MOLLY PALMER

by Lindsey Jones ’05

The dress, the shoes, the hair—it’s all they think about for weeks leading up to the Golden Globes. And then, on awards night, it’s all they think about. “In that moment, I was Molly Palmer, not Today Show producer,” Palmer says. “Today Show’s pain was so raw. It was horrific.”

In a mixed-up Hollywood milieu in which identities are fluid, relationships are seldom long-lasting and eccentricity is the norm, knowing who you are—and especially who you are not—is crucial. The pressure to compete with The Early Show and Good Morning America might tempt someone in Palmer’s position to compromise integrity for the sake of the story, but she maintains perspective by constantly reminding herself that she’s dealing with people—not “guests.” It helps to be able to call her father, longtime NBC news correspondent and anchor John Palmer, and her mother, journalist Nancy Doyle Palmer, for advice. As an only child, she returned to her hotel room after the interview with Palmer, Maria on the phone with her dad.

“I talk to my parents every day,” she says. “It’s nice that they understand what I’m dealing with.”

Palmer’s sister Carter also knows a bit about what Molly does; she works in the entertainment industry, and the two sisters live together in Los Angeles. There are, however, some vast differences between their jobs. “Our other sister Hope makes fun of me because Carter works in this chic office and I work in a workspace, but the appeal of her job is not found in the office—it’s all over the place. And, it’s possible she would have never found what she’s really good at: something she jokingly calls “being nosy.” But you can tell from the crack in her voice as she talks about her involvement on a recent story—the murder of 8-year-old Sandra Cantu—that there’s much more to it than that.

It was up to Palmer—who spent a week holed up in the Microtel collection pond, her mother, Maria, agreed to an interview, and— Palmer walked her home, Maria braced on her arm for comfort. After Sandra’s mother barely made it through the interview, Palmer vigilantly turned the TV monitor away from the woman as the grisly footage of the murder scene flashed across the screen. And, when she realized the family could still hear what was being said through their earpieces, she jumped to action, standing with her face next to the camera filming Maria and “just had her look at me and take deep breaths.”

After Sandra’s mother barely made it through the interview, Palmer walked her home. Maria braced on her arm for comfort. As she opened the door to the mobile home—because Maria was shaking too much to use her own key—Palmer felt the excruciating clash between the responsibility of work and the reality of life as she was forced to leave Maria at home and go back to join the crew: “In that moment, I was Molly Palmer, not Today Show producer. Maria’s pain was so raw. It was horrific.”

The two women sat holding hands in folding chairs outside the hotel, the cold, suit-dark night eerily appropriate. In the moments leading up to the interview, Palmer vigilantly turned the TV monitor away from the woman as the grisly footage of the murder scene flashed across the screen. And, when she realized the family could still hear what was being said through their earpieces, she jumped to action, standing with her face next to the camera filming Maria and “just had her look at me and take deep breaths.”

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The nature of production requires expediency and open communication, so the cubicle set-up is a must. Fortunately for Palmer, she likes the people she works with.

“My co-workers are one of the reasons I love my job the most,” Palmer, she says. “Because we often work such long and odd hours together and are put in all kinds of unusual situations with one another, we are especially close and they are some of the best friends I’ve ever had. We work together and are always helping each other.”

And it’s a good thing, too, because in Palmer’s line of work, there’s a lot to be done—quickly. From tracking down NBC archive footage, getting permissions and getting statements to booking guests for the show and coordinating crew, Palmer’s job—which she describes as a “scavenger hunt”—is all over the place. And, no, her humble cubicle may not be as exotic as her sister’s posh workspace, but the appeal of her job is not found in the office—it’s found on the front lines of the stories she covers.

From the apparent glitch of the Golden Globes to the disturbing tragedy in the small town of Tracy, Palmer’s job changes daily, but humanity being the only constant. And whether the stories are tragic, exciting or uplifting, the people in front of the cameras are fortunate to have someone as grounded as Molly Palmer behind the scenes.