Chapter One: Introduction

This project has been a long time coming, though I didn’t know it until just about a year ago. I spent four years working at a Little Caesars when I attended undergraduate school in Montana. It was the only job I was able to get my first summer living there. The hours matched up well with my classes and when a new store manager took over a year in, the restrictions loosened up and my relationship with him allowed me to pick and choose my hours. It also provided free food to a poor college kid, which made it a little easier to make ends meet. I didn’t enjoy the work, especially when it came to dealing with customers, but when I became a manager I was able to avoid that part of the job more easily. Moving to Missouri, I landed another part-time job, this time at a newspaper. The hours weren’t great, and the job wasn’t exciting, but it provided opportunities to photograph assignments. A 30 hours per week restriction essentially starved me out of the job and lead me back to graduate school.

It was there that I unintentionally began to focus on labor stories and how jobs affect people’s lives. I followed a single father for two years as he worked various food jobs. I photographed a portrait series called “Fast Food Families,” where families described how their restaurant jobs affected their lives and posed for a portrait outside their homes. The topic was important to me because of the national discussions about stagnant wages and economic disparity. Those who opposed raising the federal minimum wage disparaged the jobs, saying they were meant for people just entering the workforce. They argued that the jobs weren’t supposed to be long-term employment. Their opinions felt like they weren’t coming from experience or facts, but from misconceptions and stereotypes. I wanted to create work that could paint a more
accurate picture of who these working people are, why they are there, and what effects these jobs are having on people, most specifically families trying to survive.

This project is in line with my greater career goals of working on stories of consequence. It’s fun to photograph sports and funny stories, but in order for my work in photojournalism to be worth the time I spend and the little money I get, it needs to be important. It needs to be work that informs people about topics that should be of great concern. Taking a photograph isn’t hard. Spending my life taking photographs that don’t carry a greater meaning than just decorating your daily news story won’t leave me feeling fulfilled. There is room to take short assignments to pay the bills, but the greater purpose is to hold society accountable for its shortcomings. This project is the realization of that purpose and the first of many stories to be told.

The research component of my project, interviewing independent photographers Mary Calvert, Darcy Padilla, and Tim Matsui about their work on sensitive subjects, was about the process of trying to tell these stories and effective methods these photographers have used to gain access to subjects. I’ve found myself interested in subject matter that feels difficult to access because of its sensitive nature and too daunting to pursue because I didn’t know where to start or how to handle myself. I didn’t know where to look to to find advice on how to go about it. These interviews, and the process of telling the story I did, were great educational experiences that will undoubtedly inform my actions going forward as a journalist.
Chapter 2: Field Notes

May 26, 2016

I sent emails to the Fight For $15 national group and the Los Angeles branch, pitching my project and asking if they could point me in the right direction or put me in contact with anyone who can help me find subjects for my project. I don’t expect these emails to actually result in anything, but they had to be sent. I also spent the afternoon looking back through @FightFor$15 tweets looking for names of possible subjects as they send out pictures with names of people fighting for a higher minimum wage. Here’s a copy of the email:

Hello,

I’m an independent visual journalist searching for a family for a story about the struggles of providing for a family while living on fast food wages. I’m interested in photographing and filming a family that lives off these wages and depicting how the wages and hours affect their lives in various ways as they try to make ends meet.

I think a majority of the press surrounding this movement has been about strikes and the like. I think it’s important for people to see more in-depth work about how these wages and jobs affect peoples lives on a more intimate level.

I just recently moved here, so I was unable to meet people during the previous marches and strikes before the new minimum wage bill was signed in. I’m trying to figure out a way to find a family to follow for this story and thought I’d reach out to you to see if you could perhaps give me direction or put me in touch with some people.
May 27, 2016

This afternoon I spent time reaching out to people in an attempt to get contact information for Albina Ardon, a woman who has worked as a cashier at McDonald’s for the past 10 years and whose husband also works in fast food. They also have three children, making them the ideal family for me to document. She has been a vocal member of the Fight For $15 movement and has briefly shared her story with the site ATTN and some other publications, which was how I found her. I don’t see anything in-depth on her and her family, save for a short video by ATTN. I’m really excited about the possibility of getting in touch with her about doing this story. I emailed both the local Fight For $15 website about getting in contact with her and ATTN, though I don’t have particularly high hopes of either of those returning my emails. I do know that she works at a McDonald’s in Jefferson Park of LA, which means I could just put boots on the ground, which is highly probable. There are a few McDonald’s around that area, but it’d just be a process of elimination to finding her.

June 8, 2016

Today I actually received a message back from the Fight For $15 movement about my inquiry about finding subjects, which was unexpected.

Hi Justin,

We apologize for the delay in getting back to you. What is your deadline for this? Do you know approximately how much time you would need? Would you want to
talk to the person beforehand, or with me, to get background on the fast-food worker?

Thanks for your interest.

Shannon

I don’t know if this will actually lead to something, but it looks promising. Things have somehow been a complete blur, dealing with a flea infestation in my house (AKA my office) thanks to my roommates dog, replacing a muffler and tailpipe that fell off my car and trying to figure out schedules with friends and family visiting town. I feel a little behind where I’d like to be.

I spent the last week in Massachusetts for my friend John’s wedding and didn’t make any progress while I was away for that trip. The fleas got worse while I was gone.

June 09, 2016

I didn’t have time to reply to the email yesterday and wanted to make sure I replied to it in the morning so it would be at the top of Shannon’s inbox. I haven’t heard anything as of yet, but I don’t expect to hear from her for at least a few days. The rest of today was spent flea bombing my apartment and cleaning everything, including bedding and furniture.

June 17, 2016

My sister was in town for the 12th-15th, which took away from research time. I’m hoping to make some progress this next week with finding interview subjects and trying to track down subjects for my project. I haven’t heard back from the Fight For $15 people and don’t want to wait for a response. My biggest distraction and stressor right now is
trying to find work and worrying about my financials. I’m attending different meet-ups with alumni and documentary film people in attempts to build a network out here. I’m also reaching out to people trying to set up coffee dates. I’m also applying for different opportunities and just searching for work a lot. Everything is just a bit of a blur. I’m trying to focus on planning my days better so I can consistently be making progress on this project.

**June 22, 2016**

Today I reached out to NPPA President Melissa Lyttle for help finding subjects for my research component. I also reached out to multimedia journalist Tim Matsui to see if he’s willing to be interviewed. Unfortunately, I received an auto reply from Matsui’s email saying he’s out of the country until August 1st and has sometimes not existent connection to the internet. That’s a little disheartening, seems as he is the only actual subject I have for the west coast.

Amazing how these days are slipping by. Feels like I’m getting so little done. Something in the present always seems to come up to derail my work, such as me coming home from a weekend trip to Mexico to find my internet down and a roommate who doesn’t care, or realize, that it’s down. Emails are slow to write and I’m always trying to prospect for work. I’m praying that I find a rhythm this next week and things really start to click. No trips planned for a while and no company expected. As long as I can keep this house from exploding, I think things will start moving forward. Even having just sent these emails, I feel like I’ve made progress. This next week I’m hoping to put feet on the ground and start looking for the McDonald’s worker in Jefferson Park that has worked...
with media before. There’s 4 or 5 McDonald’s over there and she works at the register, so I’m just going to go through them, one by one, in hopes of finding her. I’ll ask her to discuss it with me, and even if she’s not interested in doing it, she’ll probably be able to refer me to someone who might be interested.

Would really love to start on this project just so I can feel like I’m making forward progress in life. Hard spending all day on my laptop and feeling like I’ve accomplished nothing.

June 23, 2016

Today I’ve reached out to the LA Times today, amongst other publishers, through Todd Bigelow, a former staffer. Hopefully that’s the beginning of a relationship that will maybe give my project publication once it’s done. Still haven’t heard back from the Fight for $15 people. Tim Matsui replied to my email, saying he could be interviewed when he gets back around the 2nd of August. My timing with Melissa Lyttle is also off, as she left town the next day for Alaska. I’ll try again to see if she has any recommendations when she gets back. Another friend is coming to town next weekend, but hopefully there will be more progress made this next week. Would be nice to make progress on finding a subject.

June 28, 2016

I sent another email to the Fight for $15 people, asking if there had been an update and basically to remind them that I’m here. Just realized that a mentor program that I’m interested in has a deadline in a few days,
June 30, 2016

Today was a success. I finally found the time to go searching for Albina Ardon, the fast food worker I’ve read about multiple times, and I found her on my first outing. I waited at McDonald’s a couple of hours until she was able to talk to me and then I pitched my project to her. She said that I have to go through a Fight For $15 representative, having previously had a rude interview with media, and she gave me a number for a woman in her phone listed as “Lvete (union).” Ardon was super nice and friendly and I gave her my business card and told her I’d give Lvete a call. Then, while I was out getting groceries, I got a call from a Texas number while waiting in the checkout line. I let it go to voicemail and listened to it once I got out of the store. It was from Shannon, the Fight for $15 representative who I’d previously received an email from. She had heard that I’d talked to Ardon at work today and said she wanted to talk to me, though she was actually on vacation. I called her back and we talked about my project. She said that she could think of a few potential families that fit the description of what I was looking for and that she would reach out to them and get back to me this next week. She was also very friendly and a fellow Missourian from St. Louis. She asked if I was only interested in fast food workers or if there were other workers that I was interested in, and I said for the purpose of this project I was only interested in fast food workers, but I’m also interested in doing a project on home health care workers, which she was excited to hear and it sounds like she’ll be able to set me up with a project doing that after I finish the fast food project, which made me really excited.
I’m supposed to hear from her Tuesday. I’m really excited after today’s events and feel like I’ve finally beaten the hurdle of trying to find a subject. I’ve found a fixer of sorts and I can finally start a project I’ve been trying to do for almost two years but been unable to get subjects for until now.

I’m still waiting for Melissa Lyttle to get back from Alaska so I can ask her about some freelancers out here on the West Coast who’d fit the criteria of people I’m looking to interview. I tried doing a search the other day, but it felt like I was in a dingy in the ocean without oars. I’ll be trying more until I can talk to Melissa, but it’s a difficult thing to do.

July 1, 2016

While I was out on a date last night, Albina emailed me. She asked if Shannon had been in touch with me and then said as long as I was honest with her, she was open to working with me. Today I finished pitching what I was want to do and she said she’s fine with it. She said her husband isn’t a fan of being filmed, but that he’s willing to be in some. That is a little worrisome, but I made it clear that it was important to include him so that the story doesn’t look like that of a single mother and dilute the main point of the story. I told her that I’d like to wait to hear back from Shannon before moving forward seems as I’ll be hearing from her this next week and I’d rather not ruffle any feathers seems as they seemed to get a little concerned when I circumvented the group before to find Albina. I also have a friend coming in for a few days before and after the 4th of July, so I think it all works out. It just feels nice to feel like things are finally rolling along on this front.
July 6, 2016

Heard back from Shannon today, though she didn’t have any substantial information in her email. I emailed her back to let her know that Albina had given me the OK and that I want to move forward with working with her and her family.

On a separate note, my mother called me the other day to tell me that my grandmother is on her deathbed. That’s obviously thrown me off course a little bit and isn’t something I’ve been planning on. I’m more gathered with my thoughts today than I was yesterday. Don’t know what is going to happen going forward. My mother was asking if I wanted to fly up to Seattle to be there with the family, but it felt prudent to be here while finally making progress on this project and it just feels like I would just be another person to be responsible for while up there and like I’d just be in the way.

July 7, 2016

I got accepted into the YPA mentorship program with David Zentz as my mentor, which I’m really excited about. He appears to live nearby and I think working with him will be a big help with figuring out life beyond school here.

I also heard back from Melissa Lyttle today on my email asking her about potential people to interview on the West Coast for my research. She recommended Matt Black, Darcy Padilla and if I reach beyond the West Coast, Mary Calvert. I haven’t looked into contacting any of them today, but will be soon. With how hard it is to try and find someone meeting the particulars of my research, I probably will widen my search
criteria past just the West Coast because I know of a few out east already. Trying to comb
the internet for these people has proved to be a painful trap, or at least something that I
haven’t figured out the right method for.

**July 9, 2016**

My grandmother passed away yesterday. The time in between my mother telling
me and now gave me enough time to come to terms with it. There was no hope of her
getting better when mom first told me, so I just accepted it and gave grandma a final
goodbye over the phone that first day.

In project news, I’ve emailed Albina about photographing her Sunday. I didn’t
hear back from Shannon and it’s silly to wait anymore on her response when Albina has
the final say and has already OK’d me. I’m going to meet her Sunday morning at her
home on one of her days off to begin. I’m mainly hoping to just make sure we’re all on
the same page and to just start making ground on building a relationship and comfort
level with them so I can do my work without being too much of a stranger.

**July 10, 2016**

Today’s shoot went really well. I came in and immediately sat down and talked
with Albina for about half an hour, talking about the work and her life in general. After
that, I moved across the room and began shooting. I was there for about three hours
shooting photos and video. Some of the information I had heard wasn’t correct and I also
learned some new things. One thing that was wrong is that they dad and mom aren’t
really ever together because they’re working opposite shifts so they don’t need daycare.
While they do work different shifts, they also do use a babysitter and their shifts aren’t completely polar. They also all live in one bedroom because they share their two-bedroom apartment with her brother-in-law, where he pays $500 and they pay $700. It’s hard to imagine a life where you see your significant other so sparingly and when you do, you don’t get any privacy, having to share the same small room with your three children, ages 9, 7, and 3 months. I think the shoot went really well. I started to feel a little saturated at the end with my images, knowing that while I was still getting good images, the setting and clothing were all the same and wasn’t creating much variety. I also just started feeling lost with it being my first shoot and my first actual time to really discuss what her life is like. The images started feeling like a single mother (not being able to see them beside future images of the father on his own with the children or any of the other images) and I just felt a little lost in my work. I also spent a lot of time in my head thinking about how strange it was to just be able to hop into the story like I was and to be welcomed into her family’s life so quickly. Her previous experience with media outlets have made her very aware of how things work and I think it also makes her less camera aware or at least know not to stare down the lens. Still need to gather my thoughts, but I also need to shoot again soon. With my grandmother’s death, I’ve got a flight out Thursday and won’t be back until Sunday and I don’t want to start and then have a big gap between shoots and fall out of touch. I uploaded my first shoot and started my project archive on my site.

http://www.justinlstewart.com/gallery/Fast-Food-Family/G0000KsgcSql5O2Y/

C00009AyZ0R7eVvc
July 11, 2016

Having trouble breathing today after a few things happened this afternoon that have absolutely flattened me. I texted Albina earlier to see if I could come over and photograph when her husband got off work at 1pm, to which she replied “Sorry but I can't today I got a personal problem.” Two hours later I got an email from Shannon saying this:

*I'm not sure if you're receiving any of my emails. Albina said you emailed her to meet up, but that she was no longer available to do the interview. Below are a couple of single parents, who also work in fast food. Please let me know that you've received this, and if you would like to connect with either of them, or if we need to find someone else. Best, Shannon*

*Victor Calagua is a 54 year-old Domino’s worker at two different stores. He is saving for his daughter, who is going to college soon. Victor predominantly speaks Spanish and is off on Thursday and Friday.*

*Melina Ramirez, 25, has worked at McDonald's for 3 years. She makes a dollar above the state minimum wage, but struggles to support her 2 year-old daughter on her wages. Melina is available Wednesday after 3:30 and Thursday/Friday after 2pm.*

I was shocked and asked for clarification on what had happened. I also explained how well yesterday had gone and how Albina had given me her number. I also said that I had fears with both of the new subjects, one being that they were both single parents and that using a single parent will dilute the effectiveness of the real story to shine through
and also a newer worry, one related to the political and social climate, one where perhaps using Hispanic subjects won’t be as effective to those who already have their minds made up about minimum wage and fast food workers and view Hispanics as immigrants and leeches on the US support system. I also repeatedly said how shocked and dumbfounded I was by this loss and would really appreciate some clarification on what just happened. I’m guessing the push back may have come from Albina’s brother-in-law, who is their roommate in the house and who seemed a bit shocked to see me yesterday. I don’t know if things were explained to him but he kept his distance yesterday and stayed in his room and perhaps this is a result of discomfort for him. I don’t know. That’s the hardest thing about projects like this; you may be focusing on one or two people, but other people are always pulled into the story because they’re a part of their life and you’re always having to negotiate with new people.

In this instance, I’m not sure that I’ll get the chance to negotiate and it’s wrecking me. This is the cycle I’ve face over the past two years of trying to do this story and this is the first time I’ve actually gotten to shoot and it’s been with someone who knew what was going on and seemed very aware of what she was getting into. If this can’t work, it just almost feels like nothing can work, like I can’t ask this of people and actually hope to get it. Part of me wonders if that means a restructuring of the project, making it different to work with the access I can get from various people. Maybe it’s back to portraits paired with interviews. Maybe it’s shifting away from fast food workers and over to home health care workers, which has been on my mind lately, think that the career may be more welcoming for empathy from viewers.
I don’t know. I just feel devastated right now and wanna throw my hands in the air or my camera into the ground.

Just trying to keep faith that things will go better tomorrow and this is all just a misunderstanding.

July 12, 2016

Heard back briefly from Shannon today, saying that Albina said there are extenuating circumstance and that they’ll be talking later this week. This made me feel a little better, but still not terribly hopeful. I don’t know what the deal is.

July 14, 2016

Another brief email from Shannon today, saying she had briefly spoken with Albina the day before and Albina said she had enjoyed speaking with me but that she wasn’t sure she had time for the project. I really think this is related to the brother-in-law feeling uncomfortable to some degree, as I repeatedly checked with Albina to see if she could handle the commitment of this story, discussing how much it was going to demand of them to make sure that something like this didn’t happen. She understood, and I think it’s just an easy excuse to cover up someone else’s issues. Either way, it doesn’t matter. I’m headed to Seattle for the weekend to see family and attend my grandmother’s funeral. At least that’ll be a distraction from this mess.

July 18, 2016
Since last week, my grandmother died and was buried, my roommate let our internet get shut off, and my subject has bailed on me. Spent the last four days in Seattle for the funeral.

My contact with Fight for $15 said she is talking with another family for me. I just emailed her and thanked her and asked her if I could meet up with her for lunch sometime, hoping to discuss the project and just make my presence and determination better known.

I guess I'm going to have to start working from a coffee shop for a while. My roommate has my hands tied with this internet issue and the only way I can fix it is by paying a bunch of money I don't owe and can't afford to for a bill that's not mine or to let it works itself out.

This week I'm hoping to reach out to those people that Melissa Lyttle suggested for my interviews. I also have my first meeting Wednesday for the YPA mentorship that I was accepted into. Just trying not to fall into complete despair about losing my subject.

Today I'm sitting on my rooftop with my roommates dog and mine as I bug bomb the apartment, hoping to put the final nail in these fleas coffin.

Hopefully I'll have better news next week.

July 20, 2016

Shannon emailed me yesterday saying she has a couple other subjects that might work, but their descriptions don’t fit the criteria of my story. I told her and my committee that I’d like to switch the subject matter over to home health care workers because they are a more sympathetic subject that require less criteria for me to work with. Shannon and
I had discussed the possibility of a project like this down the road, so hopefully this won’t be too hard or a transition. Would it be crazy to change the subject of this story from fast food workers to home health care workers? I’ve been thinking about that a lot lately following conversations and just knowing that I have an in through the Fight for $15 movement.

Fast Food workers have been the face of the minimum wage fight, but I don't think many people respect that job and I fear that the job may just turn them off the story without giving it a chance. I think it would be hard for someone to not look into a story about people who care for others but struggle to care for themselves. It's a story that would evoke more empathy, and shine light on something that hasn't been given as much play in the media.

I'm just spinning my gears trying to figure this all out. I've been thinking about trying another portrait series like I did in advanced techniques (http://justinstewartphotography.blogspot.com/p/advance-techniques.html) because it would be less demanding of people and I have a great in to get to people, and I just really enjoy that work. Maybe it's broadened to be the face of minimum wage.

My Fight for $15 lady came back with more options for the fast food version, but none of them fit the bill. I don't think I'd have to be so picky with people working in home health care. I think the biggest hurdle would be getting approval from the people they care for.

Let me know what you think.

July 22, 2016
Apparently health care workers have their own organization. I had been under the impressions that Shannon was working with them too, but she said she could introduce me to the person to talk to at SEIU 2015, the health care organization.

July 27, 2016

Made contact with Lizette Escobedo at SEIU 2015 today about working potentially finding a subject for the healthcare story through them. I got a quick reply from her asking what the story would be used for and where it would be published. So, I guess that’s a start. Back to the waiting game.

August 4, 2016

Just interviewed Tim Matsui this morning. I also got a phone call set up with health care union organizers Monday to discuss my project after I reached back out to Lizette, having not heard from her in about a week or so. In other news, I temporarily have Internet. For how long, who knows?

August 9, 2016

I didn’t send out an update last week because there wasn't really any progress to be presented. Now, I have a little progress.

I interviewed Tim Matsui for the research part of my project. I also got in contact with Mary Calvert and Darcy Padilla, who both said they're busy in August but should be able to talk after Labor Day. I reach out to Matt Black as well, but haven't heard back.
Yesterday I had a conference call with the home health care union, where I pitched my project. They said they'd take it to the higher ups to see if they can get a green light and then they could probably find me a subject within a week. The call went well, so I'm hopeful. Wish I had more to report, but that's about it.

August 22, 2016

There's not too much progress to report. I seem to have been ok'd by the SEIU 2015 healthcare workers group, so they're looking for subjects for me this week. Should I be lucky enough, I'll starting filming/photographing this next week. Fingers crossed. Nothing new to update on otherwise.

I'm in the final week on my mentorship program here in LA, and am eager to finish that up. Didn't end up as beneficial of an experience as I hoped for, but if nothing else, it got me out there shooting and working on other things. And it gave me a little room to play with photography, which is always healthy.

Feels weird not to be returning to classes.

September 26, 2016

I interviewed Mary Calvert for my research this last week. I also blew the recording, missing the final step on this 3-step phone app, so I have no recording. I realized it as soon as the interview ended and scrambled to write down all the major points of our conversation which I can revisit later when it comes to writing the piece. As a whole, the interview wasn't terribly productive. I have an interview with Darcy Padilla
coming up on the 7th. I need to reach out to Carey Wagner and Christopher Capozziello about being interviewed for my research.

Waiting until next Monday to contact my subject about access to her other client. Feeling anxious about it all and just frustrated by all the hurdles with communication and access.

The Atlantic just accepted a proposal of mine to do a photo story on some subjects I had previously mentioned finding through Fight for $15, the couple from Missouri who is living out of their car while they both work fast food jobs. I'm hoping to start shooting that by the end of this week. That's due by November 18th.

I'd be lying if I didn't say I wasn't thinking about if that could be my master's project, especially with the various difficulties I've been facing on this health care front.

I've also lost internet access at my house again. The first time that happened it really knocked me off my field notes regimen and I am way behind on that now.

And that's about where I am. When I'm not working on this, I'm trying to find work. It's tough, but getting a little better.

Mary did say I could call again if I had any more questions.

The Missouri couple moved out here after the minimum wage law in California passed. They thought they'd be heading into a better situation where they could make more money, but didn't fully understand the cost of living differences. They're currently working at Burger King and Taco Bell, I believe, and living out of their car. They cook meals at friend's places.
I still have to wait another week to reach out to the health care worker again because she said to contact her in two weeks after her client had finished with surgery and was in better condition.

I'm moving as fast as I'm allowed, it's just a process. I'm definitely not delaying anything, save for maybe interviewing people for the research side. Working through these organizations is a slow thing. They have to put feelers out and wait for something to come back, and I'm not at the top of their to-do list. They're also just stretched thin, so they have a lot going on.

It really sucks, but it is what it is.

October 10, 2016

In good news, I'm getting lots of work one week into October, which means my financial bleeding has been stopped for a bit – as long as everyone pays.

I was supposed to interview Darcy Padilla this past Friday, but she ended up having to cancel on me due to work and a busy schedule. She wants to reschedule for Dec. 1st or 2nd.

My story for The Atlantic also fell through. I ended up meeting with the couple, but my Fight for $15 representative apparently didn't get the message across well enough that this was going to take some time. Their situation had gotten worse since I first learned of it and they were just feeling overly vulnerable – too much so to be followed by a camera, which is understandable. This is the couple that was living out of their car while working at a McDonald's. Since I learned about them, their car broke down and they've been intermittently living off the street/out of hotel rooms.
I'm hoping to reach out to my health care subject this afternoon to see if her second patient was willing to be photographed, though right now, I'm still trying to salvage this issue with the other story.

My Fight for $15 representative is trying to talk my original subject, Albina, the woman who shares a two bedroom apartment with her husband, three children, and brother in law. She's also looking into some other possibilities. I'm hoping to have another story to re-pitch to *The Atlantic* so that I can still be a part of their project and get my piece published. My worry with losing my story, besides not being a part of that series and getting paid, is that it will flood the market with stories similar to my work and therefore make it nearly impossible to sell any other story I might do in a similar vein.

So, right now, I'm also waiting to hear back from my F4$15 rep so I can re-pitch to *The Atlantic* and salvage that opportunity.

That's where I'm at.

**October 20, 2016**

Talked with Francisco this morning about the project, along with an interpreter. He seems to have decent English and to be interested in the project. He said to contact him later after he is able to talk to his wife. I talked with Shannon afterwards and she said she’d talk with him tonight. We’ll see how it goes, but he sounded like he was willing to be photographed for this.

**October 28, 2016**
Had my first shoot with my new family last night. I actually think they are almost as good of a subject as Albina and her family were. They live in a one bedroom apartment in South L.A. They also share a bedroom with their children and they have stacks of clothing in the corner of the bedroom and a bathtub full of clothing because there's just not enough room to store items for four people.

The bad news is that it seems that every shoot I do needs to be accompanied by a person from Fight for $15, which is a hard work around. I photographed for four hours last night. The biggest issue with the Fight for $15 person is that they're there and basically bore and also a human, so my person played and interacted with the children for a large portion of that time, which is obviously disruptive to my work.

Because Fight for $15 is so restrictive, I also have to work through them to schedule shoots with the family, which can be an extremely slow process. My biggest worry is just not getting in enough shoots by Nov. 18th, when *The Atlantic* wants the finished projects.

I just sent an email to withdraw from the Sports Shooter Academy, which is taking place next week, because I don't think I can spare the time. I also have a heavy portrait series assignment that is sending me 2 hours in every direction of Los Angeles to get multiple portraits (which will take days), so it just doesn't seem feasible. The workshop can be done another year. The project and the new client are much more important to me.

So, my main stressor is just getting this project done and making sure it's good, which is really hard when I have another human attached to my hip and an organization controlling my access to my subjects. I was hoping they'd only be with me for the first
Shoot, but it sounds like they want it to be every shoot. Maybe that will change when the
subjects are become more obviously comfortable with the project, but at the moment, I'm
on a tight leash. I don't think Shannon, my main handler, has forgiven me for the first
time I photographed Albina, when Albina personally invited me and I worked around the
Fight for $15 union.

And no need to wade into the pictures if you don't want to. I just like to give the
option. I made a couple usable frames last night. Hopefully I'll make more and better
ones. Hopefully I'll get more chances to shoot than I think I will. Right now, that's a
worry of mine. The husband speaks English, but there's a lot he doesn't grasp, so it's a
little hard explaining the process and the why to him.

They're a very welcoming family, though, and nice to be around. Hopefully we
make it past some of these hurdles and I get a longer leash.

So it goes.

Link to the shoot: http://www.justinlstewart.com/gallery/FranciscoFamily-
TheAtlantic/G0000yc3230ZNJ5Q/C00009AyZ0R7eVvc

Also, because of the chaos of all of this, there will not be a video portion. With
such limited access, it's too much. I really have to focus on making good images. There's
just too much out of my hands.

November 14, 2016

I'm soldiering on with my project. It sounds like I have an extension from The
Atlantic to keep working past the due date. I'm not exactly sure how long, but they asked
me to check back in on the 23rd.
I think the toughest part of this project right now is trying to make intimate images. I'm only allowed to shoot with a Fight for $15 handler and I think it's really hard for my main subject, Francisco, to be completely at ease with both of us around. It's a tough situation. I think I've made some good images, but I don't know how much intimacy is showing through.

More images up from my latest shoot in the project gallery, if you're interested:

http://www.justinlstewart.com/gallery/FranciscoFamily-TheAtlantic/

G0000yc323OZNi5Q/C00009AyZ0R7eVvc

As for interviews, I'm waiting to conduct my next one around Dec. 3rd, which feels like it's rapidly approaching.

November 28, 2016

Been a long two week drought of not shooting, but I got in an early shoot with Francisco's family this morning and am going to photograph him at a Fight for $15 strike early downtown tomorrow morning.

Jackie had asked for a downloadable folder of my shoots. My previous links didn't seem to work, so here's a WeTransfer download for her and anyone else if interested: https://we.tl/lbUKTjsvnT

Not sure where I stand with The Atlantic right now. Think they're waiting on my latest update, which I'm going to give them tomorrow after my shoot. Just trying to focus on every opportunity I get to shoot and not worry about the rest.

December 12, 2016
It's been 12 days since I heard from Fight for $15, so I reached out to my handler
and am waiting to hear back. We were supposed to talk last week, but that never came of
fruition. *The Atlantic* is hoping my project will be ready to publish mid-December. I feel
like I'm a few sessions away.

After five months of back and forth, trying to find a time when Darcy Padilla
wasn't busy, I finally interviewed her yesterday. My recording app worked this time
(thank God) and I think it was a great interview. I haven't transcribed it yet.

I'm starting to wonder about the structure of things I turn in as the professional
project seems a bit more ambiguous to me than the other options. Am I correct in seeing
it as a much smaller turn in that the other master's options? I believe it's the proposal, lit
review, field notes all compiled together. Will it then be the professional project put at the
end?

It's nice to be at least thinking about these things. I'm eager to close the door on
this and to turn all my focus towards work and survival.

**December 15, 2016**

Last night I was able to shoot for the first time in two weeks. Shannon, my
handler, told me that she thinks Francisco is wearing down. I'm trying to get another
shoot, but last night may have been my last. Thought that was noteworthy information to
pass on.

**December 18, 2016**
It sounds as if I could maybe photograph Francisco at Church next week or before the holidays, but I'd be limited to about half an hour. I'm asking *The Atlantic* what their thoughts are, but I'd obviously also like your thoughts - any thoughts I can get from my committee - on where my photographing stands and if the project works with what I have shot.

It's been a blur of a process and it's hard for me to digest my project and how complete or incomplete it appears. I only know that my opportunities to photograph are closing and my subjects/handler are feeling worn.


They've published the first two stories already and I feel pretty certain that they'll accept and publish mine now. It's just coming to a place where I have to decide where I'm happy or finished, which is difficult to do with how this process has been. I just see a blob of photos now and need help seeing what I have.

**December 21, 2016**

*The Atlantic* agreed with me that I had probably reached a saturation point with shooting, so I just finished editing 88 captioned photographs together and sent them off to them.

If all goes well, the story will be published within the next couple weeks (Maybe Christmas Eve!).
Chapter 3: Evaluation

It’s hard to say how I exactly feel about the product of my work. On one hand, I think I did well considering the restraints with which I was faced. On the other hand, had I been without those constraints, I think the final product could have been much stronger.

I gained access to this story through the Fight for $15 organization, which is a union of fast food workers partially responsible for California and other states raising their minimum wages. I first contacted the group while I lived in Missouri and was trying to photograph a story like Francisco’s, but their office there was unresponsive. After moving to Los Angeles in May of 2016, I reached out to the organization here and received a response after a few weeks, which would begin the 6 months of negotiations and work for this project.

Fight for $15’s control over my relationship with Francisco and his family inevitably changed the dynamic. It was mandatory that a Fight for $15 representative always be present while I was working, which created a feeling that I was untrustworthy — that without their surveillance, I might do something to make the family uncomfortable. That feeling was most present during times when I would show up to photograph at Francisco’s house before my handler did. He would be slow to open the
door and would ask where the handler was, often giving them a call as he opened the
door. It was jarring for me, considering that I had a comfortable and friendly relationship
with the family besides those brief moments.

I was also forbidden from having direct contact with the family through phone or
email. Every shoot had to be scheduled through my handler and that distanced me from
the family and also created great inconveniences in my own life. I would be notified of
the opportunity to shoot less than 24 hours before hand usually. That made it almost
impossible to plan anything in my personal or professional life, as the opportunities to
photograph were sparse and if I was unable to photograph when the chance was given, it
might be weeks before my next opportunity.

My sessions with the family were limited to a couple hours. That time limit
became an issue when most of my sessions were interrupted by my handler interacting
with Francisco’s family, distracting them and becoming a part of the story theirselves. It
was hard to photograph the family living their lives with another person besides myself
being added to the equation.

Another issue that came with the handler was their inability to accurately describe
my project to potential subjects. Before landing on Francisco’s family, I was told another
homeless couple had agreed to be documented for the project. I then pitched that project
to *The Atlantic*, which they accepted. When I drove an hour to meet with the couple the
first time, I sat down and explained the project to them and what it entailed. We spoke for
about 20 minutes. After they signed releases, my handler said they were all going to talk
over dinner and she’d let me know the next time I could meet up to photograph them.
When she did contact me, she was doing so to inform me that she had failed to properly
explain the project to the couple and they were withdrawing from the project because they were feeling too vulnerable at the moment. I obviously sympathized with them and harbored no animosity, but it was one of multiple issues that arose out of miscommunication due to Fight for $15’s insistence that they be the middleman between myself and subjects.

All of that lead me to better understand some of the ways working with an organization can go awry. It’s not that Fight for $15 is a bad organization by any means. They worked hard to help me and dedicated their resources to help me share Francisco’s story. They’re just a tough organization to work with because of restrictions placed on interactions with their union members. In contrast, their sister union, SEIU 2015, was very open and eager to work with me. My interaction with them came about when I explored the possibility of photographing home healthcare aides instead of fast food workers. Before sending me possible subjects, we had a conference call, and they asked specifics about my project and what I was looking for in potential subjects. They gave me a variety of potential subjects and then sent me the phone number of the person I selected to work out my coverage with that person. They were completely trusting of me and gave me the freedom to negotiate my access, unfettered, with my subject. I ended up working with Fight for $15 in the end after The Atlantic turned down my proposal about my SEIU2015 subject and accepted the proposal about the homeless Fight for $15 couple, who had yet to withdraw from the project.

I feel really fortunate to have accomplished my goal of publishing my work in a national publication. It’s a well respected publication and gave Francisco’s family’s story a wide viewership, which is all that any photographer can really ask for of their work.
This was the first time I have ever set out on my own with a project and been able to get it published, which is empowering. This process was unique in that my project just so happened to fall in line with a series that *The Atlantic* was already looking to publish.

Through both interviews and the process of creating this story, I learned that doing work like this is about patience, persistence, and really wanting to tell the story. None of the people I interviewed made their stories sound like they just fell into their lap and happened, which was certainly my experience with this story. I have been trying to find a family to document for a few years, and even after I made contact with Fight for $15, it still took six months to find suitable subjects. Doing this work is not easy and it certainly tests one’s patience and dedication.
Chapter 4: Physical Evidence

Please refer to the Media Folder and find enclosed the .PDF file American Dreams, Blue Collar Realities book. Per discussion with committee chair Jackie Bell, the final book should be included as the Abundant Physical Evidence for the project.
Chapter 5: Analysis

As a young independent photojournalist who wants to work on stories of weight, I decided to seek out the advice of those that have gone before me. I wanted to know how people working independent of well-known magazines and newspapers gained the trust of subjects in volatile situations in order to document them and share their struggles. Without the power of saying that they work for someone like *The New York Times*, how did their subjects trust them to be credible caretakers of their stories?

For these purposes, I interviewed three respected independent photojournalists known for working on difficult stories regarding topics such as sexual assault, AIDS, and prostitution to better understand how photographers working independent of publications are able to tell personal stories on sensitive topics.

Tim Matsui has worked on stories involving human trafficking, sexual assault, and prostitution. Darcy Padilla is best known for the 21 years she spent documenting a family affected by AIDS and has also worked on stories of the homeless and imprisoned. Mary F. Calvert documented multiple stories regarding sexual assault and other sensitive topics. Each of these photographers received numerous awards for their work, including recognition from the World Press Photo Awards and Pictures of the Year International.

Each person sees their title and style of work slightly different from one another — Padilla being more apt to call herself a documentary photographer, Matsui a multimedia or visual journalist, and Calvert the most likely to claim the title of photojournalist — but all their work share the common themes of telling independently produced and difficult stories.
Publications Help, But Aren’t Everything

When asked about the difficulties of gaining access and permission to photograph, Matsui and Padilla agreed that it’s nice to have the backing of a publication when approaching institutions like a hospital or prison. While it can be helpful, Padilla said it has never hindered her. “In my head it’s just never mattered to me, which is possibly why it’s never mattered to the people I’ve asked permission for to document them or to get access to a hospital for my purposes,” Padilla said.

As an undergraduate student at San Francisco State University, Darcy Padilla tried to gain access to photograph in a prison in Vacaville, California where there was an AIDS ward separating HIV positive inmates from the rest. Padilla described calling the public information officer at first, asking for access that was denied due to some sort of construction that put the facilities on lockdown. She said she gave the officer weekly calls after that, checking in on how he was and asking again if there was an opportunity to come photograph. “And this goes on for six months. He’s had TV crews go in and other photographers who had credentials, who had people behind them. And so finally I called one day and he said, ‘Look Darcy, I really want to be able to let you come in and do this project, but I just need this from you. I need to say that you work for someone.’” Padilla solved this issue by approaching an editor at the United Press International wire service, Terry Smith, whom had published “one to two” of her photographs before. She told Smith about the project she wanted to do and the stipulation of needing to say she was working for someone, even just as an independent photographer. “So he writes me a
letter that says I’m great, I work for him all the time, do whatever you can to help her, we’re interested in this story… And that’s the letter that gets me access.”

Asked about whether she thought having a publication backing your work made it easier to gain access, Calvert said she doesn’t think it really matters. The only difference she pointed out was how it’s easier for independent photographers to photograph their own projects than it is for staff photographers, being unburdened by daily assignments. Staff photographers, though, she said, have a simpler path to getting their work published because they already have a publication.

Matsui said, “Yeah it’s nice to have that, ‘Hey! I’m working for The New York Times’ or Newsweek or whatever, to be able to say I’m with something, that I’m with some institution is nice. It gives you credibility right off the bat. Now I can say, ‘Yeah, I’m shopping this around. I have interest from X, Y, and Z. I’ve worked for A, B, and C. Here’s my website. Here’s my clips. Here’s my resume.’”

**Prior Work As Assurance**

All of the photographers recognized that their websites and previous work served as part of their credibility when working independently. Working on her story about sexual assault in the military, Calvert would approach potential subjects after their hearings on Capital Hill regarding the assaults. Calvert was straightforward with the women, describing her project and what she was asking of them. She’d give them her business card and if they weren’t interested, she’d leave it at that and move on to the next person.
Matsui admitted that younger photographers might not have the portfolio to back
themselves up, and that’s where research comes in handy. “So now I have that, but before
I didn’t. It came down to me basically doing the research, asking for the time and
knowledge of experts so I could bone up on things. Then, walking in to a situation
saying ‘Look, I know all these things about what you’re doing and this is the vision I
have for the story. Can you help me with this?’” He also spoke to the importance of
taking the time to get to know subjects and letting them know that you are helping them
share their story.

**Personal Investment**

The photographers also agreed on the importance of being invested in the story
one is trying to tell. “You have to have the desire to tell an important story, you have to
care about that story, and then you have to have patience to find the right person or people
that you’re going to follow,” Padilla said.

Calvert pointed to her “Missing in Action: Homeless Women Veterans” project as
an instance where going to events led to connections that would make for more personal
introductions, avoiding the possibility of being another email lost in some organization’s
inbox. Calvert said she worries that younger photojournalists may depend too heavily on
texts and emails in this digital age, missing out on more effective opportunities made
possible through direct contact with people.

Matsui’s interest in sexual violence came after he was asked to help with an
outdoor program after a teacher being investigated for inappropriate conduct with a
student died of suicide. “I found a polarized, traumatized community. And that opened
my eyes to something. I started talking about it with my peers and after I had that interview with that director, I had a greater context and understanding of what these students had been going through. That changed my language when I was talking about the issue with my peers, such that I became basically like a lighthouse. I became a safe person to disclose to. So I started to learn how many of my friends had been raped or abused or assaulted as children. It was through that that I formed a personal interest because I was going through a transformation. And I think that you’ll find people who are deeply invested in projects, they’ve got something in their life that gives them a personal meaning.”

**Innate Quality Or Insider Status**

None of the photographers felt that they had any sort of innate quality or insider status that made their subjects more apt to work with them. Calvert said that maybe the fact that she was a woman made some of her sexual abuse subjects more comfortable working with her, as some would close off when around men.

Matsui didn’t feel that he had any specific characteristic that made people likely to work with him, but his extensive knowledge about the topics, specifically sexual abuse, was an aid in both proving that he cared about the topic and being knowledgable enough to not accidentally retraumatize his subjects while interviewing them.

Before working on her 21 year-long story, “Family Love,” Padilla was following a team of doctors for a year working at a hotel full of people suffering from AIDS, the hotel where Padilla would meet the family she documented. Padilla found that her path of following these doctors opened a door for her into this whole other world, where she
gained some degree of credibility through being associated with the doctors, occasionally visiting the hotel without them. “That’s a great way to have access to a story that you care about, working with people who are working already in that environment. It’s almost presumptuous to think that you could just knock on the front door of a hotel and walk in and do it. I’m sure people did but, I think it’s always really respectful to go the route of somebody who is already a part of that world in some capacity, whether it be a social worker, a nurse, a doctor, somebody who works there. You need somebody to vouch for you. I think when you’re a journalist, you have The New York Times to vouch for you or a great newspaper behind you. But when you’re a documentary photographer, you really need different kinds of acceptance and you’re constantly explaining to people what you’re doing. And the irony of all this is that stories change, so you hope that that’s what you end up doing.”

Why?

I chose to interview independent photographers specifically because it’s the field of photojournalism that’s growing. Newspapers have been dramatically reducing staffs for years and photo staffs have born the brunt of those reductions according to a report from the Pew Research Center, published at the end of 2013. A 2015 study done by World Press Photo, the University of Stirling and Oxford University’s Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism of 1,556 photographers from over 100 countries showed that 60% of the respondents were independently employed and 84% worked in some sort of documentary role. Even the President of the NPPA, Melissa Lyttle, is an independent photographer.
Publications like *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* regularly utilize independent photographers, with the Post even creating their own “Talent Network” to find independent reporters and photographers across the country. Those are two of the numerous publications dotting the US and the world looking for independent contributors using various tools, including Blink, the phone application that connects photographers with companies through geolocation.

There are loads of young photojournalists vying for the chance to learn at newspapers and limited opportunities. As a student, I’ve submitted over 40 applications to various newspaper internship programs over the past few years without earning the opportunity to interview for one. There are loads of young photojournalists vying for the chance to learn at newspapers and limited opportunities. Maybe someone who doesn’t get one of those opportunities, or even the fortune of studying journalism at a university, can read this and learn something that helps them tell an important story.

I want to end with a thought from Padilla that applies to all of us working to share people’s experiences and lives with others:

“I’m looking through the camera because that person said yes; that person wants me to see their world. They want you to see their world, they want whoever I share it with - because they understand the importance of that… I think it’s important to remember as a photographer when you’re working on a longterm project that you’re at the mercy of the people you want to photograph. In the end, it’s their story and they get to decide if you’re going to be there to see it.”
Appendix

OPENING DOORS: HOW INDEPENDENT PHOTOJOURNALISTS
GAIN ACCESS TO SENSITIVE STORIES

Introduction

I’ve spent six years earning a visual education. There was a two year interval between the first four and the last two where I worked part-time at the Columbia Daily Tribune, trying to work my way into photojournalism. Before that job, I had spent three years working as a manager at a Little Caesar’s pizza place in Bozeman, MT, living off meager wages, uncertain hours and old pizza through my undergraduate degree.

Since starting my graduate degree at the University of Missouri, I’ve been drawn to economic stories. In my very first photojournalism class here, the Fundamentals of Photojournalism, my final project was based on a single father who worked 55 hours between two food service jobs. It took me a while to realize what the story was, why I was following this person. When it clicked, it made me realize a topic that I cared about, a topic I could relate to. I continued working on that story into the spring of 2016.

In my third semester, I created a portrait series for my Advanced Techniques final, taking portraits of people who worked in food service outside of their homes with their families. The series evolved as I pursued it, changing from strictly families that provided for themselves through fast food wages, to families that survived off of food service wages in general.

It was through this project I discovered how hard it can be to find subjects for an important story. I spent a lot of days and nights, awkwardly approaching workers
sweeping restaurant floors and working the counter. I’d try to talk to them during lulls in work, repeating the pitch for my project over and over in my head. I’d finally walk up to them and say it all. I had a surprising amount of luck with finding interested subjects and getting their contact information. Unfortunately, they would often bail within a day of their scheduled shoots, citing various reasons. Because of those repeated issues, I widened my subject requirements so that I could finish the project for a grade.

The fall semester of 2015, I continued to pursue the project for my Staff Photojournalism class, hoping this time to find one family that sustained itself off of fast food wages that would let me follow their daily lives and show how they were affected in various ways by their work. The project never came to fruition due to time limitations and other pressing news work, but the drive to do that project hasn’t ebbed.

Outside of helping me discover a subject of interest, my time in graduate school has helped me better understand what work I want to do in my career. Through practice I’ve created different stories. Through conversation, I’ve discussed the reasons for doing a story. Through internship applications and denials and freelance work during school, I’ve learned a lot about the profession. All of it has lead to me asking myself what I’m doing with this profession and in what ways I need to work within it to feel fulfilled.

Spending my days as a staff photographer working assignments handed down to me and losing ownership of my imagery isn’t what I want to do, a feeling amplified by the current treatment of photographers at papers. I want to work on stories of weight, stories that, when published, I can feel a sense of accomplishment. I want to work on things that don’t make me question why I’m taking photographs, but reaffirm why.
This project presents both the opportunity to complete a project I’ve been pursuing for over a year and to present myself to professional organizations with work that is representative of the work I care to create throughout the rest of my career.

**Professional Skills Component**

Los Angeles, California is the second largest city in the United States, second only to New York City. Like New York City, LA has also been a major battleground state for raising the minimum wage to $15.

For my professional skills component I plan on creating a photographic project and short multimedia piece documenting the affects of fast food jobs on their employees and their families in terms of the hours worked, food provided to the family, housing they live in and the overall structure of how the family lives.

In April of 2016, California signed in legislation to raise its minimum wage to $15 an hour by 2022. The process will be a slow one, unfolding year-by-year, starting with a .50 cent increase in January of 2017 to $10.50. The Fight for $15 group, which has been protesting and advocating for the raise, is still trying to form unions for workers, a demand tied to their original strikes in 2012.

While minimum wage for workers will be on the rise, it will be slow and the consequences of those jobs and wages will still be visible during the time frame for executing this project. While the project’s weight has been somewhat diminished for California, it is a nation wide story that is part of the news conversation right now. This project will also be unique from other work done with fast food workers lately, as there hasn’t been any time intensive effort spent on a piece detailing the life of fast food
workers besides one to two day photo stories, which lack depth and don’t provide a complete understanding of the situation. I expect most of the work to be done outside of the fast food worker’s job, detailing the various ways that the job affects the family’s life. I hope to find subjects through either meeting subjects at the Fight for $15’s newest union protests, contacting local journalists who’ve written stories on the subject to gain contact information or approaching subjects on break at their jobs.

For my project, I will find one family to follow. I’ll be creating a photo story, as well as a multimedia piece that will include video and photos. Some possible shots include shopping, leaving home for work and family interaction, both during times of exhaustion and relaxation. The final photo story should comprise of approximately 10 photographs and the final video is expected to be approximately four minutes long. It’s hard to estimate the exact amount of time shooting, as it is all dependent on the family’s schedule. Some days there may not be anything to be shot, and after a certain amount of time, the shot list will dwindle as the story nears a finish. The most time intensive part of this project, apart from the shooting and actual subject search, will be the multimedia editing. Weekly field reports will be sent to my committee, detailing progress and issues. Photographs and video edits will be shared through private links to online hosts (Vimeo for video, photo TBD – possibly EditSX or FolioLoupe). The final products will be presented to my committee in PDFs, prints and a DVD of the video.

In my sixth year of studying the visual arts, I’m more than qualified to execute this story in its technical aspects. The past two years have been spent exploring the use of video more intensely and culminated in a collection of short videos and a short documentary. In terms of gaining access, I’ve shown an ability to gain access in both
difficult and intimate situations. There should be little to no concern about my ability to gain access to and execute this story with a professional product as an end result. I’m hopeful that an organization such as the Los Angeles Times or The New York Times, or even The Washington Post will take interest in the final products and be willing to publish them.

Tentative Timeline

- May 2016 – Move to and become settled in Los Angeles (finding housing, moving in, familiarizing with area), reach out to potential professional analysis subjects, begin field notes
- June 2016 – Interview professional analysis subjects, search for potential project subjects
- July 2016 – Have found subjects, start documenting, share photographs and edits as it progresses
- August 2016 – Finish shooting, continue editing, finish professional analysis
- September 2016 – Complete editing, send to committee chair
- October 2016 – Return to defend project

Professional Analysis Component

Access to sensitive stories may be more difficult than ever with Americans trust in media at a historical low. According to a 2015 Gallup poll, only four in ten Americans have a “great deal” or “fair amount of trust in the accuracy and fairness of new being reported by the mass media. That represents a 15 percent drop in trust since 1999, when
trust was polled at 55 percent. “Since 2007, the majority of Americans have had little or no trust in the mass media” (Riffkin, 2015).

Some of the most iconic and trusted news sources in America have seen their trust amongst the populous erode. *The New York Times* saw its’ credibility drop nine points from 58 percent to 49 percent between 2010 and 2012, according to a report from the Pew Research Center published in August of 2012 (Center, 2012).

While trust of media is at a historic low, the majority of news product consumers prefer to have their news created by professional according to a 2012 survey by the Reynolds Journalism Institute (Sondersman, 2012). The same survey showed that 60 percent preferred work from professional journalists, on 37 percent said they trust the mainstream media (Sondersman, 2012). This shows that is a desire for professional journalists, but that there can be heavy trust issues between sources and photographers that may present an issue when trying to gain access to sensitive stories that people may not be eager to share.

This research is important because as layoffs continue to affect newspaper staffs, more photojournalists are opting to pursue story work independent of newspapers. Presuming that having a professional entity backing photojournalists (and journalists in general) creates a sense of authority, these new freelance photojournalists are facing a different difficulty accessing sensitive stories than they had previously experienced as staff photographers. There are also the young photojournalists who may intern for multiple newspapers before deciding to become full-time freelance photojournalists. There’s an ever-growing number of freelance photojournalists and shrinking number of
staff photojournalists (Kirkland, 2014), so the question of how to navigate difficulties accessing sensitive stories as a freelance photojournalist becomes increasingly important.

The *News Photographer* magazine seems like the most fit and likely landing place for this work to be published, being one of the few photojournalism base magazines that often focuses on discussions surrounding the profession. Other possible outlets could include *PDN* and the *British Journal of Photography*.

**Research Question**

What are issues freelance photojournalists face when trying to gain access to sensitive long form stories and how do they navigate them?

**Theoretical Framework**

Gatekeeping theory, regarded as one of the oldest in communication research, was first proposed by Kurt Lewin, a psychologist researching social change after WWII (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001, p. 233). Lewin introduced it by discussing the ways a family obtains food for meals, speaking of how the food is selected from a garden or a store, and how the person selecting and cooking the food plays a role in how it is received by those who are going to consume it. He referred to those selective streams as the “channels” by which the food it made it’s way to the table and the person making those stream decisions as the gatekeeper (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

The theory was first applied to journalism by David Manning White, who used content analysis to look at a week’s worth of wire stories that were both accepted and rejected for publishing, interviewing the editor about how he made the decisions on those
stories (Cassidy, 2006; White, 1950). White’s study showed that news editors reflect their views of their communities through their gatekeeping duties (White, 1950, p. 390).

Shoemaker and Reese say there are five categories of gatekeepers: individual, routine, organizational, extra-media and ideological (Cassidy, 2006; Salwen & Stacks, 1996). The individual level looks at the experiences and trainings of the journalist. The routine level looks at how the journalist’s choices are affected by work constraints and outside forces related to their job — “…those ongoing, structured, deeply naturalized rules, norms, procedures that are embedded in media work” (Reese, 2001, p. 182; Reese & Buckalew, 1995). The organizational level looks at what has caused routines, backing up to consider the policies and goals of an organization that journalists are obligated to follow. The extra-media level looks outside of the media at the other factors influencing coverage, such as the government, interest groups, sources, advertising, public relations and other news organizations (Reese, 2001, p. 182). Lastly, the ideological level looks at “how media symbolic content is connected with larger social interests, how meaning is constructed in the service of power” (Reese, 2001, p. 183).

Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, and Wrigley used the routine level of gatekeeping to look at how newspapers in 1996 and 1998 covered congressional bills. They confirmed their hypothesis that bills deemed more newsworthy received greater coverage and that those bills received the coverage no matter what the characteristics of the journalist covering it (Shoemaker et al., 2001, p. 240).

Shoemaker and Vos pushed the theory further when did a study on gatekeeping in the internet age, saying that gatekeeping was no longer a one way process held by
journalists thanks to the internet. The journalist’s role had now changed to become more of an interpreter (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

My research question asks what are issues freelance photojournalists face when trying to gain access to sensitive long form stories and how do they navigate them? For the purpose of my research, I plan to look at how the extra-media level of gatekeeping affects freelance photojournalists’ ability to access sensitive long form stories. Sources are possibly the most powerful gatekeepers. If they say nothing, they’ve closed the gate. They can choose how much or how little and what quality of information to give (Salwen & Stacks, 1996, p. 83). Putting that in terms of photojournalistic efforts, they can give, deny, restrict or shape the access a photojournalist is given.

**Literature Review**

There is no news without sources. Kovach and Rosenstiels list what they consider the fundamental elements of journalism. Among the elements listed are the lines “Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover” and “Citizens, too, have rights and responsibilities when it comes to the news” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). Those two elements are intertwined. The journalist, especially the photojournalist, relies heavily on the willingness of subjects to welcome them into their lives and to share their stories. While there is a degree of independence from the subjects – being able to choose how they are photographing and at what moments – there is often no story without them, creating a heavy dependence upon them, specifically when it comes to terms of access to photographing a story. As Jack Price, a photojournalist and columnist, has said, “…unlike the reporter, he [the photojournalist] cannot romance” (Sherer, 1990, p. 20).
Purpose Statement

The basis of this research is to better understand how freelance photojournalists gain access to sensitive stories, the issues they face along the way and how they deal with said issues.

Gaining Access

Photojournalists find access into stories through various manners. The subject matter of the story can often affect the approach a photojournalist takes in attempt to gain access. Even within one subject matter, there can be various routes taken to gain access.

Howard Bossen, Eric Freedman and Julie Mianecki did six years of research to compile an exhibition and book in which they look at how various photographers, mostly freelance documentary photographers, gained access to photograph steel mills. They reached out to over 30 photographers from 12 countries and conducted personal interviews to gain insight as to how they got inside factories and mills to photograph (Bossen, Freedman, & Mianecki, 2013).

Each photographers’ route of access varied. Phillip Rittermann photographed shipbuilding in Southern California. When asked how he gained access, he said he met a lawyer for the company through the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego and, being familiar with Rittermann’s work, the lawyer approached him with the idea of photographing the National Steel and Shipbuilding Company’s shipyard. Rittermann responded by saying he had been trying to for a while. It took time, but the lawyer got unrestricted access for Ritterman, who was even given a golf cart to navigate the facilities (Bossen et al., 2013, p. 8).
Noah Weinzweig, a photo assistant to Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky, negotiated access to a Chinese, state owned Bao Steel factory through the Canadian embassy in China. His initial attempts to gain access to the factory through friends that worked there were denied after a previous visit from Burtynsky had resulted in photographs being published with negative text about Bao Steel’s environmental policies. Those responsible for allowing Burtynsky in to photograph were reprimanded. Weinzweig brought books of Burtynsky’s work to the Canadian embassy after that and spoke with the head of cultural affairs, saying that he worked for the Canadian artist and they needed help gaining access to the factory. The man understood and wrote them a letter introducing Burtynsky and sent it to China’s foreign ministry, while also giving a copy to Weinzweig. That letter acted as a passport of sorts, allowing them to go anywhere they pleased. Weinzweig said that people, many of which liked the photographic work, were able to point to the letter and shift responsibility and blame onto the Canadian government (Bossen et al., 2013, pp. 8-9).

American photographer Mark Perrott chose to trespass when his request for access to the Jones and Laughlin mill was denied. He found a hole in their fence and worked on Sundays for two years, photographing as he pleased (Bossen et al., 2013).

Michael Schultz, another American photographer who photographed steel mills and foundries across the United States, Europe and China, said that building trust with all of the companies was how he was able to gain the access he did (Bossen et al., 2013, p. 13).

They’ve gotta know that you’re coming in not to take away from them—and by that I mean secrets, proprietary secrets of how the castings are made. And they’ve
gotta have a sense that you’re going to honor your word, that you’re not gonna publish your work without their permission. If you can gain that trust, you can gain access (Bossen et al., 2013, p. 13).

Schultz added he was able to show his prior work in foundries and mills. Showing that work proved that others had given him their trust and that nothing bad had come from it (Bossen et al., 2013, p. 14).

Turning to human interest related work, Lynsey Addario, a freelance photojournalist who works for publications including The New York Times, National Geographic and TIME, has thrived off of gaining access to sensitive stories (Addario, 2011, n.d.; Jacobs, 2015). Addario, a female journalist, has had unique access to stories on women in Afghanistan thanks to her gender, though she has said “…it’s very difficult to get permission from the male relatives to photograph.” She didn’t elaborate on how she dealt with that issue (Addario, 2011).

Addario worked her way into the transgender prostitute community in New York for the Associate Press for a story after a series of murders. She spent time around the Meatpacking District without a camera on every weekend until one of the transgender prostitutes invited her to her apartment in the Bronx. While Addario doesn’t mention how she created that relationship, she adds that she brought chocolate-chip cookies with milk. The next five months came with access to personal moments of women whom she’d never seen during any of her daily work (Jacobs, 2015). “I learned that the more time you put into a story, the more people are comfortable with you and realize that you are just there to talk about their lives. It set a precedent for all of my work,” Addario said in an interview with PDN about her work (Jacobs, 2015).
Lewis Hine was a sociologist and photographer that became well known for his photographs of children working in factories that brought about changes to child labor laws in the United States. Hine gained access to some of his settings by pretending to be a postcard photographer or an insurance photographer and ask to photograph their machines, using a child in the images for scale. When those ruses failed, he would resort to photographing children as they left the factories (Sampsell-Willmann, 2014, p. 393).

Another common manner in which journalists gain access to stories is through people called fixers (Richards, 2013). Steve Myers summed up their value in an article for Poynter, saying “…they work in the background, arranging transportation, translating, finding sources, figuring out what's safe and what's not. Sometimes these people are journalists themselves, sometimes they just know English and know people“ (Myers, 2011).

Greg Scott is a fixer in Chicago who is used specifically to gain access to a community of drug addicts and prostitutes in “Junkieville.” Scott has built relationships with these people over a long period of time and spends time taking care of them, walking around with a pack of sterile needles, condoms and an overdose-reversing drug called naloxone as a member of The Chicago Recovery Alliance (Terry, 2011, p. 39). He has personally saved at least one man from overdosing as it happened before his eyes. He also works as a journalist covering the drug issues Chicago faces, both as a freelancer radio journalist for the local WBEZ station and as an independent filmmaker. As a fixer, he’s helped producers for National Geographic as they worked on their “Drugs, Inc.” series, amongst others (Terry, 2011, p. 38).
As news organizations whittle down their photography staffs and face constrained budgets, NGO’s and other charitable organizations become appealing routes for photojournalists to gain access to sensitive stories (García & Palmomo, 2015; Kashi, 2010; Kirkland, 2014; Walker, 2013). Ed Kashi, a well-known photojournalist and member of the VII Photo Agency, says that as media outlets continue to become less viable sources of income for himself and other photojournalists, he finds advocacy work more enticing as it presents an access point for important work and another route to disseminate in-depth photojournalism (Kashi, 2010, p. 10; Walker, 2013). The VII Photo Agency has “aggressively sought out partnerships with nonprofit groups to compensate for the dwindling revenue streams from editorial markets” (Estrin, 2012).

While Lynsey Addario found access to women subjects in Afghanistan thanks to her gender, having similarities to subjects doesn’t always help a journalist gain access (Addario, 2011). Ken Williams is a journalist for the Aboriginal People’s Television Network. In an article discussing the struggles journalists face daily, Williams discussed the fact that just because a journalist is an Aboriginal working for an Aboriginal media doesn’t mean they’ll get better access than any of the mainstream journalists. He contended that Aboriginal journalists might have greater difficulties gaining access because they are more likely to be better informed on the topic at hand and, therefore, may ask more difficult questions (Chung, 2004, p. 33).

Like journalists, social researchers have to negotiate access to do their work. Brooke Harrington, an ethnographer and assistant professor at Brown University, wrote an article discussing researcher and subject relationships and the methods with which researchers gain access to their subjects. Harrington says that researchers gain access by
building relationships with subjects and establishing what their role is as an ethnographer working with the subjects (Harrington, 2003).

In Corrine Glesne Alan Peshkin’s book on conducting qualitative research, they contend that in order to gain access to some subjects, the researcher looks at their own identity, such as race or origins, and contemplate how those things may affect their access. They suggest participant observer researchers do their best to make themselves fit in with their subjects (Glesne & Peshkin, 1999, p. 60; Harrington, 2003).

Danny Jorgensen, a professor at the University of Southern Florida whose research is based in participant observation and ethnography, suggests that participant observers may use their life experiences and backgrounds to their advantage. In Jorgensen’s book that having things in common with subjects, such as a shared religion, hobby job or other experience can help researches gain rapport with their subjects and result in access (Harrington, 2003; Jorgensen, 1989, p. 77).

**Access At What Cost?**

Bossen, Freedman and Mianecki point out the various levels of access and cooperation from the mills dramatically affect what the photographer is able to get and what the final story looks like, saying “How freely a photographer can move around a mill or how a company-supplied minder restricts an image maker’s movements dramatically affects the content and form of the image” (Bossen et al., 2013, p. 7).

Ritterman, who gained unrestricted access to photograph a shipyard, had to have his images reviewed by the company. He was told some of his images could not be used and was restricted in how he could publish and exhibit the work he had done (Bossen et al., 2013, p. 9).
Photojournalism is not unique in facing issues of access. Text journalists have their own hurdles. A research survey of 777 sports journalists conducted in 2013 looked at sports writers and how their coverage may be affected by the threat of losing access to athletes if they published negative articles about the teams they covered.

…access is subject to the tensions between formal organizational policies—those permitting independent journalists to report and publish news about the organization—and the desire of the team to minimize scrutiny and negative evaluation by outsiders. Thus, journalists must negotiate conditions of access with organizational actors (Welch Suggs Jr, 2015, p. 50).

It states that while journalist still have decent access now, they should expect to see that access decline as teams become more internal, publish their own content on the internet and share it through social media (Welch Suggs Jr, 2015, p. 62).

One can parlay that into the idea that journalists have to answer questions of why they should be allowed access when people are able to get their message out without working with journalists, as is pointed out in a Wired article about how things have changed for protestors since the Civil Rights era (Stephen, 2015).

Looking further back at costs of access, the Associated Press has recently been accused in an journal article by a historian of giving up complete editorial control of the images they provided from Nazi Germany in order to keep their bureau open there, until they were forced to close as the United States entered World War II in 1941 (Oltermann, 2016; Scharnberg, 2016). While the AP refutes claims that they have ever given up such control, they did remove images by a photographer mentioned in the article as being a member of the Nazi regime’s propaganda unit. That has also given rise to discussion of
the concessions in the AP’s agreement made with the North Korean government to open their bureau there in 2012 (Kludt, 2016; Oltermann, 2016). The AP photographer David Guttenfelder, well-known for his work in North Korea, has said that while the system is imperfect, “…the alternative is closing the window entirely and receiving only state-sponsored handout pictures” (Guttenfelder, 2015).

Method

Interviews

The method for this research will be semi-structured interviews with five freelance photojournalists who work on stories that are of a sensitive nature and are difficult to gain access to. Interviews will be conducted through Skype, phone calls or, if possible, in person. The interviews are expected to last between 30 to 60 minutes based upon previous experiences interviewing photojournalists about their work and will be recorded. Notes will be taken from these recorded interviews and compiled together to create a better understanding of how freelance photojournalists are gaining access to sensitive stories, what obstacles they may be facing and how they’re navigating those obstacles. The interviews will be semi-structured to allow for a more conversational discussion that can adjust for any interesting responses that require additional, unforeseen questions while still hitting key points.

Questions for these interviews will revolve around previous experiences of gaining access to sensitive stories as a freelance photojournalist. Some examples of questions: How did you gain access to tell this story; what was that process; what were some obstacles you faced; did you feel your credibility was questioned because you were a freelance photojournalist instead of a staff photojournalist; do you think you have some
innate quality or “insider” status that made it easier for you to gain access; did you have to make any compromises in your coverage, not photographing things that you wanted to in order to retain access?

Potential Subjects

As there is a wide swath of freelance photojournalists working in the field today, it should be relatively simple to find subjects to interview for this research. There may be as many as five photojournalists interviewed for this research. One possible subject for this research is Carey Wagner, a former staff photojournalist who spent 10 years working on staffs before becoming a freelancer to pursue difficult stories both domestically and abroad. From her website biography:

Through her photography and cinematography, she has told stories about gender-based violence in Papua New Guinea, child marriage in Nepal, sex trafficking in Seattle, meth addiction and childbirth in California, street harassment in New York and domestic violence in Florida (Wagner, n.d.).

Wagner is currently based out of New York City.

Another possible subject for this research is freelance photojournalist Christopher Capozziello, who’s based out of Connecticut. Capozziello has been documenting the Klu Klux Klan in Mississippi since the summer of 2002, spending time at both their private and public rallies as well as inside the homes of Klan members (Capozziello, n.d.).

Freelance photojournalist Tim Matsui would also be a suitable subject. Matsui has worked extensively on stories about sexual assault and sex trafficking. His most recognizable work may be *The Long Night* documentary about sex trafficking he made,
which won the Photographer of the Year International competitions Documentary Project of the Year in 2015 (Matsui, 2015).

NPPA President Melissa Lyttle will be asked for suggestions of subjects. Lyttle is very interwoven into the photojournalist community and should be able to throw out multiple good suggestions of freelance photojournalists working on sensitive subjects difficult to access.

**Similar Research and Justification of Method**

Interviews can be divided into three types: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Structured interviews use a strict list of questions, which they do not deviate from. Semi-structured interviews also come with a list of questions, but are more conversational and allow for follow-up questions. Unstructured interviews are conversations that may be aided by a list of bullet point topics to discuss with questions freely formed by the interviewer (Fielding & Thomas, 2008, p. 246).

Interviews are the most appropriate method for this research because they will let subjects to more freely define their experiences, as opposed to being forced to fit into a predetermined box that might be set forth in structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews with a small sample of photojournalists will allow for follow-up questions and in-depth responses while still producing some similar answers to better connect the interviews. Using semi-structured interviews leaves the research options to evolve and subjects to raise important points that may not have otherwise surfaced while still answering the key questions of the research (Fielding & Thomas, 2008; Tracy, 2012). Interviewing individual freelance photojournalists about specific sensitive stories they’ve
done will also make for more precise, controlled information that will go beyond surface responses found in general interviews for websites.

The proposed research will use semi-structured interviews, similar to that of the research done in the “Hot Metal, Cold Reality: Photographers’ Access to Steel Mills” (Bossen et al., 2013). That research, which looked specifically at how photographers gained access to shoot in these industrial settings in various ways and consisted of mostly freelance photographers as subjects, is almost identical to the proposed research. The biggest difference is that the proposed research is looking at a wider swath of photographic subjects and it is also coming from a journalistic angle, whereas the steel mill photographers were not strictly photojournalists, but also artists and documentary photographers, which may not adhere to journalistic standards in their approaches.

While Bossen et al. had a larger sample size of subjects, there were recurring themes in those few quoted, showing that a smaller sample of subjects should be efficient in coming to conclusions.

Another qualitative research piece that used semi-structured interviews examined modified car culture in Great Britain. Approximately 30 men were interviewed as the researchers tried to understand how that car culture was related to masculine identities. Using semi-structured interviews allowed for follow-up questions that better revealed that some masculine issues related to car modification are linked to perceived car genders, which may undermine their owner’s masculinity (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2007, p. 451).
References

Addario, L. (2011) Alabama Picking Up the Pieces After Slew of Tornadoes; Being a Female Photojournalist in the Middle East; Discussion on the State of the Interviewer: C. Rose. The Charlie Rose Show, CQ Transcriptions.


Appendix: Interview Transcripts

Darcy: From my perspective… You know I worked for 12 newspapers and then a couple more after graduation. When I leave the New York Times in 1991, I was offered a staff position that I didn’t take.

I had my last “internship” with The New York Times, and it was an internship that was created for me by Nancy Lee. At the end of that, they offered me a staff position that I turned down - and a couple jobs after that in the following years with other people. My reasoning for that I wanted to be able to do documentary photography. I didn’t at that point necessarily start calling my work long-term projects, but I wanted to do documentary photography with the freedom and not the pressure of an editor or a publication who is looking for whatever story they’re looking for. I wanted to find that story and I wanted the freedom to decide what the story was and to navigate it that way.

So, your question's a good question for me and a bad question because my reference has only been me. The elections might come into that, but on my personal side, it’s just that all of my work has just been motivated by just me and me getting permission. Now when you’re working with institutions, I think it helps to have a publication behind you - like a prison or school or hospital. But that being said, I’ve also got access hospitals where maybe I’m just a documentary photographer. In my head it’s just never mattered to me, which is possibly why it’s never mattered to the people I’ve asked permission for, to document them or to get access to a hospital for my purposes.
For me I don’t fall in to it being something that stops me. I will say though, for covering something like the elections, which I just did in January, it’s really impossible to get access to campaign events without having an affiliation with a publication.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**D:** And it’s even more impossible to get certain credentials unless you have affiliations that you can put down for that. But that’s more of a general news type story. For some of us who were on the campaign trail since January, it was definitely a long term story, but a different one where you’re constantly negotiating your access all the way through, and begging, hahaha.

So let’s go a different direction with this. Maybe this will help you with your research. So when I’m working on this story "Family Love." Before it was Family Love, it was a project that was about the urban poor in San Francisco. People living in this AIDS hotel that I was documenting. And I was doing this story for about six years. But how I would present it to people I met in this hotel is “I’m a documentary photographer and I’m working on this story about urban poverty and AIDS and how people are living, dealing with this right now. Your photo will most likely be published. You need to know that I’m into this and I would also like to interview you. Are you interested?” And so, that’s how, when I meet somebody, I tell them what I’m doing, I tell them who I am, I tell them it could be published and that it most likely will. And that I also need to talk to them and have an interview and that they need to sign a release. And so for me, when I meet somebody, maybe the… the permission is based on the fact that I’m really approaching it
like a documentarian and not a journalist. And pretty successful. People will say yes or no. If they say no, it’s fine. It’s important to have people who want to work with you in order to do a story. And if somebody doesn’t want to agree to what you’re putting out there, it can’t work.

**J:** So, with that kind of interaction, would there usually be – walking through say, this hotel – would there usually be any small talk before you would do that or was that kind of the ice breaker for you?

**D:** Oh no, I’m really direct. I don’t fool around. But probably maybe the better question would be, how did I get to the hotel? You know, I was working on this story about health care for the homeless or indigent in a clinic and the director of the clinic said, “Oh, we help these doctors that visit this AIDS hotel you might be interested in. So my liaison become a doctor, social worker, and a nurse. So initially I go with them one day a week and then I return by myself. And so I have almost an introduction from someone who’s already working in the field. And that’s a great way to have access to a story that you care about, working with people who are working already in that environment. It’s almost presumptuous to think that you could just knock on the front door of a hotel and walk in and do it. And, you know, I’m sure people did but, I think it’s always really respectful to go the route of somebody who is already a part of that world in some capacity, whether it be a social worker, a nurse, a doctor, somebody who works there. You need somebody to vouch for you. So I think when you’re a journalist, you have the New York Times to vouch for you or a great newspaper behind you, but when you’re a documentary
photographer, you really need different kinds of acceptance and you’re constantly explaining to people what you’re doing. And the irony of all this is that stories change, so you hope that that’s what you end up doing.

**J:** So with that - I’ve got kind of two questions floating in my mind - how would you label yourself? Do you label yourself as a photojournalist or a documentarian? Or are you kind of a mixture? How would you say would be fair to describe you?

**D:** Well, I think that a photojournalist is somebody who gets hired to do news or assignment work, right? And when I’m working on a story I’m a documentarian, I’m a documentary photographer. I’m both. But in that - those are just labels - in that you carry the ethics and morals of what it means to be both those things, you know. I just say I’m a photographer, I’m a documentary photographer. That’s how I introduce myself to people that I discuss my projects with in hopes that they will say yes to me, in hopes that they will let me be able to photograph this part of their life.

**J:** Ok. And the other question was just - you know, you’re discussing if it feels really important to have somebody who’s part of this world kind of introduce you to it. With that part of gaining access to stories or to have that liaison, how did you go about forming those relationships with these doctors or - I think that works to for your prison story too that you gained access to photograph inside these prisons.
D: So the prisons story, that’s kind of interesting because nobody ever asks about that story, so lets go that direction.

J: Cool.

D: So I spent about a year and a half going back and forth to that prison. It may be closer to about two years. I was on an internship at the Rivertime Press Enterprise and I did photograph someone at the first AIDS ward there in Chino, CA, and I found out through that story that there was one in the bay area at Vacaville at California Medical Facility. And I come home from that internship, I’m a student, and I make contact with the PIO officer, which is the Public Information Officer, and there was a lieutenant ( ). And I explain to him who I am, that my name’s Darcy and I’m a student and I wanted to do a story on AIDS in prison, you know, and he such a nice man. He takes my call, he listens to me, and he proceeds to tell me that they’re in lockdown right now and there’s no way he can get me access to anything. They’re in lockdown because of some sort of - it had nothing to do with journalism - they were trying to redo that part of the prison or something. I call back every week on the same day, at the same approximate hour or so, for six months. It’s being assertive, but not pushy, which is a delicate line. It’s having respect for somebody that you’re trying to get something from. You’re not going to get anywhere by throwing your weight around, it’s not gonna happen, and I had nothing to throw around, I was just a student, hahaha. But I was just calling. He’d say “Hey Darcy” and I’d say “Hi. How was your week?” and he’d say, “Oh, it was good” and I’d be like “I’m just checking to see if there’s anyway, you know, I could come in and
photograph in the prison.” And this goes on for six months, and he’s had tv crews go in and other photographers who had credentials, who had people behind them. And so finally I called one day and he said, “Look Darcy. I really want to be able to let you come in and do this project, but I just need this from you. I need to say that you work for someone.” I’m like, “Ok, let me see what I can do. I really appreciate you being honest.”

And this is like a six month relationship. So I go to the one place, United Press International, where I’d maybe moved a couple pictures on the wire. UPI back in the day was really big, like AP, they were highly competitive at this time. It was where we would all take our protest photos - that was the age of tons of protests in San Francisco – and Terry Smith would politely let us process our film and occasionally choose one of our pictures - there was a group of us - and I’d only been chosen a couple times. I wasn’t like the great supplier of information for UPI.

It’s a really awkward place to be because the culture of how I was brought up was not to ask people for things, it was to put your head down, work hard, and persevere. I had to ask somebody for something, I had to ask somebody for help and that culturally was really hard for me to do, but he made it really easy. I said, “Terry, I’m wondering if you could help me. I’m in this situation where I’ve been calling this guy in prison for six months and I want to do this story on AIDS in prison and, unfortunately, the only way I can get access is if I provide a letter saying that I occasionally work for somebody as a freelancer.” So he writes me a letter that says I’m great, I work for him all the time, do whatever you can to help her, we’re interested in this story - I mean, my mouth dropped. And that’s the letter that gets me access. And to this day when I see that man, I see him out. He still works for UPI which is kind of a minimal agency right now, but I see him on
the campaign trail or at a demonstration. I go give him a big hug and just say hi, because he gave me, by believing in me, by just saying those kind words to this lieutenant, he gave me an opportunity to run with an idea. I’m completely grateful for it.

And then, I get in the prison and they lock me in there the first day by accident, and I’m like in there for seven hours. I’m going to leave and they can’t find my name on the assignment sheet. The only thing that saved me was that I was the only woman in the facility.

J: That’s, uh, that’s pretty amazing.

D: I end up doing that. He worked with me for a year and a half and I would bring back - that was an interesting story because so many people wanted photographs and some of them said yes to the project and there were a few that said no. The few that said no to the project I would photograph super stiff, like in a way I would never photograph. They wouldn’t sign a release, but I would still bring them back photos. I went through probably about three boxes of big fat - probably about 750 sheets of paper that I gave away.

J: Wow. So you’d come back each trip with photos from the last one with photos to give to prisoners?

D: Yeah. And I never saw a photo hanging in any of their houses, which is what they call their cells. They were just sending them home. It was interesting. And how that story
worked is that one of the men there who was gay, he just becomes my liaison. “I’d like to help you. I can carry your releases around and you can take the photos and I’ll get the signatures for you.” So I have like this personal assistant. It was hilarious. It’s amazing how sometimes people in your stories can see the importance of what you’re doing and are willing to just really help, whether it’s in that situation, or anything important if you’ve seen certain things. You’re not ever gonna know.

J: And so, with this story, did you spend a year and a half shooting? Or was that half a year used gaining access to it?

D: It was a year and a half photographing - you shoot guns, sorry.

J: Oh yeah, sorry.

D: It’s alright.

J: Good catch.

D: Might have been a little bit more. It was between internships. I left and came back.

J: And so would you say that was one of your first large independent projects that you did that required access that was tough to get?
D: No, my first one starts in 1985. I was photographing a homeless mother with two of her daughters that panhandled the (castle?) I probably photographed them for a six month period.

J: And was that just someone you approached on the street?

D: Yeah, I would walk by them on my way to work. I worked full-time to go to school, like most students, I guess. I was on my way to Macy’s and I’d take the train and I’d have to walk by them down at Union Square and it just bothered me that it was an entire family out there panhandling. I stopped by and talked to them and asked if I could come back and photograph them. I ended up sitting on the ground with them, watching people watch them. I’d hang out with them on my weekends that were free. It was interesting. Mario Castille and her two daughters. That was just simply, I'm a photographer, not anything more than that, like it was to be published or anything.

Going on down the line for what you've done, would you say that with all that extensive - I'd say today 12 internships a lot of internships. I think it's way more than anyone expects to have or - I can't say I know anyone who's had that many internships, so would you say having had all those opportunities to be involved in all these different newspapers, did that in some way help with the work you did, whether it's feeling that you might be able to find a place to publish it or -

D: No. No.
J: Or having -

D: No. People aren't interested in America. It's very hard to get the kind of stories I do published, so that would be a no in that direction. What those internships did give me was - I had to work to go to school and live and so a lot of times I'm doing 2 internships a year. It gave me money to pay rent, the opportunity to work with staff that was amazing, it gave me film to save up and use on projects and things. It gave me a chance to watch people edit, good editors. And it gives you exposure to many different kinds of people because of the assignments are given. I mean the beauty of a newspaper is that you never really do the same thing. It helps you learn how to be a better photographer. But I don't think that if you don't go to the direction I went, I think you could still do what I did, without that. And they gave me the freedom to know that the newspaper like the Washington Post and the New York Times and the Miami Herald is not too different, and I'm not talking about staff, but I'm talking purely about assignments. Assignments you do there aren’t too different than what you’d do at a newspaper in San Francisco or somewhere in southern California. It's really you're documenting the community or you’re photographing assignments within the community. And it taught me that if I was at a place like that where papers like that were wanting to hire me, that if I go off and do these stories and I choose this path of documentary - which is not going to be as lucrative as being a staff photographer- you know freelancing is really tough direction. In the early years for many years I was only making like, I don’t know, $13-14,000 - and living on
that. And that's a hard past, but I also know if I stay at a newspaper, I’d have to do what the newspaper wanted and then what I wanted. I thought well right now in my life, I don't have a mortgage, I'm not married, you know, I don't have children and if there's any time I could just be free and go and do whatever I want, this is that time.

Away from the stories we’re talking about, I go to Guatemala for a couple months, I just choose a couple countries, I country hop a couple times between these stories. But I usually have anywhere between one and three projects that I'm working on that a given time. So the foundation of newspapers is that they give you great honor to work with and staff, and they give you the opportunity to have an assortment of assignment that you probably wouldn't have as a freelancer. You wouldn't have that crazy assortment of great assignments. And all of that is educational and great, but I think that if you wanted to be a long-term project person working at a newspaper, it's going to be that you're doing those long-term projects after the day is over.

J: Yeah, personal time.

D: Unless you’re just a superstar and they say, “Yeah! Do whatever you want!” But you got to do something great to be superstar, right? Haha.

J: Haha. Yeah. I've got some kind of basic questions that I have laid out here. I think we've talked about it briefly here but what do you think doing these long-term stories, is
there kind of a consistent obstacle or are there kind of consistent obstacles you face when trying to gain access the these stories that seem to repeat themselves?

**D:** Hmmm.

**J:** Whether it be like what we talked about, kind of trying to find someone within the group-

**D:** I don’t know that there are obstacles. I think there's a process of the explanation of who you are and what you're doing and why you're doing it, right? Which is almost your proposal, your introduction to people you’re meeting, right? But maybe the more interesting or more important part of that question, and I wouldn't call it an obstacle, but the more important part is navigating doing a project is finding the right person that you’re going to photograph, that you’re going to tell their story. And it's not always the first person you meet. There has to be a series of you being aware of that and that person being into what you're doing. So there's this exchange. It's not just “this is my story.” And I don’t ever approach projects like that. I don’t go “my project, my story, this is what i’m doing.” “This is a project I’m doing about this, would you like to be a part of it?” It’s more about the people than it is about being yours. And in that, you sometimes - it could be three months before you find the right person where they see what you’re doing and understand the importance and want to be a part of it.
So maybe the important part of this long term and access of doing a project is you have to have patience. You have to have the desire to tell an important story, you have to care about that story, and then you have to have patience to find the right person or people that you’re going to follow. So really different than being a photojournalist and saying “I’m looking for a single white female who has children and is poor and deals with abuses.” I didn’t go in looking for Julie, do you understand? I went in to do a project about a team of doctors that traveled to an AIDS hotel where people were very sick and very poor and there were deplorable living conditions and health conditions and ect. And people were just trying to manage this epidemic with people who were poor. A year into that project, this beautiful young woman with the baby in her arms - and I’m like wow, I want to get to know her - but she doesn’t become the focus, she doesn’t become her own story until 96-97. So do you see? It’s that patience of being aware and open to the right person presenting themselves for you to make a decision on how this story is going to develop, this story of their life or this story of this time you’re with them, which is probably better said because it’s presumptuous to think we ever photograph somebody’s life - we photograph parts of people’s lives.

**J:** Another basic question that I’ve used - a lot of people I’ve spoken to them about one or two stories they’ve done - it’s asking whether you feel that you have some sort of innate quality or insider status that made it easier for you to be trusted to tell that story. Do you feel like that has ever been a thing for you? That there’s something about you that made
people comfortable with you photographing them that gave you access to the story that maybe wouldn’t have happened for someone else?

D: I have no idea… I don’t really think about that I have something like that that’s gonna… you know what I mean. I would just say because I say this is what I care about, I’m interested in caring about your life or what you’re going through and I want to document that and try and get it published or seen. I think it’s not so much about me being a certain kind of person, but it’s about me caring about their lives or their worlds. I’m in a place where the they’re at the bottom of the bottom. I would say it’s less about me as a person and more about me as a documentary photographer trying to share somebody’s life and what it’s like to be in their position. I don’t know if that answers your question.

We look through the camera, we see somebody, right? But I think the part that a lot of photographers and people miss is that we only see that person because they say yes. And that is the gift. I’m a facilitator of somebody’s story. The fact that I took the pictures is only one way of getting that information out. It’s not like I’m

I’m looking through the camera because that person said yes - that person wants me to see their world. They want you to see their world, they want whoever I share it with - because they understand the importance of that.
J: Are there any last statements or any else that I didn’t touch on that you feel would be important to share?

D: Yeah, I think it’s important to remember as a photographer when you’re working on a longterm project that you’re at the mercy of the people you want to photograph. In the end, it’s their story and they get to decide if you’re going to be there to see it.

Tim Matsui Interview

Tim: I think the main thing to think about when you’re – and I’m replying in context to you doing similar work, is that the idea?

Justin: Yeah, I think so.

T: Ok. The main thing is relationships and one of the things that I get a lot of questions about from people is “how do I drop into this and tell these stories?” I think really it comes down to having invested in the community, knowing the people, them knowing you and trusting you so that when you say “Hey, I’m looking for a subject that does A, B, and C, ummm, they know that you’re not just in for a quick hit and that you’ll be sensitive, that you understand the need of the character, subject, whatever the situation. Part of that comes from just having proven yourself over time. Which I guess if you’re just starting it it’s kind of hard because you don’t have a body of work, you don’t know the people, but I think being willing to take the time to get to know people and letting them truly know that you are helping them tell their story, as opposed to you coming in
with an agenda, you know. “I’m looking for somebody who suffers this and will fit this hole in my news story,” you know, that’s not gonna go over very well. It comes down to relationships which is really time and experience over the years. Is that helpful at all?

J: Yeah, well, looking more directly at yourself and The Long Night, how’d you say that you gained access to that story? Why were you trusted?

T: Because I started doing sexual violence reporting – there’s an old man eating a banana and he can’t stay in his own lane. Uhh, I started in around 2000 doing sexual violence work and that taught me a lot of the language of trauma and victimization and are sensitive. Every time someone tells their story they have to revisit that place, so, you know, making sure that they have a support group, are in a good space, are not hurting themselves, and are strong enough to be able to work with you to be able to retell their story is important, and that’s how I learned, doing that sexual violence stuff. As well as, I built relationships in that trauma/victimization community in the Seattle area and then I went to Southeast Asian over four years on periodic trips and learned a lot more about root causes behind trafficking. And gaining some of the access there required me to be able to speak the language of trauma and victimization. When I came back to the Seattle area, I kind of had that international cred. People were like “Oh, you went and reported on trafficking in Southeast Asia,” and you know, if they’ve never been there, then that seems like a big deal. So that helped. Gaining specific access to the subjects in the film again came down to relationships and knowing people in the social services community. And literally being able to go into someones office and say “I know you don’t provide
your clients to the media, but help me out, I have this need to tell this story, you understand the story I’m trying to tell, you want it told, but you know, you’re not gonna give me somebody. But, if you were to, this is what I would envision.” And they basically put out feelers and found people who would be willing to participate, you know, given what I was trying to do, because they trusted me. And when working with the law enforcement folks, I came in on the heels of a fiasco with a commercial production crew who was trying to do a documentary and they did that, but they interjected themselves a lot and actually caused a lot of problems for the law enforcement folks. So for me to come in and say “Look, I’ve done all this work. These people in these communities trust and support my work. Plus I’m a journalist, and this is how journalism works: I sit back and I watch, I observe, I don’t interfere. My job is not to make a story but to make sure I’m in the right place to capture a story,” and I think that that helped them with their fears that I was gonna fuck something up, so that gave me access there as well. Is that specific enough?

J: Could you kind of discuss how – you’re saying that these relationships are important, that you can walk into these offices – were you kind of volunteering for things to where you formed these relationships prior to this project, or how did those kind of prior relationships form?

T: Well, again, if I started in 2000 and I’m doing this work in 2013, and I started writing grants for this specific project in 2009, you know, it’s years of work, years of relationship building, years of proving myself in different capacities, so it’s not just like I called them
up and was like “Hey, can I have an audience?” I did that back in like 2000 when I got an interview with the director of the (______) sexual assault and traumatic stress, and she granted me an hour of her time. Now this is the director, and she’s basically walking me through that initial introduction to the language of trauma victimization so I had all that background, basically, before walking into these offices. I had also been going to the OPS (Organization for Prostitution Survivors) and they had just been created, and they were having their initial board member training and I asked if I could attend so I could understand what they’re trying to do by participating in that one night a week for – I forget how many weeks – I was building relationships there and in a way showed my personal vulnerabilities as they were showing theirs. And you know, if you’ve ever been to a retreat, people do that and come out of that closer and more bonded and together and whatever. That was another way in which I was able to, through good faith, show that I was willing to put in the effort, that I cared about the issue, that I was willing to approach in a safe way, blah blah blah. It’s not just calling somebody up and saying “Hey, I wanna do a project over the summer on this issue.” It’s like, I’ve been working on this over the past decade, you know, this is just another version of it.

**J:** Can you talk about some of your early experiences and, were these stories you were brought to through assignments or through personal interests. As you say, I’ve read a couple of your interviews, you say you started this about 15 years ago with sexual trauma stories and violence.
Yeah, so, the sexual violence stuff came about because I was asked by a friend to help
out with an outdoor program. The teacher had committed suicide during an investigation
into inappropriate conduct with one of their students, so I went and helped with the
climbing program. It was a typical abuse of powers situation. I found a polarized,
traumatized community. And that opened my eyes to something. I started talking about it
with my peers and after I had that interview with that director, I had a greater context and
understanding of what these students had been going through, and that changed my
language when I was talking about the issue with my peers, such that I became, uh,
basically like a lighthouse. I became a safe person to disclose to, so I started to learn how
many of my friends had been raped or abused or assaulted as children. It was through that
that I formed a personal interest because I was going through a transformation. And I
think that you’ll find people who are deeply invested in projects, they’ve got something
in their life that gives them a personal meaning. If somebody does something about the
Holocaust, maybe it’s because they’re of Jewish ancestry and they had somebody in their
family that you know, went through this or survived it, I don’t know. Or somebody
interested in immigration, maybe they themselves are immigrants. To commit to
something of that scale, you kinda have to have a personal interest, I believe. And for me,
that was seeing myself change my own language and thought. I mean, I’ve never been
assaulted sexually or abused, but now that I know so many people who have, and they’re
my close friends, so now I have a personal interest. And I helped them start telling their
stories and that gained momentum – it was kind of a moment where it was like wow, I
could have this great gallery show and it would be super awesome for me, but what’s that
gonna do for them? What’s that gonna do for the society or community? I realized
nothing. So that led me down the road to forming a non-profit that actually engaged with the communities and helped create change, and that was my intro to the concept of creating social change through media. So all of this stuff is me on my own wanting to do these things, ultimately at great expense. I had to walk away from the non-profit because it was just driving me into the ground financially and emotionally. I think also, even more so in today’s editorial marketplace, if you really want to do something, you’ve just got to figure out how to spend the money yourself and find the time to do it, because nobody can afford to pay for it. Go find the grant or work another job and save up the money, then take some time to go work on the project. It’s just, yeah, how it is now, even more.

**J:** Yeah. With a lot of this research, I think I’m looking at whether there’s a difference when say someone from the New York Times approaches someone to do a story versus when an independent journalist approaches someone. Have you felt that way? Or, I guess, have you felt in some instances, say maybe when you had less of a body of work, that you felt less credible than someone working for a larger institution like the NYT’s or whatever?

**T:** Yeah, yeah –um, yeah it’s nice to have that “Hey! I’m working for the New York Times” or Newsweek or whatever, to be able to say I’m with something, that I’m with some institution is nice. It gives you credibility right off the bat. Now I can say, “Yeah, I’m shopping this around, I have interest from X, Y, and Z. I’ve worked for A, B, and C. Here’s my website, here’s my clips, here’s my resume.” So now I have that, but before I didn’t, and it came down to me basically doing the research, asking for the time and the
knowledge of experts so I could bone up on things and then walking in to a situation and saying “Look, I know all these things about what you’re doing and this is the vision I have for the story. Can you help me with this?” And I think it really, it’s kind of funny for me to say this but, don’t feel very confident but you kind of have to walk into the situation with a humble, modest confidence and say “I’m really interested. I’m trying to do this story. I think that it has a chance to go to these place. This is what I’m going to work on to make sure that it’s gonna happen.” And when you don’t have that resume, you have to have even more of that confidence, but also the humility and the modesty to say “You’re the expert. I’ve been studying this stuff. I think I know enough, but I need your help to really tell this story.” Again it kind of comes down to relationship and how you come off and what you’re asking of them and being respectful of them, but also in that respect for them, doing your research so you’re not a total shit show when you walk in there. Does that make sense? Is that helpful at all?

J: Yeah, no that’s great. That’s all kind of what I was thinking and informative too.

T: The other thing too, and I think while you’re looking at this stuff, research what it means to be freelance vs what it means to be working for an “institution.” If you go to the University of Oregon school of visual journalism. Bob Sasha and I did a panel or a talk a couple months ago. We talked specifically about that issue, about being freelance versus being on staff. And when being on staff, sure, you’ve got that name, but you’re also bound to the vision of that publication. And I think today, as freelancers, actually journalists in general, all we have is our reputation, our name. So I can not be affiliated
with an organization and say here’s who I am and this is what I’ve done. And this is what I want to do with you. And I think more and more, given that we can self-distribute and self-publish, etc., it comes down to our reputation, to our ethics, and the fact that we can work for a diverse array of publication or corporations or non-profits. We just need to be transparent and clear about that. And we’re not bound by what the NYT’s says we have to do or the voice of the NYT’s or whatever it is. I think that’s an important thing to factor in there and I encourage you to watch that talk.

**J:** On that same topic, then, I won’t go too far into it because I’ll watch that, but, do you think that is a kind of strength of being a freelancer as opposed to be a staff photojournalist is that you maybe have more – you’re not tied to Fox or the NYT’s or whatever maybe perceived bias? You have your own credentials you’re putting forward instead of a brand name. You’ve got your own brand name.

**T:** Yeah, I think so, but I think that it helps to have, still, today, I think it’s important to have done the work or have been repeatedly published by the venerable institutions and then to have that to then step forward with and then say “Alright, well, this is who I am, this is my work, and this is where I intend to go.” I think it’s harder to just say “Here I am world” and create your voice. But I think by doing that is pitching to the editors of these publications, and if you find the sweet spot, then you’ll be published by them, and then you’ll never actually have to be on staff, you can just be a contributor or a periodic or whatever. Staff, I wouldn’t rely on staff today anyway, so. One person I think of is CJ Chivers, have you followed his work in the NYT’s. Look him up. Lens blog recently did
something on him. He’s worked with Bryan Denton the photographer and Tyler Hicks the photographer. Those seem to be his main go tos. He’s given up war reporting. He kind of became the expert on ordinances: where it came from and who’s using it and implicating the buyers and stuff like that. He’s now writing a book on it. He was a regular contributor to them but now he’s doing his own stuff. Anyways, stuff like that.

J: Alright, um, I’ll look him up. I’m almost done here. One of my last questions here, and I don’t think it really pertains to the work you’ve done, it’s more other people I’m looking at, other types of stories. It’s kind of just, whether you’ve ever felt like you’ve had to compromise your coverage or not photograph things that maybe you wanted to photograph in order to maintain access to a story.

T: Yeah. I mean, yeah, sometimes there’s amazing, powerful images that unfold before you, but if you raise the camera, you’re going to fuck up the relationship. So hopefully you’ve done a good job of developing that relationship so when that moment does arise, you can raise the camera. There’s also a sensitivity to the safety of your subjects and, you know, working with them to help them tell their stories also involves being sensitive to their needs and maybe altering how you… I mean, I guess and example would the newspaper policy thing “We don’t publish images of a dead body.” Or we don’t publish the dead bodies with faces or we don’t publish photos of dead American soldiers but we’ll gladly publish the bodies of Taliban or whatever. Those are the things that happen a lot. For me personally, yeah, I’ve had moments where out of respect for the subject or the situation or fear for my access, I’ve not made an image. Other times I have made an
image and not published them. So yeah, it happens, and I think that that’s something that the relationship and experience will help dictate the outcome. It’s never been a life threatening thing or anything like that, but more about sensitivity.

**J:** Summing it all up, what would you say some of the biggest obstacles an independent visual journalist faces trying to gain access to sensitive stories or difficult subject matters?

**T:** Being able to afford the time to invest in the relationships to get there and that comes down to money. And that is in part who is going to publish it, the fact that most editorial publications don’t have the money, that foundations haven’t stepped in, that private donors haven’t really… there just needs to be more money to be able to do the long term journalism. So I think that that is a major factor. It should not be ignored, and I think it should be highlighted, above all else, I think, because that means if there’s money to do this sort of stuff, then it makes it easier to overcome those other hurdles, which may be policies or some of the relational stuff. For instance, in Washington state, I can go into the department of corrections and film an interview with an individual inmate, which affects the ability to tell a story and that’s a policy thing that could be changed. But in order to get that policy changed, I need to be able to invest the time to get there. So I think that, yeah, financial support for long-form journalism and the fact that the market is still evolving and the economic model is shot to shit and needs to be fixed, those things are the major barriers to being able to gain access to these stories. Freelance or staff, I don’t think it really matters, because staffers have the same problem as well. Publications just
don’t have the resources. Is that an ok answer for what you’re looking at? Is there anything else?

J: No, I mean, if there’s kind of anything else that you think are important points that you want to try and get across –

T: No, I would just say go The Long Night movie dot com and look through the two essays I’ve published on Medium and then watch the talk with Bob Sasha and maybe do some research on Bob because he’s awesome and amazing.

Mary Calvert Interview Notes

*recording device failed in this interview, so notes are from memory of interview immediately after its finish.

Easier for independent visual journalists to shoot the story, easier for staffs to get it published. Believes that maybe it is easier for

Went to hearings on Capital Hill, which she had a credential to attend. Approached subjects there, who were somewhat familiar with her after seeing her there a few times. Approached subjects for violence straightforward, describing project and they either wanted to do it or they didn’t. Would hand them her business cards. If someone wasn’t interested, she wouldn’t push it.

Some of the access she gained was probably due to being a female, as some of the women would close off when around men.
Working on the homeless veterans part of her project. Some of the access came through personal interactions and meetings with people at events, which would then give her a more personal introduction to a director of a program or the likes.

Began working on sensitive topics as a student in San Francisco State University, working on an AIDS project with classmates that ended up winning the Robert Kennedy journalism award.

Feels a “certain generation” misses some of the importance of face to face communication because they operate so heavily through texts. So many of the organizations they’re trying to contact get tons of emails and they often don’t reply to them all.

Like Matsui, said that it’s important to care about the story and to actually be invested. Also agreed that having the work to prove yourself is a helpful thing.

Maybe compromised her coverage/didn’t photograph something out of fear of losing access when she went to a group of woman who broke down crying at the beginning of the discussion. She didn’t want to jar them by taking photos right then.