



**JUSTINE HA**

**NSPA 2020:  
Photojournalist of the year submission**

El Estoque | Monta Vista High School | Cupertino, CA

# PERSONAL STATEMENT

As a naive sophomore walking into my school's journalism class for the first time, I was admittedly nervous. On top of it being the first day of sophomore year, I had realized how unprepared I was for the course. I had never taken Writing for Publications, my school's introduction to journalism class, during freshman year, thus I embarrassingly had very limited knowledge about the journalism world. What was a nut graph? What was an angle? I have to follow AP style – what the heck is that? When I had sat down next to all the skilled and passionate student journalists in El Estoque for the first time, it had felt like a physical form of imposter syndrome was taking over every inch of my body. Even throughout the first week of my sophomore year in El Estoque, I had constantly thought to myself, "What did I deserve to get into this publication in the first place?"

As someone who had previously thought of written articles as the basis of journalism, I have since learned that journalism is a diverse playing field. As a journalist, you have several different creative avenues to pursue the many articles you produce. Due to this creative freedom El Estoque had given me to create the stories the way I wanted to, if my scared and shy sophomore self were to look at the person that I am today, they would surely be shocked. It's safe to say that not only have I grown into a more empathetic student at my school, a responsible member in my community, and a confident person overall, but I was also able to improve my storytelling skills through journalism, most notably in photography.

When reflecting my time now as an incoming third-year member and managing editor for El Estoque, I realized that certain niches within the El Estoque community helped me grow into the photographer that I am today. More specifically, if it weren't for the editors and staff members within the sports section and the section as a whole, I honestly think I wouldn't be here writing this statement for you today.

While I never found interest in being in the sports section in the first place, I was put into the section along with the sports journalism fanatics during my sophomore year after being appointed as the visuals editor. The duties of a visual editor were to help out staff members with camera work, and due to my pre-existing passion for taking photos during my free time, it allowed me to practice using cameras more often. On top of that, being in sports gave me that extra boost to grow as a photographer. In sports, there was an emphasis to not only produce quality written articles via game reviews and sports features but to also take quality sports photos. From just those three months of being in the sports section, I had countless opportunities to attend different games from different sports. After numerous attempts of trying to follow the rule of thirds and having the subject be fully in frame, I had realized that practicing sports photography pushed me to nail down the basics – I was able to navigate the settings throughout my camera confidently, shoot without having my subjects be blurry, and help others out with their own camera needs.

My time in the sports section during my sophomore year was so unexpectedly enjoyable to the point where I had applied to become a multimedia sports section editor for my second year on staff. When I was appointed to the position, I was thrilled knowing that my chances of growing even more as a photographer were not cut short. As I would have to attend and cover sporting games all year round, consequently this would give me more opportunities to use my camera.

My basic knowledge of photography was truly tested during my junior year. As a result, I had learned to refine my skills, which in turn led me to become a more versatile photographer at the end of the school year. Not only was I practicing by attending various sporting events, but I was also attending as many school and community events as I could to diversify the subjects I was taking photos of. During my junior year, I had learned that unique photos come from adjusting and being creative – sometimes you need to get in the middle of the action to get the photo, or sometimes you need to squat down low to get that powerful low-angle shot (no matter how embarrassing you may look).

Even though I've had these past two years of actively practicing my skills in photography, my journey is still not done. I have one more year left in El Estoque and time beyond high school to truly practice and enjoy this passion of mine. I still have countless stories I want to explore and different subjects I want to photograph. While my sophomore self would be scared to pursue these new stories, I feel at ease knowing that now I have my camera strapped along my side to help explore and tell these stories with me.



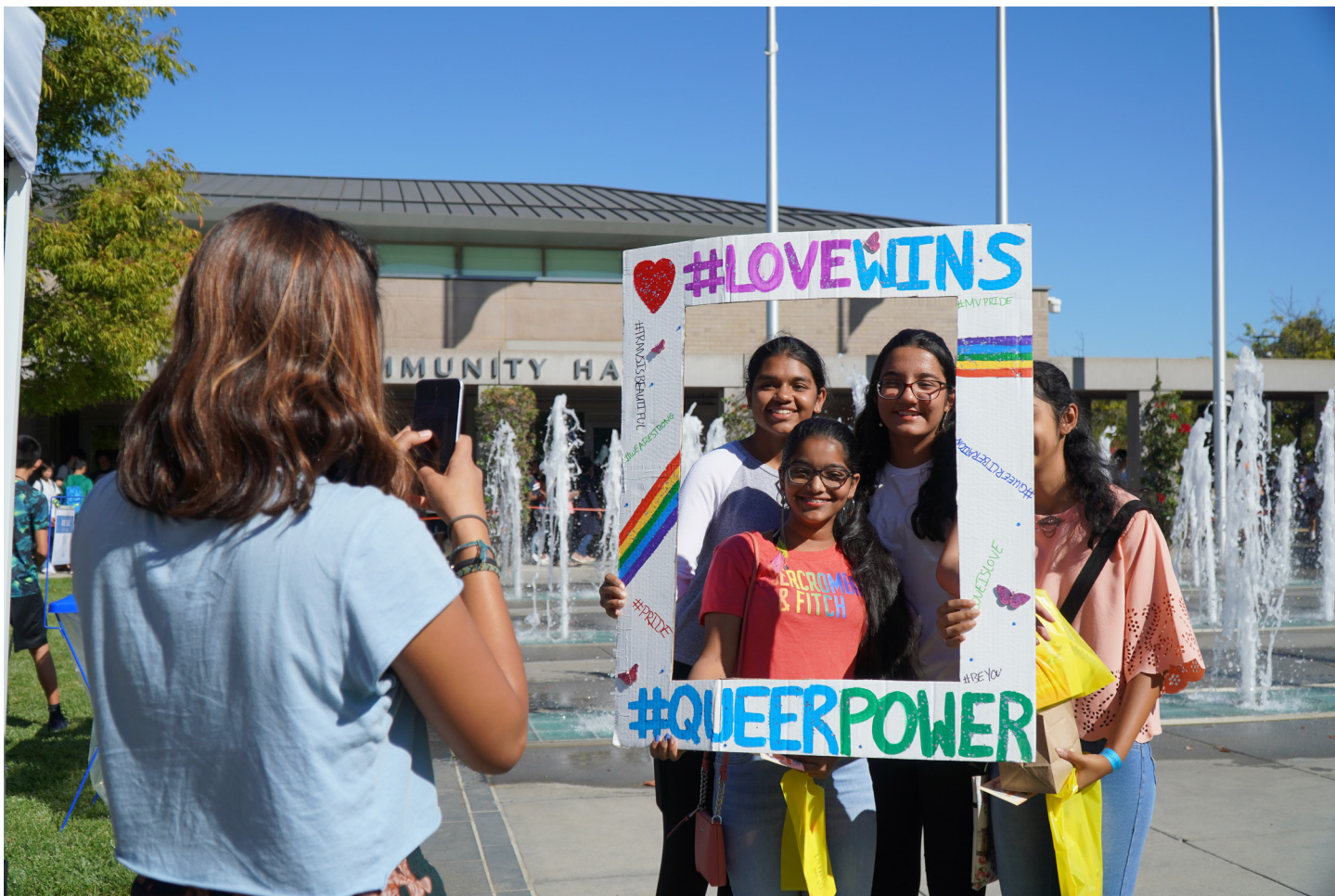


## 2021 CAN'T BE OUTDONE

At the front of the rope, junior Michael Pavlik leads the class of 2021 during a tug-of-war match against other members of the class of 2022. This tug-of-war match was one of the five different challenges Monta Vista High School (MVHS) Leadership had planned during "Clash Royal Week". At the end of the week, the class with the most challenge wins would be deemed the winner and received a trophy.

When taking this photo, I had many goals in mind: I wanted to utilize the rule of thirds (with Micheal being the subject), shallow depth of field, and leading lines. Since I was using my 18-104 f4 zoom lens for this photo, I had to take a couple steps back and zoom in (to focus in on Michael) to create the shallow depth of field and effectively frame the shot. As I wanted capture the emotions of the students behind Michael, the rope acted as a leading line in this shot as well.





## #LOVEWINS

A group of students poses for a photo with a customized photo frame at the MVHS Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) booth at Bobateeno 2019. This community-wide event allowed students from any neighboring school to get a free boba drink as well be informed of various mental health resources. Students at the event needed to receiving five different stamps from five different booths to receive the free boba drink.

I was excited to branch out from my usual sports articles/photos to write a community-based news article for El Estoque. During this event, I had practiced getting a wide variety of angles from the different people attending. As seen from this photo, I had utilized an over the shoulder shot, while maintaining focus (via a low aperture setting, which gave me a shallow depth of field) and using the rule of thirds composition method on the subjects.





## SPREADING THE LOVE

With the help of various choir groups at MVHS, students were able to celebrate the holiday of love with various Singing Valentine's performances. Students and staff were able to purchase a customized card and singing performance for anyone on campus for \$4, and on Valentine's day, different choir groups spent the whole day performing to various students who had received a Singing Valentine. For junior Daanyal Raja, he got serenaded by the tourist themed singing group in front of his AP U.S. History class.

I had used my fourth period, which was my El Estoque period, to run around and snap some pictures of the different choir groups performing. From the excitement of the singers to the embarrassing look of the person being serenaded, I am proud that I was able to get a picture that truly encompasses the feelings during Valentine's day at MVHS. Although it was a bit hectic trying to run around with different choir groups to get certain shots with different angles and students, I am overall proud of this photo as I had to get in the middle of the action.



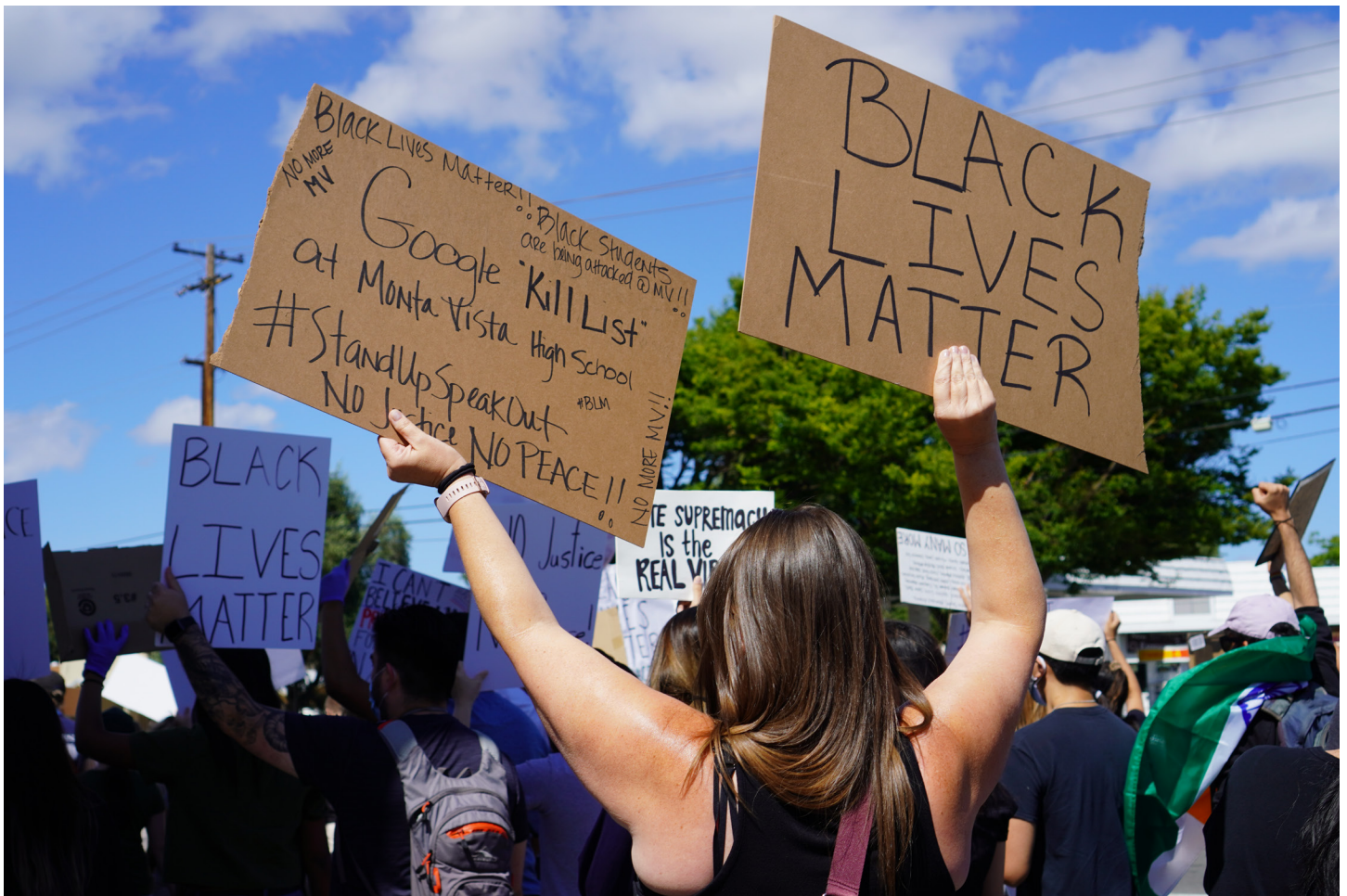


## QUICK ON YOUR FEET

After a short pass from a teammate, senior Brett Park drives for the ball in an attempt to save it from going out of play.

As soccer is played on a big field with the players dispersed everywhere, it was challenging to shoot this boys' soccer match due to me only having a short 18-104 zoom lens and not the usual telephoto lens. Due to this, I had to do a combination of moving around the field to get close to the players, as well as waiting until players were close enough to me to get a full-body action shot of them. As a photographer, I believe that this photo showcases my ability to adapt to my conditions quickly, as I was able to work with the equipment that I had to ultimately get the job done.





## SPEAKING YOUR TRUTH

A protester at the “Cupertino Solidarity March” on June 6 holds up two signs demanding justice for both the Black students at MVHS (left) and the Black community in America (right).

While it usually isn't my first instinct to take photos behind the subject, I believe that it's fitting in this instance. Without seeing their unique features and identifying who they are, I believe that this protester represents the unified outraged voice — all the Black individuals, protesters, and allies who are infuriated with the racial inequality still present within our community and overall society. I ended up taking my camera, alongside my compact 35mm prime lens, out to the protest just in case if there was anything noteworthy to take photos of, and I'm glad I was able to capture this specific moment.