



HOW TODAY'S YOUNG JOURNALISTS FOUND THEIR PASSION AT RIORDAN

by JC CANICOSA '16



Despite what you've heard about Riordan alumni, they weren't always perfect.

They didn't walk into Lindland Theatre for freshman orientation already knowing they'd be tomorrow's computer programmers, doctors, artists, or writers. They didn't know they had passions and potential waiting to be tapped. Heck, they probably didn't even know where their homeroom was that day.

But that's what Riordan provides for young men and women with potential. Direction.

Want to try acting? Here are four years worth of theatre classes to get you started. Want to see if you like Cross Country? Practices start at 3:30 after school, open to all.

Anything you may have a inkling for: anime, music, science, culture, food—somewhere at Riordan, a club or class or activity is waiting for you to find it.

For me, and so many other Riordan alumni in the journalism workforce, that direction led me to a passion. It was something about the idea of storytelling, but the subjects were members of your community, that really drew me to craft.

I love what I do, and I know my fellow writers who worked at *The Crusader* feel the same way.

Looking back, it's crazy how seven years ago I was interviewing Mr. Juan Zumbado, the dean of students, about (what I thought was) a hard-hitting piece on the video games ban on campus. And today, I'm talking to the governors and senators about the COVID-19 crisis.

If you asked 16-year-old me, he'd probably say, "the video games story is more important."

The point is, we wouldn't have been able to find that passion for the craft if we never started along our humbling beginnings (for me it was in Room 204 on Wednesdays at lunch, for the Newspaper Club under the leadership of then-moderator Mr. Viggen Rassam '87).

Today, many of those writers are continuing to hone their craft in the professional and college journalism world. I spoke with four of them about how Riordan prepared them for where they are now, on and off the presses.

Read more about their path on the following pages.

**"I fell in love with the aspect of being able to bear witness to news as it unfolds and the privilege of reporting it through my camera."
- Stephen Lam '03**

JC Canicosa '16: What are the main differences between covering a high school campus and a college/professional one?

Steven Rissotto '20, the editor-in-chief at Skyline College's newspaper (*The Skyline View*), podcaster, and former editor-in-chief of *The Crusader*: One of the major differences between covering a college campus compared to a high school campus is that everything in college is sped up two notches. An emphasis on localizing stories becomes the top building block and being able to navigate through a larger campus is a lot to get used to.

The hardest part from a journalism standpoint is learning the new personnel, and since I'm at a junior college the time to introduce yourself is limited. I've noticed this throughout COVID, where we've lacked student sources because the reporters simply don't know anyone else on campus because of the lack of in-person learning.

High school was definitely more hands-on and we did a lot of learning on the go. When you get to college, it's almost expected that your skills are good enough to start writing right away and the grace period is cut in half. It was uncomfortable at first in a new environment, but my key to journalism has always been to stay composed while uncomfortable.

Keven Muñoz '18, editor-in-chief at Drew University's newspaper (*The Acorn*) and former staff writer for *The Crusader* and journalism student: The biggest difference I noticed was that college has a lot more people and a lot more activity. So, you have to be on high alert. College students can be some of the most outspoken people and really value being heard.

Roman Peregrino '18, editor-in-chief at Georgetown University's newsmagazine (*The*

***Georgetown Voice*) and former editor-in-chief of *The Crusader*:** There is so much more freedom to publish anything you want or feel is needed, but that comes with responsibility. You have to make sure you put in the work and the research because there are real world consequences for not reporting a story correctly.

It is also harder to make connections with professors or other students as it was to know teachers at high school. Finally, it is both easier and harder to manage your time in college. In high school, you would just write a story when your homework was done, as if it were another assignment. In college, you have to carve that time out, with a strict deadline over your head.

Stephen Lam '03, staff photographer at *The San Francisco Chronicle*: I believe the biggest difference between a high school paper and *The Chronicle* is the scale and speed in which the news is delivered. The stories in the Riordan paper back then were mostly quick school-related features and it ran much like a quarterly. I don't think there was a website for the newspaper either.

"Journalism has helped me in many ways—from learning how to effectively do research, to how to ask questions."

-Keven Muñoz

What inspired you to continue doing journalism after Riordan?

Rissotto: My time at Riordan boosted my desire to pursue journalism at the next level because I realized it was something I really enjoyed doing.

Sure, I can write an article while conducting staff meetings, but the social interaction with the staff, sources, and advisor was an aspect about the industry that I fell in love with.

After my four years as a Crusader, I didn't really have an adjustment period when I got to college because everything felt normal to me because of my preparation in high school.

Muñoz: Journalism was an important part of my high school career where I was able to develop my writing style and my voice. I thought that these were key aspects of my life that could benefit from being involved in a more rigorous environment.

Journalism has helped me in many ways—from learning how to effectively do research, to how to ask questions and even how to organize my writing.

Peregrino: At first, I actually didn't plan on pursuing journalism.

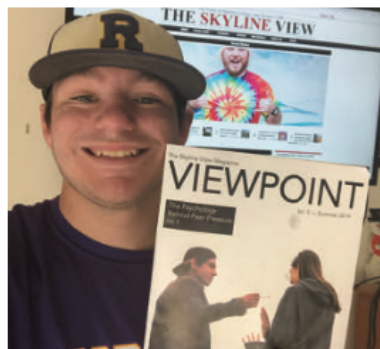
I was at the club fair at the beginning of freshman year with my roommate and we decided to just put our names down for *The Georgetown Voice* because they had no application and the people seemed nice. I liked being a high school journalist but I didn't want to make it a career and figured I would try different things.

But my roommate said he wanted to join their design team and I decided to attend one news meeting. I never looked back and eventually met some of my best friends in the world.

Lam: Photography was a hobby during my high school years and I went on to study mechanical engineering for three years before accidentally discovering photojournalism. I fell in love with the aspect of being able to bear witness to news as it unfolds and the privilege of reporting it through my camera.

Describe the impact that Ms. Susan Sutton (current faculty advisor for *The Crusader*) has had on the program and on you.

Rissotto: Most of the journalism concepts and style I've learned over time have come from Ms. Sutton. She was absolutely instrumental in giving me the tools I need to never feel like a situation is too big. She genuinely cares about her students. There's nobody on campus that works harder



Clockwise from top left: JC Canicosa, Keven Muñoz, Steven Rissotto, Stephen Lam, and Roman Peregrino.

than she does, and it's a reflection on the success the program has experienced in recent years.

We can be in a big time crunch and everyone would be stressed and running on fumes except her. She stays even keel and I know the rest of the staff really feeds off that.

Muñoz: Ms. Sutton was one of the best mentors I had at Riordan. She rebuilt the newspaper program at Riordan so that it could be something that we were all proud of. As for her impact on me, Ms. Sutton taught me how to lead a newspaper and push my writers to do their very best. She never stopped believing in us which made it that much easier to keep going.

continued on next page

Peregrino: Ms. Sutton means the world to me.

She has always believed in me and made me strive to not just be a better writer but a better person. I feel as though I always have a home in her classroom. I owe a lot to her.

Outside of journalism, what are some values you learned at Riordan that you carry with you on the job or off it?

Lam: Respect and empathy.

It still baffles me how a group of young men with raging hormones and various upbringings managed to get along, but I think we learned through mutual respect.

I also remember those mandatory community service hours. I dreaded it then but I still vividly remember the times serving breakfast at Martin de Porres at sunrise and talking to people about their struggles. It put life into perspective. Those interactions which were often a simple act of listening carries over now that I am working on many stories on that front.

Rissotto: Outside of journalism, Riordan was kind of the foundation of how I developed socially.

I had a good amount of friends in middle school, but I first witnessed the family atmosphere in high school. All the students had the same goal with the idea that nobody would be left behind. I was challenged when I started writing in the newspaper and playing baseball because I didn't have any core relationships.

I quickly learned that I could be myself at Riordan and that helped me grow as a man during the four years I was there.

Muñoz: Riordan taught me how to be confident in what I have to say and not take my own voice for granted.

One of the major challenges in college is

learning how to fit in and being comfortable with who you are. However, the teachers and friends I made in college really made me feel like it was important for me to not shy away from the things that make me me.

This form of thinking made it easy for me to adjust to the different social spaces in college.

Peregrino: In terms of values, I've definitely felt as though I learned to talk to a very diverse group of people.

Riordan was a relatively small, but diverse school so I talked to a lot of people with different backgrounds and life experiences. I feel like that helped me be comfortable at Georgetown talking to people, whether that was for a story or not.

Life is all about interacting with others and I feel like Riordan was the place that helped push me out of my comfort zone.

I also learned that you have to take every opportunity that comes your way—you never know what that will turn into.

###

JC Canicosa is a political journalist in Baton Rouge, Louisiana covering the Louisiana Legislature, as well as education, poverty, and government programs (or lack thereof) through the COVID-19 pandemic. In college he served as the sports editor and senior staff writer for The Loyola Maroon, where he also wrote an award-winning column.

In Mr. Vigen Rassam's journalism class at Riordan, Canicosa wrote articles about the NBA, band trips and new school policies—as well as new campus renovations.