

Hunter Musi

Wando High School

Tribal Tribune

Photojournalist of the Year

I decided to join my high school newspaper as a writer. In about a month, I found myself with a camera at a local rally hosted by the South Carolina Democratic Party. I was given parking spots for two satellite trucks and access to anything at the 10-hour event. As I was the only high schooler out of the ten photographers signed up, it was only me and my beaten-up Honda taking up one space next to a dozen TV vans.

Fast forward a few hours to the arrival of the first major candidate who already had hundreds of supporters lining the highway wearing Kamala Harris T-Shirts. She arrived simultaneously with a large labor union group. Suddenly, everyone wearing a press ID sprinted to try and get something from the action taking place. I soon discovered how much the other photographers appreciated my presence when I was shoved out of the way to make room for the “real” journalists, as they called themselves. The shove pushed me behind the candidate while she hugged the leader of the union group with her face turned away from the crowd. Every other photographer snapped away before realizing in shock they were all on the wrong side of the picture. Fortunately, I got dozens of images of a smiling Kamala Harris.

I was drafted. That was how I told my friends that I had joined the newspaper in my final year of high school. I had no idea how to use a camera and was under the impression I would simply be writing satirical reviews. Yet within a month, I had ended up staying after school until 10 for three days, finished four stories that missed their deadlines, and ended up being promoted to an editor. I would end up taking over editorials and pretty much anything controversial or political, but as the year went on, photography slowly became my main focus. I had begun the year not even knowing how to focus a camera and ended it giving PowerPoints on exposure and lighting to the rest of the staff. I started to do studio portraits and cover pretty much anything I could. It became a usual sight during work nights at 9:30 PM for our Editor-In-Chief and me to start screaming at each other over our lack of understanding of photography and writing. All the while, I maintained my overly obsessive love for politics that had gotten me my first assignment.

With nearly a quarter of our school being able to vote next year, it became essential to us to focus on showing events and issues that would be important to students, not necessarily ones that were filled with them. Despite being a high school newspaper, I ended up getting a press pass and got to be in the spin room through the entire 10th Democratic Debate. Going from having a local newspaper photographer shove you to that of The Washington Post was a big step up, except this time, I knew I had just as much a right to stand there as they did. I ended up getting home around midnight and editing through my 2,400 pictures before sending off the completed photo-story around 3:00 AM, which, in retrospect, was probably why I nearly failed an economics test five hours later.

Working on my school newspaper has been the greatest experience of my life. In a span of around nine months, I went from wanting to be an astrophysicist with zero interest in journalism, to by the end realizing I want to be a photojournalist. Thanks to a college essay involving way too much journalism and some politics, I'm now moving across the country and plan on spending the next four years working for the Stanford Daily.

It's rare to be taken seriously as a student journalist. But when a tear gas canister lands directly under your feet and not the professional photographer's thirty feet to the left of you, you realize you're as important and influential as any other journalist.

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Unity

2020 Democratic candidate Kamala Harris hugs Fight for \$15 marcher Taiwan Milligan as she makes her entrance to the Blue Jamboree event Oct. 5. Harris was greeted by a sea of red and yellow -- yellow shirts were worn by the large group of campaign volunteers and Harris supporters waiting for her arrival.

I worked my way to the front of a crowd of supporters only to be shoved away by a local reporter. Nonetheless, I moved to the other side and got as close as I could with my 24-105mm as the candidate met the leader of the other group.



Larger than Life

Presidential Candidate Tom Steyer engages with reporters after the debate ended. Steyer had the least amount of time speaking with seven minutes.

I made this with a 35mm lens and fifty reporters pushing me from behind. After spending several months annoying the organizers for credentials, I didn't think twice about getting close to the presidential candidate surrounded by a mob of journalists.



Appeal for Calm

South Carolina National Action Network leader James Johnson attempting to calm protesters and police forces in Marion Square.

This was the last moment of a tense protest when police asked protesters to disperse. As soon as the protest leader left, the police launched tear gas canisters and began shooting the fleeing protesters and reporters with rubber bullets.



Surrounded

Counter-Protesters inside a crowd of Black Lives Matter marchers in an intersection by Marion Square.

I used a 35mm lens to get as close as possible. In this case, it forced me to the front of a crowd surrounding two combative Trump supporters who were shouting at the Black Lives Matter protesters.



Power to the People

Black Lives Matter protester speaking to a crowd at the Charleston City Market.

Protesters were moving up a staircase to speak to the crowd gathered in the street below. The building in question has a staircase on each side meeting on a platform in the center. However, there were too many people in the way, so instead, I used a trash can as a boost and climbed up the side of the staircase to get on top behind the protest leaders with a 35mm lens.