



## Stephanie Ramos Has Big “Go For It” Energy

She grew her career as a journalist while serving in the US Army. Now the ABC News Network Correspondent reflects on how 9/11 inspired her call to service, the ways her perspective as a veteran informs her story telling, and how she “goes for it” even in the face of fear.

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- Alicia Menendez: Stephanie Ramos has the biggest go forward energy I have ever encountered. The kind of energy you need when you're building a career in the military and a career in journalism and growing your family all at the same time. How? Well above all else. Stephanie is one of those people who decides what she wants and goes for it, even when it is complicated and even when she's afraid. That bravery has earned her role as an ABC News national correspondent, where you can sometimes catch our anchoring with fatigues on the bottom and a blazer on top, making her own way and inspiring others to do the same. Stephanie, thank you for doing this.
- Stephanie Ramos: Absolutely. I am so excited.
- Menendez: I want to start with growing up Dominican, Puerto Rican, oldest of five kids. Have you seen the meme that's like, are you happy or are you an oldest daughter?
- Ramos: I have not, but I have a feeling that it is spot on.
- Menendez: Yeah, I imagine that for you being the oldest of five, there was a lot of mommy number two going on.
- Ramos: There was. I was always down to help. There was a big age difference. I mean, there is a big age difference between myself and my siblings, and I remember when I got a car, it was like, "Okay, now you can drive to your college classes, but hey, pick up Nannie here and pick up Avi here and your brother here. Take your brother to tap class." There was a lot, but when you're in a Latino family, that's how you just grow up knowing that everybody chips in, everybody helps. There's so much love. There was never ever a burden.
- Menendez: I know that you always wanted to be a journalist, but I can't gloss over the fact that you started as a performing arts theater kid. So there must have been a period of time where you thought that was your path.
- Ramos: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. I would have daydreams of being on stage to sold out crowds at Madison Square Garden just singing my heart out and that's why I went so hard at it. I took dance classes, vocal classes, and when I got to high school, I think it was like my senior year, I realized I had an interest in news. I kind of want to take a different path and inform people, and at first that meant entertainment to me because I did want to merge both passions. Back then, if you remember, it wasn't as easy to cross over from entertainment to news. So I figured, okay, I have to choose one.

Menendez: Then 9/11 happens, and I think there are a lot of people whose entire worldviews were reshaped by 9/11. I think being a native New Yorker, there's also something very personal about it. For you, what is it that shifts?

Ramos: I wanted, during that time, to be part of a larger organization. I wanted to seek out a different path where I could somehow give back to my country, but also give back to New York City. I mean, we had just gone through something so horrific and sitting there watching the news, seeing where this was going. We were going into war. I said, "I want to be a part of that" and some family members and friends that said, "What, you want to join the military? You've been singing and dancing all of your life, you're not going to survive." And I thought, I can do anything.

And that kind of fueled my motivation, just wanting to show my family and friends that this was something that I could do and do well, and I was actually a few weeks shy of going into the Marine Corps and ran into some army recruiters and they laid out this plan that really worked for me and what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a journalist, I wanted to be in the military, and they said, "We have a plan where you can actually do both simultaneously." I could be in the reserve as an officer right away, also go to grad school for media studies and then graduate with a master's and be a commissioned officer. That was the way to go for me, so.

Menendez: Can you tell me about a time when either it felt like the two careers were on a collision course or where you had to really execute them side by side?

Ramos: Yes. From South Carolina, I went to Topeka, Kansas. That was my first honor job at ACBS affiliate there and found a reserve unit nearby, so I was coasting. It's like, "Okay, I'm doing what I love." I was reporting, I was anchoring, I was producing, I was doing it all at the TV station while fulfilling my duty of one week in a month, two weeks out of the year with this reserves unit.

After about a year just being on this high at the station where I was getting promoted and everything was going so well. Then I got the call to deploy to Baghdad, and it wasn't even with my unit that I was with there in Topeka. They were transferring me by myself to another unit that needed a First Lieutenant. So it was a completely different group, completely different job. And I thought, what do I do?

Is this where I say, "Okay, I need to focus on one job, on one career because I can't lead these two lives." But then after the shock of getting that call to deploy to Iraq kind of wore off a little bit, I said, "This is what I signed up for." This was a six years after I had joined the Army. So six years later is when I deployed and I said, "This is what I signed up for. I'm going to go, I'm going to put news on hold for a year."

I packed up all of my things into storage in Topeka, Kansas, and I drove my little car to Kansas City, Missouri. I joined this unit and I was with them for a year, but that I would say was a moment where I thought, "Okay, can I really do this? Can I be a successful army officer and be an on-air reporter?" And when I came back is when it hit me. Absolutely, you can. You just have to manage it all and once I got married and we had kids, that's when things got really interesting because that's when I needed my mom and sister and folks to step in to manage it all. Is it possible? Sure. But it does take a lot. It takes a lot of effort from a lot of people in your life.

Menendez: You also, in that period, make a big jump, and that's from Topeka to Kansas City. I mean, that's a big jump in market and it required an act of, I would argue, bravery on your part to make that happen.

Ramos: Thank you. Thank you.

Menendez: You're welcome.

Ramos: It was pure determination and at this point I had realized when there is a will, there is a way. Went to Baghdad, came back, picked up where I left off at the station in Topeka, and by this point my husband, who was my long distance boyfriend back then said, "You know what? I'm going to join you in Topeka." I met him in the page program at 30 Rock. He had moved back to the Bay Area in California, and when I came back from Iraq, he said, "I'm moving to Kansas. I don't care what you say. We're going to finally be in a relationship in person." And we started our lives in Topeka.

Now, after about five years, I had received job offers at other affiliates across the country, but now he had been settled. He was settled now in Topeka, had an amazing job there and I didn't want to just uproot him even though he was down for it. He was ready for this life that I was carving out, and the next big market close to Topeka was Kansas City. Most people at the station or folks that I would talk to in the business would say, that's almost an impossible jump. That doesn't happen. Even though it's just an hour away, it just doesn't happen.

I take it into consideration, but it does not affect me, and I started contacting the news director every couple of weeks, sending my tape, sending notes, "What can I improve on? I really want to work there." Because I wanted to be able to stay in that area and even went to the station, which could be really risky. They could either love you at that point or call the cops on you for showing up unannounced or without an appointment. Weeks later, I got a call from that news director in Kansas City and she wanted to meet with me, and during that meeting she says, a reason why she called me back is because of the tenacity that I showed in just trying to meet with her. And she said, "If you have that tenacity in trying to get this position, I know you're good on the streets reporting. I know you're a good journalist if you're that tenacious."

Menendez: I have heard you say that you believe that your experience in the armed services, your experience as a veteran, that it makes you a better storyteller. Can you give me an example of a story that you think was changed by your life experience?

Ramos: A story that comes to mind that I've covered for ABC where I feel as though my military background came in handy was the Vanessa Guillen story. When she first went missing at Fort Hood. Well, whenever I hear of any soldier or service member that goes missing at a base, red flags come up because I know what the procedures and the protocols are on the military side. I knew something was wrong, not getting answers from a public affairs office at a military base. I knew that was wrong. That shouldn't be happening. I knew we couldn't give up on that story.

Menendez: Tell me about getting the call from ABC and what it required of you to level up for national.

Ramos: It was early 2015. I think it was around January, 2015. I had been interviewing for a couple of months with folks at ABC, and there's always that little voice, right? There's that voice that we try to silence that tells you that you can't do this, this isn't going to work. I have always tried to silence that voice like, "No, we can do this," and it's worked, but it's always there. And it was definitely there in early 2015. I didn't think it was possible, but I was making all the moves as if it could work out, if that makes sense. Come January, 2015, I am about seven months pregnant and I had these conversations and my agent at the time said, "Before you reach that 35 week mark and you can't travel anymore. Get to New York so you can meet with these people in person." And I said, "Okay."

I get the news around February, 2015 that I've been offered the multi-platform reporter job and it's just, it's a dream. But then I was faced with another offer to go to where my family is in Miami, Florida. Now in all of this, my travels, they've now moved from New York City to Miami and it makes me a little emotional to even think about it because it was such a difficult decision. We are a close family, so close, and I was torn. It's like, okay, here's a dream that I've had, that my mom had for me. I mean, I am the way I am because of that lady. I'm giving in my all year after year because of what she instilled in me, this drive to just do well and be the best. And because of that, now I'm faced with these two decisions and I chose ABC 'cause I said, we don't know when this opportunity will come up again. We couldn't know if this'll happen. This is timing. It's all, and this business is all about timing. I can't say, "Okay, I'll go to Miami for a couple of years and then I'll come back to ABC." It doesn't work that way, and they were all very understanding. My mom was the number one supporter as she's always been, and my husband was super supportive and she said, "[foreign language 00:13:44] I will support you in whatever your decision is." It was a very busy spring of 2015. I had to have a baby first before doing anything, had Giovanni in March. I also had my annual training coming up for the Army, so I scheduled it so that I could knock out the two week annual training before starting at ABC. So we moved. My sister flew from Miami to South Carolina so that she could watch him while I was training.

Two weeks go by and I for some reason thought that the orientation was in DC because I was going to be based in DC, but no, no, no, no, no. On our way to the airport in South Carolina, now she's going to go on her way back to Miami. Thank God for her for dropping what she's doing to stay at a hotel with my baby, cause I'm breastfeeding. I have to be near him. He's tiny. I get the call that the orientation is in New York City. She could hear it in my voice and she just rubbed my shoulder. She was in the back with the baby and I hung up and "I can't do this, I can't do this." I start breaking down. She's like, "You can. You've come so far you can do this."

It was such pressure filled moment like yes, I was not things out, but it wasn't easy was there was so much on my mind. There always is, and it's just about managing it, but she was amazing. She said, "I will take the baby to Miami. You go from here to New York to this orientation. We've come this far, it's worked out. We're making it work. We will do what we can." And that's what we did. All of that to say it hasn't just been me by myself. I've needed that support in order to make things happen because I do have that drive to push forward, but there are a lot of moving pieces and you need a village.

Menendez: I love that story both because I recognize so much of my own story in it and because I think you need help, whether that is help that comes from your family or help that you pay for in order to pull this off. And I want people to understand that. It's like what you're not seeing is all of that juggling that happens behind the scenes and that no single person can do all of that by herself. And I will tell you, for me, the jump to MSNBC, the jump to being a mom of two was really where I finally learned that I had to ask for help.

Ramos: Yes, absolutely.

Menendez: And that I needed to build support systems around myself in a more robust way than just calling my mom and hoping that she could throw a hail Mary.

Ramos: Absolutely. I learned that in DC. We need help, I can't just rely on my sister who's leading her own life and growing up, or my mom, same thing. I had to find someone that could

step in even for just two years or so until the boys were a little older and in school full-time. Just a little bit of help for this unpredictable schedule.

Menendez: It gets better.

Ramos: It gets better.

Menendez: I have one final question for you before I let you go, Stephanie. When in all of this do you audition to be a Nick City dancer?

Ramos: That's a great final question. So I went to the Nick City Dancers camp one summer and learned all the moves, and I must have been practicing so hard that so many years later, my siblings, my brother specifically, he still knows one of the dances. He knows the choreography.

Menendez: The reason I bring it up, because I think it's, listen, I so appreciate your hard work, your willingness to live a life that is different than what people are accustomed to. All of that is very interesting to me, but I also just like that you just go for it. You got big, just like go for it energy.

Ramos: Right? I know it's in me. It's infused in me, and this is what I'm trying to show our kids too. Just go for it. If there's a part of you that feels like you can do it, then go forward a hundred percent. Whether you're scared, we are all scared. I have been scared every step of the way, but it could be a beautiful thing if you just go forward and believe and also have that support system.

Menendez: Stephanie, I love you so much. Thank you for doing this.

Ramos: Thanks for having me.

Menendez: Thanks for listening. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our producer. Kojin Tashiro is our lead producer. Tren Lightburn mixed this episode. We love hearing from you, email us at [hola@latinatolatina.com](mailto:hola@latinatolatina.com). Slide into our DMs on Instagram or tweet us at [LatinatoLatina](https://twitter.com/LatinatoLatina). Check out our [merchandise@latinatolatina.com/shop](https://merchandise@latinatolatina.com/shop) and remember to subscribe or follow us on Radio Public, Apple Podcast, Google Podcast, Good Pods, wherever you're listening right now. Every time you share the podcast, every time you leave a review, you help us grow as a community.

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