

# COMMUNICATING THE COSMOS



## "It was no secret that I love space exploration."

Raquel Villaneuva, award-winning journalist, Westminster graduate and absolute ray of sunshine, is speaking over Zoom, from her LA home. She is sharing the story of her not-so-obvious transition from entertainment news to NASA JPL in 2019.

When the job came up, Raquel was based in Denver, working as a reporter and producer for news and entertainment show, the *Daily Blast Live*. Though she had always seen herself in entertainment journalism, Raquel was also a fully-fledged NASA stan. She even went to a [NASA Social](#) event to watch a rocket launch, followed by a behind-the-scenes tour that she documented on her social media.

## "That's all I talked about for months straight."

It was actually a colleague who spotted the role at NASA JPL and thought of Raquel.

"She sent it my way because she thought I might really enjoy it. It was—I think, just everyone knowing I'd love that path before I knew myself."

Five years later, Raquel is still in love with NASA and space exploration. She hosted live coverage of the 2021 Perseverance Mars landing and—more recently—was a JPL correspondent for the Europa Clipper launch broadcast. She won the British Council Culture and Creativity Award in the US in February 2024.

"I was shocked," she says. "I was so impressed by everyone else that it was humbling to think it was going to be me. I was just excited to be there."

One of Raquel's biggest challenges at NASA is translating complex topics into terms everyone can understand and get excited about.

## "When I'm talking to scientists and engineers I really have to be honest with myself and know I understand what they're saying and that I'm able to ask questions,"

Raquel says. "Because if I can't explain a technical term right back at them, the general public won't understand either."

Taking this to the next level, Raquel also produced content in Spanish, soon after joining for *NASA en Español*. She is of Bolivian heritage but covering concepts like this in her second language took some work, she says.

"I can speak Spanish at home, but I'd never thought about technical vocabulary when it comes to talking about spacecraft and all the terms. I really studied and practised with my dad—he's an engineer."

Completing this content was the proudest moment of her career, she says.

## "It's my goal for the world to know how great space exploration truly is. The chance to communicate in multiple languages and make it accessible to a wider audience is something I always dreamed of."

Raquel was born and raised in Wyoming, before moving to Colorado to study her undergraduate degree at the University of Denver. She first attended the University of Westminster as part of a study abroad programme during her junior year, but she later returned to complete the International Broadcast Journalism MA in 2008.

Being so far away from home was hard, Raquel says, but she made some great friends on her course from all over the world. Many of them are still working in journalism and they have a huge WhatsApp group. Some of them have discussed arranging a reunion on neutral soil, though it's hard to find somewhere nobody lives. ("We were thinking Japan would be a good place, because I don't think we have anyone from Japan.") She also has very fond memories of the Harrow campus's resident cat, who really helped with home sickness ("He would come and just keep you company, but when he was ready to go, he'd let you know—he was adorable.")

Meanwhile, the course's hands-on nature taught her "self-sufficiency" in a professional sense.

"I learned how to be a presenter; I learned how to be a producer. I learned how to write and how to collaborate. I learned to work with my colleagues, which eventually translated into working with coworkers. That collaborative spirit was all possible through the work and the projects I did during my Master's."

Within four years of completing her Master's, Raquel had landed a role at 9News, Denver's leading local news channel. During her five years there, she worked on local news stories, hosted a weekly DIY show (where she was nominated for an Emmy Award!) and interviewed celebrities at red carpet events and music festivals.

One of her strangest moments during that time was her "exclusive interview" with internet cat sensation, [Lil Bub](#), live on camera. ("It's really fun, very sweet.")

From here, she landed a role as a TV news reporter and producer at TEGNA in 2017, where among other things, she played a central role in launching *Daily Blast Live*. Just two years later, she left Denver once again – this time for the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory in LA.

Raquel's time with NASA has continually inspired and surprised her, she says. Even the scale at which they work is hard to visualise until you see it with your own eyes. ("I don't know what I was expecting, but I didn't realise there were so many specialised engineers and scientists working together to make this happen.")

## There is a real "beauty" in the teamwork on display at NASA, she adds.

"It's amazing what we can do when we work together and that's why I love going to work. It's hopeful and inspiring, and I get to see the best in people every day."

And in a world where things can feel scary, it has never been more important to communicate this sense of wonder, hope and possibility to the world at large.

"I believe science communication—space exploration specifically—is beautiful in the way that it is a showcase of the best that humanity has to offer," Raquel says.

It really is a chance for thousands of people from different agencies to come together and work on a common goal, and show what humans can accomplish when they work together. And I want the public to know that we are at our best when we come together and really strive for something beyond our own Earth."