

## Rebecca Schneid Personal Statement

Throughout all of my struggles and stories I have written during my time as a staffer and as two-time Editor-in-Chief of the Stoneman Douglas Eagle Eye, I have primarily strived to do one thing: find the truth. Beginning this year, the major issues that I wanted to explore was the way in which the ever-changing political climate has influenced the world around us. In finding this truth, I researched extensively and canvased the ways in which our culture has changed with the new presidential administration.

Then, as the #Me Too movement struck the Hollywood community and American society, completely revolutionizing the way sexual assaulters are held accountable for their actions, I became passionate about this issue. This passion turned to curiosity as I tried to find the truth again: what does this movement, its origins, and its results say about our society in the past and in the future. I interviewed experts on sexual assault, a lawyer in the Harvey Weinstein case, sexual assault victims, and politically engaged students of all ages and backgrounds to explore rape culture in America. This is the piece I am possibly most proud of because of the work I put into not only just the writing, but also the research, the design, and the photography that accompanied the story. It was something I felt very passionate about, and I was so extremely excited and proud to write and expose this issue to those at my school, and demonstrate how it also affects the lives of my classmates. In this piece, I also mentored a freshman newspaper classmate, teaching her how to improve their writing and properly research a sensitive topic such as this one. Simultaneously, I worked to put together this second quarter issue as the Editor in Chief, having to step into this large leadership role and lead the class to a timely and well-written magazine finish.

Then, suddenly, my life changed as a journalist and person forever. February 14, 2018 marked a complete shift in my life, and the Eagle Eye was thrust into the spotlight as the newspaper of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School where a tragedy had just occurred. So, while dealing with my own personal issues and trying to create change myself, I had to put my heart into this newspaper and work as the Editor-in-Chief to lead our publication in the most trying times of our life. I worked with my fellow editors to plan to cover the multitude of stories coming out of the tragedy and activism at our school, while simultaneously working to create a magazine that memorialized each victim. We made the decision to do these victims justice, and tell the world their story. I wrote two obituaries, Alaina Petty's and Joaquin Oliver's- and those are the two pieces of writing I am most proud of, and likely will always be most proud of. Here, I worked to tell *their* truth, even though they were no longer able to. I did not stop work, staying after school in newspaper each day from the moment we got back to school, reporting weeks before that. My mental health and wellbeing was a certain obstacle in reporting on the tragedy at my own school, but I worked with my staff, whom I now consider my family, to get it all done.

From there, the Eagle Eye worked to be the leading publication in the events going on as a result of our school. I did my part editing almost all of these online stories and writing some of my own, such as a story on Secretary Betsy DeVos's visit to the school, which was cited in many other major news websites' reporting of the event. We travelled to Washington D.C. to report on the March for Our Lives, and partnering with *The Guardian* to do so. Through this experience, I got a taste of my future as a professional journalist, and was exhilarated. Not only that, but also The Eagle Eye finished the year off strong, as we all worked to tell the truth about gun violence in our final magazine issue- not just gun violence in our lives, but in the lives of so many Americans around the country. My specific stories in this issue worked to find the truth in how past activism movements have influenced the active generation rising up today and of the NRA's

history and its current power in our current political system. Throughout all of this, I was doing interviews to promote journalism, media literacy, and student journalism rights in schools for the betterment of journalism in America as a whole.

This year, my resolve and work at *The Eagle Eye* did not stop nor did it slow down. As Editor-In-Chief for the second year, I continued to inspire and work with our staffers, both editing and leading them. I was an integral part in the planning and execution of our first two issues: “Reclaiming the Nest” and “Express Yourself”. The former was an extremely informative issue that revealed the true feelings and circumstances of our school as we returned for the new year. I had written about the activism work done over the summer by my classmates, but there were also investigative pieces (that I assigned) about the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Commission, the reassignment of multiple Assistant Principals, and the new safety precautions implemented at the school. In the second issue, I wrote an investigative piece on the struggles of LGBTQ+ students at our school. When planning the issue, I knew that our first quarter issue was very focused on our shooting, and our third quarter issue would be as well. So, I advocated for, and planned with the help of my editors whom I trust unequivocally, the “Express Yourself” issue, which was still informative, but highlighted more positive aspects and events of our school. We centered it around the art and expression of students, whether that be through makeup videos, rapping, student businesses, or their sexuality.

Through my work at the Eagle Eye, I have travelled the country to promote the work of journalism. Last year, I travelled to the March for Our Lives in Washington D.C. I also travelled to the Columbia Scholastic Press Association convention last March, where I spoke on a panel teaching other student journalists about reporting on a tragedy. I plan to attend this conference again this March. This past November, I also travelled to the Issuu Generator’s Summit in New York City to discuss free press rights and our struggles in fighting for our rights here at *The Eagle Eye*. Finally, in a few weeks, I will be headed to Des Moines, Iowa as a guest of Mary Beth Tinker, speaking at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Tinker vs. Des Moines* Supreme Court decision.

Through my work on all different topics over my three years at *the Eagle Eye*, my experience through travel, and my leadership within class, I have been able to truly see the power of journalism. Not only do true journalists strive to find the truth in their lives, but in the lives of those who often are not listened to. They do not discriminate someone’s story because of their skin color, creed, orientation, or gender. They find a story and they tell it to the world, hopefully therefore making it a better, more informed place as a result. I hope, and truly believe, that the work that I have done at *The Eagle Eye* has done this for the Stoneman Douglas Community and for the country.