

A SPIRIT THAT IS NOT AFRAID



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COLUMN | Wanted: The art of journalism, dead or alive?



Auburn Plainsman senior, Ella Walton, poses in Ralph Brown Draughon library.

By [Ella Walton](#) | Newsletter Editor

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Let me preface with: forgive me, *Plainsman*. I meant not what I said three years ago, on that rainy campus tour of Auburn.

The orange-and-blue-striped guide had just reached the portion of the tour in the student center, where she instructed us to crane our heads upward, to marvel at where the Auburn Creed was etched on the wall.

I recall my dad picking up a newspaper from the rack, broadcasting “A SPIRIT THAT IS NOT AFRAID.” He said something along the lines of “You like to write, Ella. You should join the paper.”

I suppose I was already attempting to live the Creed at 18, because my spirit wasn’t afraid to declare: “Pretty sure journalism is dead, Dad.”

He was right about me enjoying writing. I’ve had a fondness for it since I was in the fifth grade and had known I wanted to work with words — whether that means writing them or editing them — since then.

When I thought of journalism back then, breaking news came to mind. Leading with hard facts, leaving no room for the creativity I desperately needed to purge into my writing.

It wasn’t until my sophomore year that, in desperation for connection, I walked into *The Plainsman* office. At the time, I had my heart strictly set on becoming an editor at a book publishing company. So I asked to be an editor, please and thank you.

Imagine my mortification when I was informed I must be a writer first.

It took me no time to decide on a section: culture. Reading over previous articles, which covered everything — fashion, food and features — I was dumbfounded to find that journalism had room for elements of creative writing. It wasn’t as black and white as I had made it to be — it was an art form, a kaleidoscope of perspectives mixed with fact and observation.

At first, the idea of interviewing strangers was fuel for my nightmares. I’ve always been better at the writing of words than speaking them.

Nonetheless, I threw myself into story after story. Anxiety was constantly an uninvited third party in my interviews. Quivering hands, heart threatening to beat right out of my chest. But editorship was in my sights, and I was born stubborn.

Gradually, I began to recognize myself in those who I interviewed. Whether I spoke to an artist, or famous alumni, or a local business owner, it was their excitement to be heard that fueled me. Connecting with members of the community, seeing them smile at questions they weren’t used to being asked — appreciating the humanness of it all — helped me breathe again.

Everyone wants to be seen, heard. Everyone has a tale to tell teetering on the tips of their tongues, eager to be shared. Writing for *The Plainsman* allowed me to reach out my hand, touch a fingertip to the stories people have long held quiet.

The art I once declared dead came alive. In my mind’s eye, it was resurrected through the people who resonated with the articles we published, those who were able to learn more about The Lovely Village they call home. It was revived through the family I found in that windowless newsroom — those spirits who aren’t afraid to pursue the truth, the good, the bad or the ugly realities that people deserve, and demand, to hear.

In a digital age where most would sooner read their news from a screen than a broadsheet, *The Plainsman* has had to evolve with the times. We don’t simply exist in the printed news magazines placed in racks around campus. We live online, linking the stories in our community with readers around the world. We dwell in email inboxes, set up camp on social media and shout: “We have something to say! And we are unafraid to say it!”

I don't believe my 18-year-old self, who declared journalism's time of death prematurely, could fathom the metaphorical home I've made for myself in journalism's embrace. Nor could she possibly imagine the voice I've steadily grown, watered and sunlit by those that have emboldened my ability to articulate the stories surrounding me.

Three internships, two editor positions and one (incoming) bachelor's degree later, and I can say with full confidence that walking into *The Plainsman* office those two years ago was the best thing I possibly could have done for my career, my creativity and, frankly, my sanity.

My brain hums with all the words I wish to say to this untiring organization. The lifelong friends it has gifted me, the purpose and perspectives it has provided me, are written on my heart like a living headline — to remain long after I graduate in December.

The art of journalism is alive in those that keep it so: in my fellow journalists, in each interviewee we come across, in our dear readers. To you all, I say, thank you for bringing a previously undiscovered part of me to life.

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Ella Walton | Newsletter Editor

Ella Walton, majoring in English literature with a minor in creative writing, currently serves as the Newsletter Editor at The Auburn Plainsman. Formerly the Culture Editor, Walton has been with The Auburn Plainsman since the fall of 2023.



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