they would say that they remember it like it was yesterday.

For 2002 Ashland University graduate Jess Baker, the events of that day have remained vivid in her memory 18 years later.

“I remember all of it, and I just get chills thinking about it,” Baker said. “We were not the story, obviously the story was happening in Western Pennsylvania, in New York and in D.C.”

Baker, who was a double major in sport communication and electronic media production, had rushed to the TV2 studio in the Center for the Arts building after hearing that a plane had crashed into the first tower.

Four weeks earlier, Baker was living in New York City, just three blocks from the World Trade Center, working a 10-week summer fellowship with the International Radio and Television Society.

Sitting in the studio on that day, Baker turned towards her classmate Laura Allenbaugh, and asked her if she wanted to take a road trip. Around noon that day, the two AU students took off in their car headed east, finding themselves in a field in Shanksville, Penn. later that evening at 6 p.m.

“I think we had to see it for ourselves,” Baker said. “I think the fact that we both identified so much with the city with the potential of wanting to be in media and loving

that city, and how personally we both took it.”

Baker and Allenbaugh, with their camera equipment, found the location of the Flight 93 plane crash and were covering it that evening with the other national media that was present.

After leaving the site of the crash, the duo traveled east to find a place

Hudson river, shooting different shots and stand-ups of the Manhattan skyline.

“As you go over [the bridge into New Jersey], you could see the smoke on Sept. 12. So we see the sunrise with the smoke over lower Manhattan... and it was just awful,” Baker said.

Once they finalized their footage,



SUBMITTED BY JESS BAKER

Jess Baker with her husband Josh and their baby boy Harrison.

to sit down, eat and comprehend the events that happened. After both of them had called their parents, they knew that there was only one option left for them to do... continue east onto New York City.

Baker and Allenbaugh drove through the night and arrived in Jersey City around 4 a.m., knowing that they were not going to travel into or anywhere close to Manhattan.

They spent the morning of Sept. 12 driving from place to place along the New Jersey side of the

the two AU students traveled back home to Ashland after going 40-plus hours without sleeping.

Baker looks back at the moment and said that it was not necessarily a defining moment of her career, however, she said that it is something she will never forget.

“What started in New York that summer, me realizing that I had a lot more guts than I gave myself credit for, I think that is definitely one of those early signifiers,” Baker said. “I have gone on to do some pretty cool things that I never

thought that if you had told me at 16 or at 21 what I would do, I wouldn’t have believed you.”

Since that journey on Sept. 11-12, 2001 and since graduation from AU, Baker said that she was given the opportunity to do what she had always dreamed of doing in the real world, which was to become a television newscast producer.

“From the get-go, I somewhat knew that I wanted to produce,” Baker said.

Baker’s first job out of school was working as a producer/writer for CBS 47 and Fox 40 in Jacksonville, Fla. for four years. Baker said that she was always covering hurricanes and in 2004 covered a hurricane every other weekend with Hurricanes Charlie, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne.

It was from her love of covering weather that in 2007, Baker received a phone call that changed her life.

“I got a phone call in 2007 from the Weather Channel who was looking for producers at the time, and said ‘would you like to come up to the Weather Channel to interview for a job?’” Baker said.

Baker said she knew that the phone call would change her life.

She went on to work for the Weather Channel for almost nine years spending the first three and a half years as a television writer/producer. As people started to turn to social media for their news, it also changed Baker and the career path that she was about to follow.

“A highlight of my career was to have the opportunity to work at the Weather Channel both on-air and online, it’s the best job and it

was hard and a lot of hours,” Baker said. “But being able to do the job I always wanted was pretty stinking cool.”

In 2011, Baker made the move to Weather.com to be an editor for their news and social team. Four months later she witnessed something she would never be able to shake from her memory.

“I was actually part of the Tornado Hunt team in 2011 that was about 10 minutes behind the EF5 tornado that devastated Joplin, Mo.,” Baker said. “I saw what I thought was a field, and then realized it had been a subdivision an hour earlier. It was heartbreaking. We didn’t sleep much those nights.”

In May of 2016, Baker went through another change of occupation, this time sticking to the social media side.

“The Brewers Association based in Boulder put up a job ad that they needed an editor-in-chief of Craftbeer.com, and I was like ‘oh they’ll never hire me but I’ll put my resume up.’ Well they hired me,” Baker said.

To this day, Baker works from home as she manages every part of Craftbeer.com such as 70-plus freelance contributors, the budget and all of the content that is seen on the website.

In the Fall of 2018, Baker had the opportunity to move back to northwest Ohio where her parents still reside, back to her childhood home. She now lives in Waterville, just outside of Toledo, with her husband Josh and their son Harrison.

**Read the rest on AU-Live.com**

## Department chair spotlight: *Dr. Gwen Hullman- Department of Communication*

**CHRISTINE JENKINSON**  
News Editor

“What is communication” is the first sentence out of a professor’s mouth on the first day of class. The communications department is not just sending a message; there are many aspects to this department.

Students can major in public relations, health and risk communication, communication studies and sport communication, while their masters in corporate and strategic communication has been added recently.

“The unique contributions of the department include undergraduate and graduate level programs created to develop skills in public speaking, listening and critical analysis that support the ethical responsibilities of communicators,” Dr. Gwen Hullman, associate professor and chair of communication studies, said.

Hullman not only teaches courses in their graduate program, but teaches classes for communication majors, such as communication theory and research methods and health communication courses.

“Graduates develop the ability to create and maintain a variety of relationships with other individuals, within organizations and with diverse publics,” Hullman said. “They develop the motivation and competency to craft messages aimed at specific communication goals.”

Hullman grew up in Elyria. She earned her Ph.D. from Kent State, accepted a position at the University of Nevada Reno in 2004. After staying there for several years and starting a family, she and her husband decided it would be best to raise their kids around family and friends in the Cleveland area.

Hullman moved everyone back, including her rescue bulldog, Cocoa, back in 2017. Ashland University position posted she applied for. “I love it here,” Hullman said. “The students are amazing individuals.”

As students are graduating, they are looking for jobs. Communication skills are the number one skill listed in every job description: being able to listen and speak.

To better prepare her students, all graduates must complete an in-

ternship in which they demonstrate practical, hands-on experience.

“There has never been a greater need for the study and practice of effective communication than in our divided modern world,” Hullman said. “This is the essence of a liberal arts education.”

Hullman said that public relations students graduate with the ability to manage strategic relationships in a variety of organizations and settings and participate in the creation and implementation of public relations campaigns and crisis plans.

Students are involved in the National Public Relations Student Society of America organization and participate in the National Bateman Case Study Competition.

Health and risk graduates apply communication to important situations at the intersection of a “complex health care system and a variety of cultural lenses,” Hullman said. They are poised to serve as connectors to care and well-being, and as conduits to health information.

“Students learn how to be good communicators, of course, but they

also learn how to be good people,” Hullman said. “Learning about the symbolic nature of communication helps people see things from another person’s perspective and helps all of us realize that com-

munication can be a powerful tool that should be handled carefully.”

If students have questions, they can contact Hullman at ghullman@ashland.edu.



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Dr. Gwen Hullman, chair of the communication department at AU.

If you have a story idea or want event coverage, you can email Zach Read at [zread@ashland.edu](mailto:zread@ashland.edu)