

Inaaya Omer: Photojournalist of the Year Personal Statement

Photography to me is a way to capture a single moment, to preserve it; time frozen in place. My camera is an extension of me, and the only limit is one's imagination and level of persistence. How far are you willing to push the boundaries, how far are you willing to put yourself into the thick of the action. The first-hand experience journalists and specifically photographers get, is unmatched.

I began high school thinking I wanted to go into graphic design and digital media, but I didn't know much about it. I thought it was just fun and somewhat easy. In my sophomore year I joined the Media Arts English class to qualify to take graphic design as an upperclassmen, but soon after the year began I realized that my passion lay elsewhere.

Over the course of both my sophomore year and this past one as a junior, I began to explore new paths through the world of journalism, in which I wasn't confined into a single box. I had the freedom to cover any story I wanted in any way that I could imagine. I was exposed to not only the world of design, but reporting, broadcast media and last but not least photography. These paths not only became a way to explore my creativity, but to pull me into something greater than just myself.

In a media project covering protests at a local high school, students were suspended for protesting new school policies which therefore violated their first amendment rights. I was given the opportunity to hear directly from the people involved and publish my first podcast which included interviews from the students themselves, to showcase their story.

Jumping forward to more recent events, a minority student in another local high school was arrested which sparked a protest and two schoolwide walkouts led by their Black Student Union (BSU). I was fortunate enough to cover one of the events with a team of fellow student journalists to help capture the emotion and meaning behind the protest as well as dive deeper into the work that the students put to fight for their rights and for their voices to be heard.

Photography has become a way for me to help the community, regardless of the scale, to see a perspective they normally wouldn't be able to. Whether that's showcasing serious events such as the protests and walkouts, to even showing the view from the middle of a huddle of a sports team or capturing the memorable moments in which a senior spends during their final days in high school.

If there's one thing I learned these past couple years either regarding the pandemic, or experiences with family and friends, it's that time isn't promised. I can't waste a second of it, and I truly believe that this is my way of shining a light on the greater issues of our society as well as showcasing the smaller moments that mean more than one would think.