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Hometown: Raleigh, NC

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Internship: The Forum of Fargo-Moorhead



At the end of May, I squeezed as much of my life into two suitcases as I possibly could and set off on the journey from my hometown of Raleigh, N.C. to Fargo, N.D. -- farther than I'd ever traveled before. A month earlier, I decided to accept the position of summer news intern at The Forum of Fargo-Moorhead. And even though I was apprehensive about living and working in a completely new region, I was thrilled to begin my first daily news experience.

When he first interviewed me, I told Editor-in-Chief Matt Von Pinnon that The Forum stuck out to me because it felt like an opportunity to hone my reporting skills in a mid-size city similar to the Triangle area in North Carolina where I'm from in terms of industry and politics, but unique enough to really challenge me to get out of my comfort zone and learn on my feet.

The prospect of covering breaking news as someone who has mostly resided in the comfortable territory of features writing was frankly quite nerve wracking for me. I'd never monitored things like police scanners and dispatch logs for a hint of action or had to call public information officers for the scoop on a breaking story. In my ten weeks at The Forum, I learned how to do all those things and more. As I gained confidence covering events like city government meetings, extreme weather, and accident and crime reports, I also learned how to supplement those stories with cool sleuthy things I'd never done for school assignments, like accessing court documents, police reports, and contact information from Accurant.

Reporting in a new city in a region I had zero familiarity with was certainly a challenge. Many of my assignments saw me scrambling to contextualize a particular policy or figure within the North Dakota and/or Minnesota political spheres. My story looking at the results of the Minnesota Buffer Law comes to mind as one such example where I had to research the legislation starting from its origin a few years back through to its passing and aftermath. I had to quickly familiarize myself with the tenuous relationships between lawmakers, farmers, and environmental activists here. It was a test of my abilities to be sure, but exactly the kind of thing I came here to do.

I used most of these newfound skills for one of the last stories I completed during my internship -- the Denise Anderson murder-arson case. A friend of the murdered Fargo woman reached out to the paper on Saturday, Aug. 3, saying she had information about the story. As the weekend reporter, I returned her call. The friend, Natalie Hest, shared the contents of a concerning Facebook Messenger conversation she'd had with the victim several weeks before the murder. At the end of the day, it became clear that all Hest wanted was to make sure that her friend's story shone through, despite all the coverage about her alleged killer. It was a rewarding experience to assure her that I understood her perspective and I appreciated her reaching out. During that conversation with Hest, I got to put into action many of the best practices I've hoped other journalists would adopt under sensitive situations in the past.

I also had the freedom to pitch some of my own story ideas, like a local screening of the 1977 documentary "Gay USA" and a panel of LGBTQ seniors recalling the impact of the Stonewall Riots on their lives during a week-long celebration of its 50th anniversary. Or when I decided to cover a local blood drive by donating for the first time and documenting the experience after my research found that the Fargo-Moorhead area was in critical need of blood donations.

Hiring me also indisputably showed The Forum's dedication to granting opportunity to all students. There are so many economic barriers preventing young people that don't come from wealthy families from breaking into the news industry and I was discouraged when many of the internship listings I saw last year required applicants to have their own car. I was so relieved when Mr. Von Pinnon assured me we'd be able to work out some form of transportation for me, and true to his word, a pool car was made available for me to pursue assignments. I really appreciated this accommodation because I know it's far from industry standard, and it opened up a world of stories to me that I wouldn't have been able to do if I was stuck in the office all day.

But I must say, the best thing about interning at The Forum is that learning and guidance doesn't end with your direct supervisor, although mine was a treasure trove of resources and mentorship. There is a sense of community here that I found extremely enriching as I navigated my first role at a daily paper. I frequently had lunch with last year's intern, first to pick her brain about the job, and later because we had become fast friends. When I went out on assignment with our photographers, I learned how to spot different components and figures in a scene that I wouldn't have noticed before. Across roles and experience levels, The Forum's staff members were happy to dole out their best tips and advice. That collaboration was evident when every week, a group of reporters, new and seasoned, would go to trivia night at a local bar (an excellent exercise more reporters should engage in, in my opinion). The current events round tested our understanding of news value, and the other categories on our general and pop culture knowledge. Combining what we knew from our varying life experiences across age, culture, and region, we won more often than not.

My summer as a news intern at The Forum saw me grow tremendously as a journalist and a young adult. Flying halfway across the country to report in an unfamiliar city was intimidating, but my supervisors, friends, and colleagues at The Forum welcomed me to the team and taught me more than I can ever thank them for.