

The Idiot's Guide to Good Reporting

- Kathleen Alexandrou

“If a story is in you, it has got to come out.” - William Faulkner. The feeling summed up by this quote is one that I believe many writers, both young and old, can relate to. Sometimes, you just have to write. When we talk about “writing,” especially writing done by students, it’s often assumed that if writing is not an assignment, then it’s creative writing for one’s own enjoyment. The little niche of middle school, high school, and college journalism is generally overlooked. Many Marblehead citizens know of Headlight (if you didn’t, you would not be reading this), the student-run paper at Marblehead High School, but Headlight is not the only school paper in Marblehead. Both Marblehead Veterans Middle School and Marblehead Charter School have their own newspapers. I interviewed two student reporters, Alex Kerai (now a freshman at the Hobart and William Smith Colleges), and Nicole Alexandrou (an eighth grader at MVMS) in order to make more public this niche of student journalism.

Alex has been a reporter for a grand total of seven years now, starting out with the Charter School magazine. He spent four years with Headlight at Marblehead High School, even serving as editor-in-chief his senior year (along with Meredith Piela and Liam Reilly). Currently, he is on staff for the Herald at HWS.

Nicole has just begun her second year as a journalist for the MVMS Gazette, the middle school paper run by Mr. Schaffnit.

When asked what his favorite article was, Alex said: “It’s hard to pick a favorite article because I tried to do things that were different every time. I had probably four that were mainstays. I always did a recap article at the end of the year, and then Drama Fest and the Oscar issue. Everything else is different every time. At HWS I did an interview with an artist I know and one on the Starbucks controversy. I try to do things that are different every time. I think it’s a good way to practice your writing skills and not do the same thing over and over. In terms of my favorite Headlight article, I’d say my last recap one. But overall I don’t have one.”

Nicole, on the other hand, immediately responded, “I think my Les Mis one because I wrote it with a friend. It was like a summary of Les Mis.”

Alex says that over the last seven years, he’s grown as a writer and a reporter. “I approach topics differently. One thing I remember Mr. Higgins telling me with my first Oscar article (Alex’s M.O. was publishing an annual issue devoted to the Oscars) is that you want to tell them something new. I remember I was brainstorming ideas about it with him and he said, “Pick an idea and make it your own.” The biggest thing is you always look at what’s going on; you want to always approach things with a new perspective. What’s stayed the same... I don’t really know. I think you always have to evolve. Your writing style changes, but you have to maintain a certain voice that stays with you.”

At the middle school, things are a little different. Nicole says, “You go to the club, and you sit down and write pretty much. Mr. Schaffnit might say, “Someone do an article on this topic,” but

mostly you just write whatever. I think this helps me grow as a writer, because I can basically do whatever.”

Finally, I asked for any words of wisdom they had for aspiring journalists. Nicole said: “Oh I don’t know... Work hard, I guess. If you work hard, the writing gets done faster.”

Alex ended with: “Here’s three things: be observant. Always look around and see what’s going on, ‘cause that’s what will make you a good reporter and a good citizen - always knowing what’s going on. Write a lot; it doesn’t matter if it’s journalism or not, just write. That leads into the third: enjoy your school paper. It doesn’t matter if it’s high school or college, just enjoy it.”

In conclusion, it is pretty safe to say that whether it’s middle school, high school or college, two things are obvious: in order to become a better writer, you have to write - and you have to write a lot.