

A Lesson in Growth: The Stool

If there is only one aspect of my Journalism I class that I will never forget, it is irrefutably The Stool. It is fairly humble in appearance—a steel piece of metal fashioned into a skeletal frame with a flat top to it on. Installed in the middle of the seat is wooden padding to add comfort while sitting. Always, it sat at the front of the room, directly in the middle; at first glance I knew that sitting on The Stool was the speaker's (or, should I say, *sitter's*) silent tool to command the attention of their audience.

Often, my classes were characterized by my (then) Journalism I teacher (now, publications advisor), Ms. Sarah-Anne Lanman sitting on the tool, enlightening us on our journalistic freedoms as outlined in the first amendment, or the seven elements of newsworthiness. I never sat in The Stool during my time in Journalism I, and it is reasonable to understand why; I had nothing to teach, but everything to learn. Even more, the idea of ever sitting in The Stool at all seemed outlandish to me—I imagined myself sitting in front of the class, mind empty and mouth sputtering a collection of “um”s and “uh”s. I felt as if I would never have anything worth listening to. This all changed during the final day of Journalism I, when Mimi Brody, the then Editor-in-Chief of *Crier*, entered the classroom. I sat in awe as she sat on the seemingly-immortal seat, its steel frame creaking as she did so. Her eyes were searching through the small class, undoubtedly analyzing each of us. As the class stewed in reverence, Mimi invited each student to write a story for the paper's next issue.

Seeing my work published a few weeks later was a moment of absolute gratification, but even more satisfying was the process in-between; interviewing others provided me insight

regarding my own insecurities. After five years of homeschooling, transferring to public school was a shaky transformation, and the turbulence typical of high school only exacerbated this. Though I excelled academically, socially I was not always the most confident in myself. The journalistic process of connecting with those around me and gathering information, however, replaced this self-consciousness with curiosity and courage. Soon after joining my high school's newspaper staff, building relationships with people became my “thing”—honoring the stories of those I connected with is what kept me awake throughout all the late nights of writing and editing stories, and hours spent after school designing news page after news page. Knowing that my name would be attached to every story I wrote motivated me every time I needed to find “just one more source” to create the perfect narrative, and filled me with indescribable delight whenever my peers described the impact our coverage had on them, such as when we covered the state of student mental health during our year of hybrid eLearning.

It is also in that Journalism I classroom that I learned what storytelling truly meant to me: unbiasedly describing history to illustrate the perspective of everyone. *Crier's* coverage of local Black Lives Matter protests was my first practice of taking risks and maintaining balance as a journalist—despite possible retaliation from those opposed, I continued to report during the aftermath of George Floyd. As the current Editor-in-Chief, I constantly strive to continue this legacy of authenticity and challenging the status quo by empowering the voices of students of color who face marginalization at a predominantly white institution, as well as covering the growing intellectual, racial, and ideological diversity at Munster High School.

Now, as *Crier's* editor, I often find myself staring at The Stool rather than sitting on it. Even today, sitting on it feels akin to breaking a hidden rule of humility—though I now have much to teach my staff, I have equally as much to learn from them, and the craft as a whole. I am

often astounded by what I have learned in the past three and a half years, and how much of it can be attributed to my experience as a student journalist—whether it be balancing my additional workload as the editor of my church newspaper, or refining the identity I have come to discover in high school, journalism became the unwavering pillar that guided me. By extension, that steel-frame stool also became a constant figure in my ever-eventful transformation from first-year staffer to editor, and a keen reminder of the never-ending growth of a journalist.