

The Voice, Vision, and Unapologetic Storytelling of Cillea Houghton

✍ Christine Kinori • ⌚ 1 day ago • 7 min read



Story by Christine Kinori and Kamaya Tarpley

Feature Photo : Isabella Bambagioni

Cillea Houghton, writer and visionary, lives by her own words: “I believe in the power of words and voice.” She has tapped into the soul of every work she touches and embraced the storytelling aspect of each collection of words. Readers have seen her in publications such as Variety, Good Morning America, Taste of Country, Audiofemme, and more.

The American writer turned nearly 2-year Italian transplant, and has not let oceans nor borders keep her from tantalizing our ears. She is currently the author and genius behind her blog “No One is Listening” as well as service to her audience in regards to speech writing and memory book needs.

With a resume as long as the flight to the orange groves of Italy, she is always ready to add to it with one of her services, including love stories and copywriting. Her journey is just at the beginning and we at MEKKA Magazine cannot wait to see learn more about her journey in this exclusive interview.



Photo Credit : Rachelle

How Did Your passion for Journalism start?

My love for journalism is a journey. It started when I was young, but my first interview was back when I was in high school. The experience, among others, is what really opened the door for me. Throughout high school, I started interning at a radio station and had great mentors.

The summer after I graduated from high school, my parents and I took a trip to Nashville, and I felt a connection. The connection led me to consider doing my college internship in Nashville and see if I wanted to live there. Four years later, I ended up getting an internship at Nfocus Magazine.

How Did You launch your freelance career?

Hmm, shout out to my dear friend Annie Reuter. She is an incredible Nashville writer who connected me to her editors. Annie put me in touch with the people at Taste of Country. That was my first official freelance gig, which led me to Sounds Like Nashville. After that, I started pitching other publications that I wanted to write for, such as No Depression, Tennessee Tribune. It was a domino effect where one opportunity led to another and opened many doors.

Throughout your career, you have had the chance to interview many amazing people. What are your favorite interviews that you have had?

Oh! Wow! They have all been wonderful in their own way. The first one that comes to mind is the one I did back in August 2022, in Italy. For a backstory, I had traveled to Italy in 2013, and I felt a connection. Nine years later, I thought of taking another trip to Italy. I was talking to a former editor at Variety, and he mentioned an Italian actor he knew. He asked if I would be open to interviewing the actor, and I was all in.

It was an incredible experience to interview Fabio Testi. It was a beautiful summer evening. We pulled up to his estate, and the gates opened. Suddenly, I just saw greenery, all these olive trees with dogs coming running down the hill. It felt like a scene out of a movie. His son later gave me a tour of the house, and the property had a beautiful history.

We did the interview on the back porch as the sun was setting, and although my Italian wasn't great, Fabio's son helped to translate. It was a breathtaking moment, and it was a life-affirming moment that affirmed my dream.

Despite the language barrier, it was such a pinch-me moment to connect with him and hear his story. It was a pretty amazing interview. For me, anytime I get a chance to interview people who inspire me, like Kacey Musgraves, it feels like a special moment.

Another special interview is with Bryan Galentine, right before the pandemic. Bryan was a songwriter who had ALS. He wrote and recorded his last album to preserve his voice and share the life lessons he wanted his children to know. It was a lovely interview that stuck with me. Bryan's effort to thank the people in his life and leave a legacy truly touched me.

I think the beauty of being a journalist is getting to be a lifelong student and learner and to touch other people's spirits. Their words stick and resonate with you through life.

EXCLUSIVE EDITION

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DIGITAL COVER

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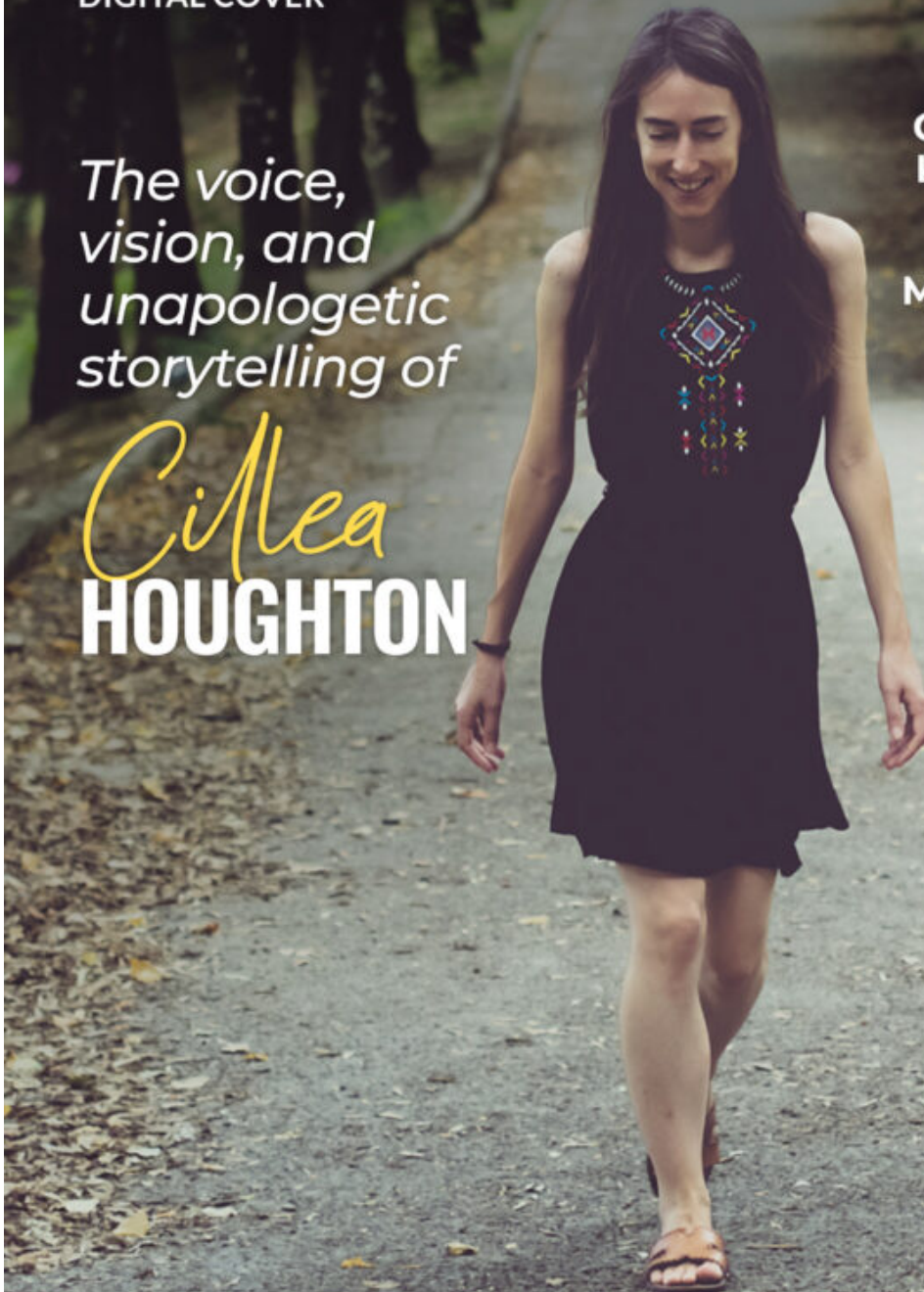
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STORY BY

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PHOTOGRAPHER

MIRIAM MAZZOTTA



What advice would you give to a young journalist who is following in your footsteps?

The first thing that comes to me is following your intuition and staying away from unethical practices. I also believe that showing up with curiosity also helps. I believe that by allowing us to interview them, people are giving us a chance to touch their story.

Secondly, listen! Be willing to let the conversation go where it needs to go. Do your research, avoid generic questions, and show empathy.

When you are not working, what do you do to relax?

Now that I live in Italy, the experience has opened up my mind in new ways. I live in Perugia, where there is a vibrant, creative, and artistic community. There is an event called The Folk Sessions, which is a weekly music and storytelling event. It makes me feel rejuvenated every time.

I also love taking walks, especially when I feel stuck. Walking and journaling help me. My love for travel and starting traditions with my friends. It always feels soul-filling.

What is it like living in Italy?

OMG! The first word that comes to me is open, and the second one is free. This is why I came here. I initially felt burned out and was working myself to the ground. After spending time in Italy back in 2013, I felt attached to the country. In the months leading to my move to Italy, it felt like my spirit was already here, and I needed to catch up to it physically.

From the second I got off the plane, I felt a sense of both physical and inner serenity. I realized I needed all those nine years away in Nashville to get to Italy. If I had done it in reverse, I wouldn't have worked. I am glad every single step in my life led to Italy. I love the passion and openness here in Italy. I am grateful, and it is a dream come true to live here for the past one and a half years. I am excited for the beautiful journey to continue.



Photo Credit: Miriam Mazzotta

What advice would you give to a young you?

Stay the course! Nashville was my North Star. It was my dream for four years. I worked towards it, and it turned into my reality. At first, it felt like a dream come true. I think when we have such a privileged job to meet with the biggest stars, it can be mind-boggling.

However, when you have been in the industry for too long, you can start to feel jaded. I would tell my younger self not to forget how amazing the journey to the dream was. Don't get jaded; appreciate the moment, savor it, and celebrate the little moments.

What is next for Cillea Houghton?

I have been doing a lot of brainstorming and manifestation lately. I recently launched a new media venture called No One is Listening. It is meant to connect people across different cultures through the power of voice. We all have our individual voices, but we are all connected by our shared experiences as human beings. That is what is next. It is my life mission, and everything else feels like a warm-up to this. I am on a mission to connect people all over the world through stories. It is a huge horizon in front of me, and I am excited to see what is on the other side.

Congratulations! Is it going to be a podcast or a blog?

Yeah! This media venture has three different branches to it. I am hoping to launch a newsletter this year. I would love to have a TV show down the road. I have been doing some live events here in Perugia. I have collaborated with Folk Sessions on an event called Night of Authentic Voice. It is all about individuals sharing their original voice instead of covers.

I recently launched a new workshop concept called The Power of Listening. It is a guide to help people learn more about their inner voice and be open to listening to each other. It is a new concept in development, but I am looking forward to seeing it grow.



Photo Credit: Miriam Mazzotta

How do you use your platform to inspire others?

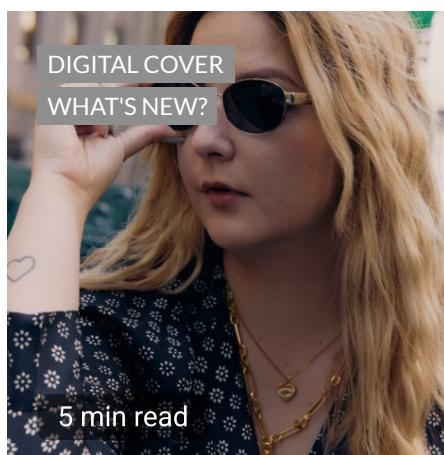
I love this question. I hope that through my voice/platform, people walk away feeling more curious and touched. Whether it is an interview or my own story, I hope it opens up more people's minds and leads to more openness and connection.

Fun fact about Cillea: her music taste is as eclectic and diverse as her writing. She listens to everyone from the raven-haired lewd maestro Alice Cooper to the bubblegum pop-princess with a slight edge, Britney Spears. Just like the aforementioned musicians, she continuously works on her craft because writing is not simply writing for the journalist – it is an everlasting passion.

Follow Cillea's journey on Instagram: @cilleahoughton, and stay connected with her on social media.

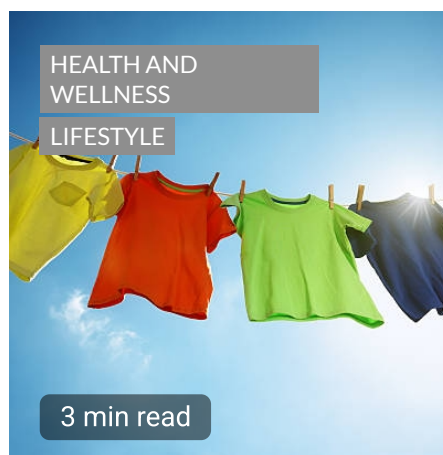
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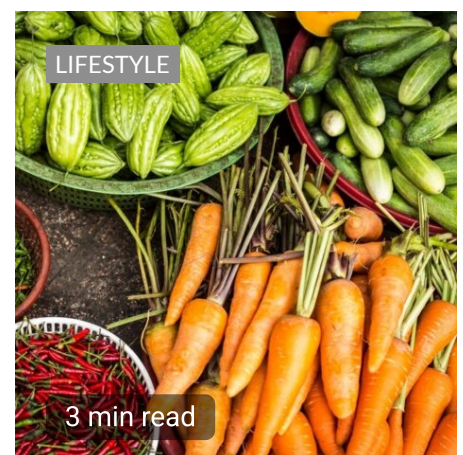
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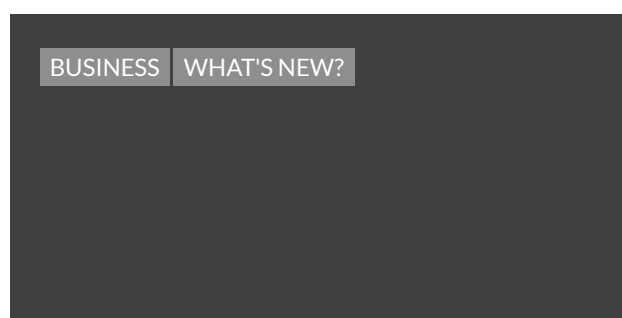
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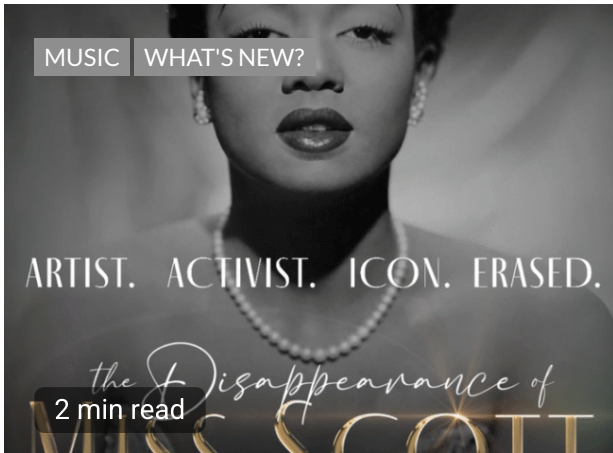
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