

## Maya Ortiz

### Photographer of the Year Reflection

If I had to list the amount of things I learned about photography this year, it could take pages. It was my first year using a DSLR camera. It was my first year shooting high school activities and sports. It was my first year being one of the primary photographers for the newspaper and the yearbook staffs.

While COVID-19 changed a lot of things in our school, it ultimately opened up a lot of opportunities for me as a freshman. We had so many students in our school choosing the virtual school option, those of us on campus were able to get opportunities we might not have gotten otherwise. I took advantage of each chance I got. I shot school activities, which were kind of tough since the few kids on campus had to wear masks and interactions were extremely limited. Sports were different though. That is where kids were able to sort of forget about the everyday challenges and focus on the games. That is where I was able to especially capture moments that showed glimpses of normalcy in a year that was anything but normal.

I never realized how much people rely on facial expressions until everyone had to cover their faces. In photos you can tell the mood and attitude of people through smiling or a focused stare. This year, I learned how to portray emotion through photos when people could barely show their faces.

Sports was one of the biggest opportunities to get pure emotion. When players were on the field, they were unmasked. When I shot my first sporting event in the fall -- tennis -- I was told to "capture people's faces." I worked hard to find the right angles and the right moments to capture the action and the person. Through wins and losses, goals and errors there was always emotion on the field and in the stands. Both our girls and boys soccer teams were very successful and so I worked to capture that success as they broke records and competed in big games. I learned to move with the ball and capture key moments. So many of the games were off campus this year and a lot of kids couldn't travel or space in the stands were restricted. I was able to help bring the games and the players' success back so a lot of people could see it and catch key moments they missed.

Outside of sports I captured small moments of fun like our choir program's burrito eating contest. Everyone was unmasked trying to shove burritos in their mouths while also joking around with each other and dancing to the music playing from a speaker. It was a rare glimpse at what school used to be more like. Also, the cat dissection photos did a little the same. Of course the students were masked, but they were still interacting and working together. Those types of activities are why so most of the in-person kids chose to be at school instead of learning at home. They liked the teamwork and interaction with their classmates. The burrito eating photo and the cat dissection photo showed a glimpse of what life was like inside the building.

This abnormal year taught me the importance of photography. Photography is supposed to show the highs, lows and everything in between in ways words cannot express. Emotions cannot be correctly explained in just words, but people's energy and emotion can be captured in images to be seen forever. Years like this need to be recorded and I have learned that explaining a pandemic in stories can't make the personal connection that photos can. Photos show you people in the moment. People relate to people. To convey history and people's stories correctly, you have to show people in the moment.