

Suddenly, her voice broke. The quiet quiver in it that had been building from the moment she started explaining her situation – the hospital visits, the ragged breath, the uncooperative administration – had reached a point of no return. And it broke.

In that moment, I felt it. Her pain, her fight, her drive. I felt the words of my interviewee in a way I never had before. Upon that break, I allowed myself to put a stop to my furious notetaking and set my pencil on the desk. To listen. Because in that moment, an idea that had been swirling in my head for three years finally clicked and settled into place. I saw it more clearly than I ever have. The point of it all. How up to then, I had been content to simply write and report at, around and about people. But with that slight break, that small burst of emotion, the idea of reporting *for* people cemented firmly in my mind.

It's what I've strived to do all year, and it's what I intend to do for the rest of my life.

From analyzing disproportionate spending between the band and athletic departments to presenting unintended consequences of a seemingly harmless attendance policy, I've used this year to chase the stories and issues through which I feel I can make the most impact. I've realized I'm no longer content to report solely for the sake of information or curiosity. I've realized I've developed a hunger to make a difference, and so too did my sense of reporting for people further develop throughout this year.

I've even realized the ability to write for people doesn't always have to be accomplished through objective reporting. When the fake news and anti-journalism rhetoric was at its peak, I realized it was my voice as a reporter for a publication I love that would best convey how much this trend frightened and angered me, as well as how it should frighten and anger the student body. When a group of affluent white girls in my grade embarked on a mission trip to build homes in Puerto Rico, I realized that in an effort to educate and inform people of the problematic nature of this trip, I needed to strongly present my own minority opinion to the larger student population in a way that would create discussion amongst them, rather than trapping the ideas in a cookie-cutter feature story that could easily be glossed over. I've realized that sometimes, giving my own voice can better deliver a message or achieve a goal.

But this idea of writing for people was never more glaring in my mind than it was in March of this year, when myself and three other staffers wrote a series of articles on the upcoming school board elections. When we received a tip that a candidate had a history of homophobic writings, and the four of us subsequently began gathering facts and sources, I found it incredibly difficult to remain objective throughout the reporting process. As a gay man myself, I felt personally invested in this story in ways I had felt few times before and wanted to try to find the worst aspects of this individual and put them front and center for the world to see. What I realized in those weeks is that taking this approach is contrary to the idea of reporting for people. Not only was I taking an issue that should have been about others and making it about myself, but had I allowed my anger to fuel a published product, there would have been nowhere near as great an impact to our reporting. For it was our objectivity that made the story believable, and our cut-and-dry presentation that allowed our community to become personally invested in the story. And it's not the combined 10,000 views or countless messages we received on social media that stick with me the most. It's that my reporting created a forum for my city to come together to reject a fourth-generation Kirkwoodian whose beliefs would have harmed KHS students. Because I realized *that* was what reporting for people looked like.

It's putting aside your own personal investment to allow for the greatest impact for the community members at risk. It's telling the truths that need to be told not as you want them to be, but as they are. It's hearing the break of a voice and setting down your pencil to listen, taking in every word not just as a reporter, but as a human being, so that you can best tell the stories of the people that need it.

Stories:

1. Never Enough  
<https://www.thekirkwoodcall.com/news/2018/08/20/never-enough/>
2. Are We Your Enemy?  
<https://www.thekirkwoodcall.com/top-stories/2018/09/03/are-we-your-enemy/>
3. The Top Priority  
<https://www.thekirkwoodcall.com/top-stories/2019/03/06/the-top-priority/>
4. “Those poor kids in Africa”  
<https://www.thekirkwoodcall.com/opinion/columns/2019/04/19/those-poor-kids-in-africa/>
5. Tom Ricks School Board Controversy  
<https://www.thekirkwoodcall.com/uncategorized/2019/06/21/tom-ricks-school-board-controversy/>