

Inside the coverage: Katrina Bailey on her debut story

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Alex Lassiter hosts senior city desk reporter Katrina Bailey, who discusses her first story, “East African students process tensions in East Africa,” her challenges in sourcing and the learning experience from reporting on such a sensitive topic.

ALEX LASSITER: Hello, lovely people. It’s Alex from the Minnesota Daily and you are listening to In The Know, a podcast dedicated to the University of Minnesota.

This episode is going to be a little bit different because I have a special guest with me, Katrina Bailey. So Katrina, why don’t you introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about what you do at the Daily? And what desk you work on and all that kind of cool stuff.

KATRINA BAILEY: Yeah, perfect. So I’m Katrina, I work on the city desk and I am the senior staff reporter as of right now. And basically what the city desk does is it focuses more on what’s going on in Minneapolis and the Twin Cities rather than only focused on the University of Minnesota. And I’m very happy to be here.

LASSITER: So today, Katrina, we’re going to be talking about your very first story, which is titled East African Students Process Tensions in East Africa. You wrote this back in February. So why don’t you give us a little bit of context, kind of lay down the groundwork for us on this story.

BAILEY: So, honestly, when I first joined the Daily, I didn’t know what city desk was or what I should write about. So one of my friends who is Ethiopian brought this story to me and I thought it was super interesting because I know there’s a big East African population on campus and I just thought it would be important to cover this issue and see kind of how it was affecting them. So, honestly, the hardest part of the story was getting sources for it because I know this is a very touchy subject for people and they don’t want to be perceived in the wrong way by picking a side kind of. So that was the hardest part.

I was working with another reporter, her name’s Alex, on this story and she was covering more of the background of the story and I was reaching out to the sources, but like I was saying I didn’t really get any. So I decided to attend the Somali Student Association, like, kickoff event that they had in the spring because I thought that would be perfect. And then I can talk to people directly there instead of trying to go through their email and then not respond.

So I go there, and it’s really interesting just to see how the atmosphere is. Everyone’s really excited to be there and different things like that because they’re going to have, it’s like a game night type of thing. So I go in there and I approach the president and I’m like, “Hey, I

don't know if you got my email, but I'm Katrina Bailey with the Minnesota Daily and I was wondering if I could talk to someone here." So then they're like, "Yeah, of course. Here's the like board historian who can tell you a lot of information." So he was very happy to talk about it.

And he basically said that Somaliland is a territory who wants to be considered a sovereign nation. And they recently made a deal with Ethiopia on leasing part of its coastline for the next 50 years because Ethiopia is a landlocked country and having that access to the water really allows them to like trade more and different things like that. But then Somalia doesn't necessarily like that because Ethiopian and Somalian have had issues for a while.

So that's basically kind of like the gist of the story and a lot of people have family in that area. So it's interesting just to get their perspective on how they're concerned for their safety. I spoke with somebody else at the event who said he has, like, his uncle had to flee the area where they were having conflict and that he has, like, a very, like, close tie with the area. And it was just interesting to see because I personally knew nothing about that area. I don't have any connections to that area. So I was just like overjoyed that they were willing to talk to me about this because touchy subjects are always hard to approach when you're a journalist.

So that was honestly super nice. They were all super nice. And they were like, "Oh, you can stay if you want to." And another thing that I thought was interesting is I wasn't used to not being the only white person in a room if you know what I mean, that was something that I don't know if it like took me back, but it's just something I like immediately noticed. That I was like as soon as I walked in I was like, "Wow I am the minority here," and that just really put things into perspective because I've never really been the minority being like a white female.

So it was just interesting because they all were like super fun. They were all taking like polaroid pictures of each other and things like that. It was just a nice atmosphere to be in and I'm glad that I made an effort to go to the event because it's way easier to talk to people when you physically show up instead of like hoping they'll respond to your email. And then with that, I only had two sources and for a story you need at least three sources.

So I reached out to like the, it was like the African Association, I don't remember the exact name on campus. And then they finally got back to me and I was able to talk to the president. And I was like so happy that they were able to make time for me and basically I just like said, "Oh, how was, how do you feel?" Because she said she had both people who were Somali and Ethiopian in the association. And she's like, it's more like people don't want to be perceived the wrong way, kind of what I was talking about earlier.

That they are afraid if they like bring something up or something, someone will get a different perspective on them about this issue and then maybe they won't want to be friends anymore or something. So like this subject was very touchy and I'm glad that I was able to cover it as my first story because I honestly haven't written anything in that dynamic sense, usually I've

been writing about like funding or grants or you know stuff through the city of Minneapolis that it's honestly not as interesting as that because I always like the connection that people have with different areas of the world.

And they're able to bring that here because the U is a big diverse group of people and being able to cover specific areas is great. My beat is social issues, but it's sometimes just kind of like whatever you find to write about, you know, because people in my desk kind of cover anything in that area. So, but yeah, it's been it's been a good experience. I'm glad that that was my first story and I think that Jack was saying that this was like one of the most read stories on city desk ever.

LASSITER: Yeah, I definitely, I remember hearing about that too. It sounds like it had a really, really big audience and for those listening Jack is the city desk editor. But it's just really interesting that this is like your first story and it already garnered so much traction and so much interaction.

And so I'm kind of curious, I have a few questions I want to ask about like the aftermath and everything. But before we get, or before I get too far ahead of myself, I guess I'm just most curious about how it was working on this story, your first story with your co author and how that research was split. How that interview process was split, like what you each contributed and what you learned from your parts of contribution.

BAILEY: Yeah, sure. So when I first started on the desk, Jack said it would be better if you worked with somebody else, which I totally understand, because this is my first ever newspaper job and just trying to get a hang of it was important. And I remember at like the first pitch meeting, I was like really nervous that this idea wouldn't have been good enough, kind of, because I didn't know exactly what to expect for the ideas here like my first actual pitch meeting.

And Jack asked me, he's like, "Do you have any story ideas?" I was like, "Well, I kind of have one, but I'd rather not pitch it." And then I was, then I like backtracked on my words. And then I was like, "Actually, I would like to pitch it." And then he's like, "Oh, I love this idea." And then he's like, "Alex, you're going to work with her on this story."

So we talked and Alex was like, "This is your story and I'm just like a helper basically for your story, so I can do all the background information like find out all the history of it and kind of why they're at tensions with each other right now. And I think it'd be better if you went and talked to the people about the story." And I was like, "Okay, that's fine." That's kind of what I was thinking about anyway.

Yeah, and I was nervous because I mean it's my first story with like with the Daily. But then I'm more like interested in building the emotional connection is what I'm trying to say, so I'm glad that we were able to do that. And she's been she was really helpful and kind of like

showed me how to write the story how like the application we used to write the story, it's called Flow, which is basically where everyone submits their articles and then people can like edit them and different things like that.

Like I didn't know how any of that worked. So it was nice that she was able to help me with that. It was overall a really positive experience and I'm glad I was able to work with someone on my first article because it made things a lot less intimidating, for sure.

LASSITER: Absolutely, and that makes a ton of sense. Trust me, coming in, my very first article about a year ago, I was floored, I was flabbergasted. I just, I had no idea where to start, but it seems like you did a really, really good job, and it paid off a lot. Now was this your first article that you'd ever written for anything, or was it just your first article here at the Daily?

BAILEY: It was my first article probably published ever besides just the stuff you did in like the journalism classes just because I didn't, I didn't know about the Daily at first. And I probably would have started writing it sooner, but I'm glad that there's this opportunity for me to do. And I was honestly worried I wasn't going to get hired. So, yeah.

LASSITER: And so, with that first article ever, what did you learn from it? What did you take away from it, like especially in your talking to people in your reporting and pre-reporting and in your tackling of like sensitive issues and topics?

I'm really interested to hear in what this really beefy, it sounds like, first article taught you in the way and how you've implemented those skills that you've learned into maybe future articles or like previous articles that you have put out that are future in the context of when this article was released back in February. If you're able or willing to give a few examples.

BAILEY: What I realized was everyone has something to say about anything. And that's what I feel like is important because even if it's something small or it's like, "Oh, I never thought of it that way." Different things like that, that's really what I learned about is honestly, reach out to as many people as possible. It's kind of how I've taken that and because everyone has something different to say. They're involved in it in maybe a slightly different way or through a different organization or different things like that.

So it's good to hear different perspectives and then it makes you think, "Oh, I didn't think of it that way," because doing like the pre-reporting or just trying to find out all the facts about it. So like, let's say you're talking about some like funding or something like, "Where does the funding come from and what is it used for?" Like, so then you figure out all of that and then when you talk to people you're more finding out why is this important?

And then they all have a different idea on why it's important and maybe how it's affecting them or the organization they're a part of or something like that. It's also important to show up. That's something I really realized. I know a lot of people probably just like think emails

are better or phone calls are better, but it's completely different when you actively show up to the event and then show that you take an interest enough to take time out of your day to show up and then they're more willing to talk to you. I understand that that doesn't work all the time because I mean, we're busy, especially during the school year. Like I can't really show up to stuff because I have class.

But over the summer it's different because a lot of people have more free time, I would say. So showing up is definitely important with that. Just allowing people to talk. I give a lot of people free range, I guess, in the interview. I'm just like, "This is kind of what I wanted to cover." And then they're like, "Okay, I'll just start talking." And then usually when they start talking, they have that flow and then they just keep going and then eventually they get to something. I'm like, "That's a good quote," or I was like, "Oh, I didn't." It's like all goes back to the oh, I didn't think about that because as journalists, you're constantly learning.

Even if you do all the pre-reporting and different things like that you're still learning how this has affected someone in a different way that you didn't think of because you're just on the outside of it just learning. Then all you do is continue to learn. I remember when I was first started at the journalism program here at the Hubbard School, it was kind of like, you should know all the answers to your questions before you ask them.

But personally, I don't necessarily agree with that because how are you, how am I supposed to understand, like, how is it important to you? You know, like on like a personal level. A personal level is what makes the story interesting more so than the context to back it up. While that is important just for people to understand how it works and different things like that, I'm more interested in like those quotes that are like make you feel something.

Or it's like, for example, my story that came out yesterday, it's about the [Marcy Holmes Leave a Light On program](#). And I interviewed a student and they said that, "You couldn't pay me to live there because of the crime." And just like, hearing it like that was just like, wow. And then I included that in my story because it was really important. But it was just like, something like that I can't prepare for or I can't know the answer to that because they'll say it in certain ways that just make the story better.

So I feel like that is important and just figuring out how to best cover the subject, so like with my first story it was like a very touchy subject and I was just trying to figure out the best way to approach it. And I just realized like kind of let them talk about it because one of the people I interviewed just kept talking and talking about like their experience and their family different things like that and it was best for me not to interrupt them or say anything. Just like let the silence sit and then they continue to talk which I feel like is important. So I was just, made sure that when I initially started I was like, "If this is too touchy or if I say anything you're not comfortable with you don't have to answer I'm, just trying to learn more about the situation and your kind of like your involvement with it and how it affects you."

So I feel like that's the best way to approach a situation like this. It's like, put yourself out there as like, "It's okay to be vulnerable. And if I cross over the line by asking any questions, feel free not to answer because I don't want to do anything that will like make you upset or anything. I'm just here more like to learn about your personal experience." So any other story that I would cover to this extent, I would feel like just be available and be like, "If you want to talk about it after the story is written or anything like I'm here for you," and different things like that.

LASSITER: And so having this first story, and you talked a lot about this in your answer to your previous question, but you came into it, I'm sure, just not knowing everything, the full scope of the situation. What did you learn from talking to people about the situation in Somalia and Somaliland and Ethiopia?

Kind of like a best hits for people who haven't read your article yet, the most pertinent pieces of information. And then what do you think, if you've had any contact with your sources, post publication, what's changed? What is something new that we should be aware of if there is anything to that extent?

BAILEY: Yeah, so I haven't heard from my sources yet because I told them to reach out to me if they had any questions because I don't want to like feel like I'm prying into their business, I should say. And I don't really think there's anything has evolved because it's more like they were just trying to talk about it. It's like Ethiopia wants the shoreline and then Somaliland wants Ethiopia to recognize them as a sovereign state. And for Ethiopia to use the shoreline, it would like come into Somalia and that, Somaliland has been disputed territory for a long time.

So that's kind of like the background of the article. And then when I talked with people, they were like, "I have family in the area and they've had to move away and I just hope that they can find peace eventually." And it really touched me that some people have, like, are locally involved even if they're thousands of miles away from them.

Just being able to hear about their experience and hear how much, like, this is affecting them, even when right now it's just, like, a conversation, kind of between the groups of people. So that was really interesting.

Like just learning about the background like the first person I talked to, like the board historian of the Somali student group just knew so much information and some of it, like I couldn't even find online. They just knew so much information about the land and like the dispute and the tensions that have been there since like 1991 or something like that. So it was just interesting that they knew all this stuff and they held it so close to their heart that they were more than happy to share about it. And they weren't, they didn't hesitate at all with showing me the information.

I was really happy about cause I didn't want them to like, feel like I was over crossing the line in any way, but I'm glad that I was able to do that. And it honestly gave me a lot of confidence. So that's, I continue to write and make stories it's like everything became a lot easier. So I feel like after I tackled this really touchy subject as my first story everything else seemed kind of easy you know. So yeah, the my story just to like sum it up it's kind of like giving more of like the context I've talked about throughout the story and just how people react to it and like having family there even when the people don't know anyone specifically there.

If they know like, that's their homeland, or that's where they came from, or like, immigrated from, or anything, so just knowing about the thing. Oh, now that I think about it, what was interesting is, a lot of people didn't know about this at the student event, for example. They were like, "Oh, I didn't know this was going on." So it was kind of like two sides of like, people who were deeply involved and deeply connected, or people who like, are kind of like, estranged from their homeland, or maybe they're like, have been in America for years, you know, so they didn't, they don't have an emotional connection with that area anymore.

So they just felt like they didn't need, they didn't know about it because they don't have a connection. So that was really interesting to me because there was kind of like two sides of the story, like, "Oh, I didn't know," or like, "Oh, I do know, and my family is involved." So just trying to find that balance between kind of who to talk to and who is willing to talk about their story. Because if they aren't involved in it I wouldn't want to say I don't want to talk with them, but they don't, they don't know anything about the conflict going on. So I wouldn't be able to get that emotional perspective on that.

LASSITER: And that does answer about all the questions that I came in wanting to ask. Is there anything else that you'd like to share about your experience writing this story? Is there anything else that you'd like to share with us? That you just think you'd like us listeners to know or anything. Any just last tidbits of knowledge, wisdom, information that you'd like to share with us before we sign off for today.

BAILEY: Yeah, so thank you for having me on, I really appreciate it. And I've never done anything like this. It's been super interesting. I just think that it's important to keep an open mind and learn about stuff that you wouldn't have normally learned about because that's how you learn about what's going on in the world.

It's like I had no idea this was going on, but then with my friend, it like deeply touched her. So then I was like, "Oh, this will deeply touch a lot of other people." So then I learned more information about it. I just feel like it's important to just keep an eye on of what everything is going on. I know like news happens every day and there's so much of it, but just finding something that seems interesting and learning a little more about it is important.

Like even like looking on your local news and you just click on one story and read it. Just to kind of get what's going on and different things like that because you can always learn more. That's kind of your thing as a journalist is you just continue to learn. I know that I wanted to be a journalist for a long time and kind of what I thought of was I get to be so many different careers and so many different people as a journalist because I just learn so much information about something that I could honestly maybe like teach.

I could teach other people about it is kind of like what you do as a journalist is you teach other people about the story that you have an interest in and then I kind of like become that job or that role for that for that story. And I always think that's been interesting because I like used to want to be like a biologist or something that has like nothing to do with journalism, but then one day if I find a story that is it and then I can talk to biologists it's like I become a temporary biologist if that makes sense.

So I just feel like it's just interesting to learn about and with this story, it's good to read on it. I know it happened, like, or like this is still going on, but my story was written back in February of this year. It's just good to go back and read the story just to kind of learn what's going on. There is also like a bunch of comments that were left on the story about people's opinions on it and different things like that.

So that also brings you in another perspective. So I would say like the last thing is just immerse yourself kind of in learning because that I feel like is the most important thing because you never know what learning about one thing can do to help elevate your life I would say.

LASSITER: Well, thank you so much for dropping that insight on us, Katrina. It was an absolute pleasure to have you. My name is Alex Lassiter with the Minnesota Daily, and this has been In The Know. You can feel free to read Katrina's story on the Minnesota Daily website. It is titled, East African students process tensions in East Africa, or you can go on her staff page, Katrina, that's K A T R I N A, Bailey, B A I L E Y and read it there. If you have any questions, comments, concerns regarding this episode or any others, feel free to shoot us an email at podcasting@mndaily.com and we will see you in the next episode. Again, I'm Alex, and this has been In The Know, take care of y'all.