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Upside-down campus in an upside-down world

Megan Troutman Mar 29, 2018



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As spring-breakers filter back to Flagstaff, I'm expecting NAU campus to flip upside-down.

On March 21 at 2 p.m., the body of NAU student Joseph Michael Bock was found dead. NAUPD, leading the investigation, sent out an alert describing the incident as an “unattended death.” There was blood throughout the apartment and Bock’s body was found underneath a bed.

I picked up this story for *The Lumberjack* and spoke with a student living in the Hilltop Townhomes where the incident happened. Senior reporter Adrian Skabelund and I took on the investigation.

Immediately, I went into journalism mode. I was trying to find the truth. Facts. Sources.

My mind was cranking as I made phone calls and talked to sources, trying to find the truth, trying to find out what happened in that apartment the week before March 21. How did no one know? Did anyone see anything? Did the police have any leads?

I had questions, lots of questions. And it became my sole mission to inform students and the public about anything I could find. Not just in a nosey journalist way, although it may seem like it, but in a way where my job became the most important mission—to inform the public so students and Flagstaff locals could feel at ease.

Sometimes ignorance is bliss, but not when it comes to a suspicious unattended death. People need to know.

So after a few hours of investigating, transcribing quotes and writing, my co-reporter and I published. I watched the view counts go up.

After that I went home, changed into my pajamas, made a cup of tea, and I cried.

I cried harder than I have cried in a while.

I cried for the Bock family in this difficult time. I cried for his roommates and his neighbors. I cried because “journalism mode” got the best of me. I became a soulless, desensitized robot, hungry for the truth and nothing else.

I cried because the unattended death I was researching so hard was actually a real human being, with friends and family whose lives will never be the same again.

Media is a desensitizing monster. Hearing about school shootings and sexual assaults has become the heart-wrenching norm. We're losing a sense of normalcy in this twisted, complicated world.

As a journalist, you need a journalism mode, otherwise you wouldn't be able to emotionally handle any assignments. Guns. Violence. Sexual assault. Murder.

It would be too much.

So please don't cry on your bathroom floor and spill scalding tea on your hand. Call someone to talk to. NAU counseling services can be reached 24 hours at 523-2261.

My heart goes out to all affected by Bock's death. May he rest in peace.

Megan Troutman is the editor-in-chief of The Lumberjack, Northern Arizona University's student newspaper. College Chronicles aims to connect FlagLive! readers to various aspects of campus life.