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NSPA Honor Roll Scholarship

Most third graders enjoy the newspaper for making paper footballs, for the weekend comics, for paper mache projects. But my eight-year-old self fell in love with the Philadelphia Inquirer, and eventually journalism, because of a yellow Labrador retriever. Before John Grogan wrote the bestseller "Marley and Me," he described Marley's exploits in the Philadelphia Inquirer Local News columns, which I devoured every morning along with my strawberry Pop-Tarts.

After a few months, I began to explore other sections of the paper, and what I read was, at times, shocking: I grew up in affluent, white suburbia, so articles about the homeless and the unemployed in Philadelphia were far removed from my life. I discovered years later that this is the essence of journalism--to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable--and so I fell in love, at first with a dog, and then with the world of journalism. Now, a decade later, Marley is famous throughout the world for his mischievous exploits and I still read the Inky, along with the New York Times, every morning.

Just as I began to explore other sections in the paper in third grade after familiarizing myself with the Local News section, I am now preparing to move on in the world of scholastic journalism. In six months, I begin classes at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, with a major in print journalism. I will return to the bottom of the newspaper food chain--from editor-in-chief of The Spoke to freshman contributor at the Daily Northwestern--but I could not be more excited.

Though the field of journalism undergoes significant transformation--I see tweets every day about the ever-digitizing nature of publishing--after four years on one of the country's most-recognized student papers, I believe the pen, or the keyboard, still wields mighty power. This power, to bring visibility to issues swept under the rug, to afflict the

comfortable, will not diminish with the sweeping changes afoot in the media world. Even in a world of iPads, Facebook and 24/7 news cycles, I cannot wait to write the stories that need to be told.

When asked “What do you want to do after college graduation?” I can honestly say that I have no idea. I have not, like some of my friends, picked out the medical or law school that I must attend, nor do I even know on which continent I will live. But wherever I go, and for whomever I write, I do know that I have the opportunity to make a difference through journalism. In the small world of Conestoga High School, I have seen the concrete results of my writing: a changed school policy about concussions after my sophomore investigation, anti-bullying seminars scheduled later this year as a direct consequence of The Spoke’s November cover story on cyberbullying.

The benefits of journalism clearly outweigh the costs—caffeine addiction, sleepless nights, low pay. I will gladly continue attending school board budget meetings, knowing that my writing makes a difference.