

Lessons in journalism — Sophie Eydis talks stories, successes and setbacks

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As graduation nears, Sophie Eydis, a senior reporter, shares her journey, favorite stories and the lessons learned while covering campus life.

KAYLIE SIROVY: Hello, everybody. My name is Kaylie Sirovy, your host from the Minnesota Daily. Right now, you're listening to In The Know, a podcast dedicated to the University of Minnesota. Today in the studio with me, I have Sophie. Hi Sophie!

SOPHIE EYDIS: Hi!

SIROVY: She is here to talk about one of her recent stories. Sophie, I'll let you take it from here. Why don't you let our listeners know who you are.

EYDIS: I'm Sophie. I am a senior at the U, and I am a staff reporter here at the Daily. I'm on the campus activities desk, and I've been here for a little over a year now. It's been a journey, for sure.

SIROVY: Have you liked it here so far?

EYDIS: I love it here. Sadly, this is my last semester here. I really need to start focusing on what I'm going to be doing post grad. So I'm trying to focus on that.

SIROVY: We're all on that job search grind. Let me tell you.

EYDIS: Yeah.

SIROVY: Are you looking at any jobs in particular?

EYDIS: So I'm from Chicago, so I would love to move back to Chicago and I'm looking at jobs at just different news organizations, mostly newspapers. Wherever I can get a job, honestly. It's been tough. There's been a lot of rejection. A lot of ups and downs, but my second semester, I'm really gonna be focusing on that.

SIROVY: At least you have people responding to your applications. I've done a few. They have not responded.

EYDIS: Yeah, I have a lot of those, too. I've applied to places and it's just like some get back and then they're like, "Thanks for applying. We didn't select you, but try again some other time."

SIROVY: Sophie recently did a piece about a crochet business from a student here on campus. And it is currently one of our most read stories in the past two years. So walk me through your reporting process. How did you find this story to begin with?

EYDIS: So a lot of times when I'm looking for stories, I will go on the U of M Snapchat stories and sort of see just what's going on because my focus is mainly students. What a better place to look for students than the U of M Snapchat stories.

I came across, a little, like, ad, I guess you could say, a little, like, Canva poster that someone made about a crochet business that a student was running, and I thought that was super interesting.

I'm always looking for stories about students doing innovative things, so I got in contact with the person who posted that, who was the friend of the girl who ran the crochet business. From there she connected me with Corin, the girl who runs the business. I also talked to her friend Lola as well. And they're both great.

SIROVY: Oh, I love that. So, were you just like, "Girl, tell me about your business? How'd you do this?"

EYDIS: Yeah, I really wanted to, figure out how she got into crocheting. She said that she had started this business like two years ago as like she was working at European Wax Center, and she was basically looking for something to do with her hands.

So from there she sort of was getting commissions from customers asking her to like make things for for them and then she was kind of like, "Well, this is like something I could make some some money off of." So she started selling some of her things and I asked her, I'm like, "Well, where do you find the time to do all this?"

SIROVY: That's the big question, man.

EYDIS: Yeah, and she was like, "In class." She was like, "At every class you can find me crocheting."

SIROVY: And her professors don't mind that?

EYDIS: I guess not.

SIROVY: I love that. She's just crocheting, sitting there. Oh my god. I love that. Did you ask her how many customers she's had? How many people?

EYDIS: Yeah, well she sells mostly to students. She has definitely gained more of a following recently. She also sells some of her things on Poshmark. So she has gotten a few customers that way too. But, with her, like, she said that she is not really doing this for the money.

It's just something that she likes to do. And like the money, it's just a nice aspect of it. But you know, this is just kind of a hobby that turned into something she could create into a business.

SIROVY: Isn't that the dream?

EYDIS: Yeah, it is.

SIROVY: While you were talking with her, or while you were writing this story, was there anything that was really surprising to you?

EYDIS: Good question. I would just say the amount of people who have bought her stuff and the positive feedback that she's gotten back from so many people. One thing that I really liked that she said was that she'll see people around campus wearing her hats and things like that.

She mentioned the cat ear hats are a really big, popular item that she does and she sees those around campus and she's like, "You don't know this, but I made that." I thought that was super cool.

SIROVY: That is super cool. So you got her interview and you were talking with her and you're sitting down to write this piece. Was it really easy to write or was it kind of difficult?

EYDIS: Honestly both. I think it was easy in the fact that she's so amazing and she gave me so much to work with, which is always nice because there was a lot to write about. But I could only write so much, so I really had to choose and be intentional with the things that I included in the piece.

She gave me a ton of people to talk to. And unfortunately I could only talk to one of her friends in the timeline that I had. She's just great.

SIROVY: I love that. Has she read the piece, do you know?

EYDIS: I reached out to her after I saw, the piece was getting a lot of attention and I was just like, "Thank you so much. This is insane. I really hope that I've helped you out in some way and like growing your business." She was just very thankful.

SIROVY: Yeah, that's so sweet. At what point did you realize it was getting a lot of attention?

EYDIS: I came into in person editing and Spencer, our editor-in-chief, was sitting there and he's like, "Sophie, do you know your story is like the second most read article in like all Daily history or something?" I was like, "What? Like, which story?" He was like, "The crochet story," and I checked the website.

I've consistently been checking it and it's stayed at like the number one trending story. Honestly, this being my last semester here, I was thrilled and I was so excited that I could end on this note and promote her stuff and just everything she's doing and all the work she's putting into it was super, super special.

SIROVY: This is so wholesome.

EYDIS: It is.

SIROVY: Oh my god. I love it. I love the fact that this is your last semester, this being one of your final pieces. How many do you have left to do?

EYDIS: I have probably like, two more, two more stories.

SIROVY: Yeah. Way to end on a bang. And it got Best of Sno, which for those who don't know, is kind of like a student journalism award.

Exemplifying that it was a great piece. It was very unique. You had great writing in it. Was there anything that you wanted to put in the piece but couldn't because of the word limit?

EYDIS: No, I don't think so. I was very intentional about what I put in the piece. If I could have put the whole interview in there, I would have. Corin is truly amazing. And, just having a conversation with her, you could just tell the kind of person she is.

But, no, I think I was, I was pretty intentional with what I included in the piece, and I made sure that everything I put in there was something that I wouldn't want like our readers to miss out on.

SIROVY: Is this one of your favorite pieces that you've done, or is there another piece that you think you did better on?

EYDIS: I would say this is one of my favorite pieces that I've done because a lot of the time I'm doing stories on clubs and things like that. And while that is great, it can get repetitive sometimes.

So it's always exciting when you could do a student feature piece because there are so many incredible students here doing such great things and when you get to recognize them for the work that they're doing.

It's just, I don't know, it fills my heart. I'm glad that I am able to do that for them. Reflecting back on all the stories that I've written, one of my first stories was on the homecoming marshal last year Laura Coates who is a CNN anchor and that just being one of my first stories was kind of kick ass.

She was amazing and I was so happy to talk to her. The piece turned out great and that was one of my favorites for sure. Every story that I do is different and intentional and like its own way. So, yeah.

SIROVY: Is there a piece that you don't like?

EYDIS: Oh gosh.

SIROVY: Cause I've got work I don't.

EYDIS: Not that I can think of. I mean, it's all kind of blurring in my head right now. Everyone I've talked to and all the clubs that I've talked to and been in connection with, like they've all been so great. So I don't know, that's a hard question. I'd have to look back.

SIROVY: Did you ever want to, after interviewing one of these clubs, do you ever want to join?

EYDIS: Actually, yes. I'm currently interviewing and working on a story for a club called the National Retail Federation Student Association.

SIROVY: That's a mouthful.

EYDIS: And it's basically a club that is retail focus like they work. They do a lot of networking with the retail industry and I'm like a sucker for like brands, like I don't know. I love like makeup brands. I love designer brands even though I can't afford it, but I can't afford the fake bags, which is good.

But I've been talking to them and they go on this trip to New York every January and get to connect with all these cool retailers like Steve Madden and Fenty Beauty. I've been talking to them and I'm like, "You guys are super cool. I would love to join this club."

SIROVY: Can it be any major?

EYDIS: Any major is welcome to join. I would imagine it's mostly retail related majors. But they're super cool and they welcome everyone.

SIROVY: So now, kind of reflecting on your time here at the Daily, how was your process getting to work here?

EYDIS: I would say it was pretty incredible. I am so happy that I got the opportunity to work with the Daily. I've met so many great people. I love everyone on my desk. And just coming in every week, whether it's for meetings or in person editing, I always leave feeling a little bit happier because there's never really a bad day at the Daily.

Everyone is so amazing.

The people that I've gotten to speak with through this has been incredible. I feel like I know so much more about the university and everything that it has to offer and I think that that's been super cool and also just holding the university accountable, too.

SIROVY: You are so right girl. That's what we do. Yeah. I mean, I don't really do that. My coworkers do. I would like to, but that's for another time. Do you see a potential follow up for somebody else to this kind of story?

EYDIS: I don't know. I'm always on the lookout for things. I'm always checking the Snapchat story and seeing what people are doing. I definitely would be open to that. I think that I would love to see after this story, what that has done for her and how much that has grown her business and how many crochet items she's sold after this piece has come out. I think that would be super interesting.

SIROVY: Yeah, and all of her comments there were like 20 plus comments on the story. They're all so nice it's kind of a nice change of pace from some of the comments that we get. It definitely, I was like, "Ah, this is just refreshing."

It's so refreshing and it just feels really nice especially in the time of like winter break with like holiday season coming up. I was like, "Ah, this is what people need," you know, just a nice story to read.

EYDIS: Yeah, it was. It's definitely refreshing. I feel like we've had so much going on this semester with the protests and people stepping down from positions and all this crazy stuff. I'm glad that this was something people enjoyed. And was more of a positive note.

SIROVY: Yeah. I think it's a great way to end the semester for sure. Is there a moment that you've had here at the Daily that you think about sometimes like either a funny moment or someone that you've talked to or a story that you heard?

EYDIS: Whenever I think about the Daily, I really think honestly just about my experience with the first editor that I had, Henry. He was so incredible. When I first joined the daily, I knew close to nothing about journalism.

SIROVY: We all did.

EYDIS: I was in my early stages of journalism. I had a very broad aspect of what I'd learned in my classes, but I'd never had the experience outside of that. Henry was someone who really helped me thrive here and was with me every step of the way.

That meant so much to me. I feel just like my first semester here was the thing that I'm probably going to remember most about the Daily is just how welcoming everybody was and how great Henry was. Shout out Henry. He was amazing.

SIROVY: I do miss Henry. Yeah. I miss chatting with him. He was always so fun. Is there anything you would tell yourself when you were just starting here that you know now you'd be like you got to know this before you?

EYDIS: Don't be afraid of PR. University PR. Don't be afraid. They are just doing their jobs. Make a list of questions for every interview you do. I kinda do that to structure me, but I used to just go down the list and not respond to what the other person said. I would just say, "OK, and this and this and the next, and the next question," and I was just so nervous.

But now as I've gotten more comfortable with it, I feel like. It's really important to just let the conversation flow like we're doing right now. That is not something that I was doing before and I wish I was because I feel like conversations like this really are what get the best out of people and help you learn about them the most when it's like you're going down a list.

It can be hard to learn about the person. And I think that's what I did with Corin too, just let the conversation flow.

SIROVY: Did you have an embarrassing conversation then, like someone you first talked to?

EYDIS: I remember my worst interview I ever did. I'm sort of exposing myself. It was with someone from the mortuary department here. He was kind of just like, "Did you not look at anything before this interview? Do you know what you're talking about pretty much?" And I was just like, "I mean, no, but yes, I did my homework."

That was probably the most sort of awkward experience that I've had. It will definitely stick with me because I remember after that interview, I literally started crying. I was like, "What just happened?" I was going in feeling good, ready to talk about dead people. All of a sudden I was just like.

SIROVY: We all have those interviews, man, where the person is like, "Are you sure? Like, you're good at this? Like, you know your job?"

EYDIS: I'm like, yes, I do. I promise. I was like, I promise. I did my homework. Oh my goodness. Yeah, that was probably my most, like, embarrassing.

SIROVY: Well, you definitely learned.

EYDIS: Yeah, I've learned since then. There's so many interesting characters that you meet doing this job, and that's kind of why I love it, too.

SIROVY: I love talking with people. There are some times where I'm like, I just want to use our entire conversation. It's not really pertinent to the topic that I want to talk about, but I just want to use it. I just wanna hear you talk. Literally. Yeah. Sit there and yap to me all day long.

EYDIS: And it's always the best when you get people who are a little quirky and have their wits about them. Like, those are the best people to talk to. It's just kind of why I love what I do, getting to meet all these characters, honestly.

SIROVY: That's kind of like the best part about journalism, you know?

EYDIS: I love that, I live for it. I live for the different personalities.

SIROVY: Oh, me too. Yeah. And all about the different topics and stuff that we talk about, really fun. Yep. Is there anything that you want to talk about, like a story that you wanted to mention, or the Daily as a whole. I don't know.

EYDIS: One other story that I did, this past semester that got a lot of attention was a story on Jewish student reactions to the protests and everything going on. That meant a lot to me because I felt like we weren't really giving that side of the narrative.

And talking to those students and I was really, really happy I was able to do that, especially being Jewish myself. I felt like I was able to give those students a voice when a lot of them felt like they didn't have one.

SIROVY: God, you're going to make me cry over here.

EYDIS: I'm really surprising myself. I'm never like this. I'm already in a really emotional mood today because it's my last days of first semester. Then I go into the second semester of being a senior and I'm like, "Where has the time gone?"

SIROVY: I know. That was me last week. I was like, "Wait a minute, I won't be here next year."

EYDIS: Like, it's insane. I've been kind of feeling like that today. I almost cried walking out of my class. I'm like, "Wait, this is surreal."

SIROVY: I'm so gonna do that tomorrow.

EYDIS: Yeah, I was like, this is surreal. And honestly, like, I've had such great time. Like professors this semester, so.

SIROVY: Yeah, I love my professors.

EYDIS: Yeah, they're great. Shout out J School. They have some really, really great, really great professors there. I'm sad. That time of year too.

I'm sad. I'm excited for a break, but I'm sad because I go home to Chicago, and then I don't see my friends here for a while yeah.

SIROVY: You can do freelance work for the Daily. Have you thought about that?

EYDIS: I've thought about it. I'm actually currently working on a piece for one of my classes, which is basically about crime in the University of Minnesota area, specifically Dinkytown, which is a really, hot topic all the time. This is breaking news, but I am planning on doing freelancing for that one with the Star Tribune.

SIROVY: Oh! Yeah, that's really exciting.

EYDIS: Yeah, that's really exciting. I'm going to be working with my professor over break and making the final touches to that story, I've been working on it all semester. I'm super, super excited to have this opportunity. This is for in-depth reporting.

So investigative reporting that I've been doing all semester. It feels good that the work is finally going to pay off. I've talked to the University of Minnesota Police Department. We don't hear from them all too much.

SIROVY: We don't hear from them too much. That's okay though. This has been so nice to chat with you.

EYDIS: Thank you so much for having me on. I love talking, so this has been perfect for me.

SIROVY: Why do you think I love my job?

EYDIS: You're making me want to start doing something like this.

SIROVY: Hey, it's super easy, you know? It's just literally talking with people and then making a story out of it.

EYDIS: Yeah, it's fun. I'm so into podcasts right now, too.

SIROVY: Oh, which ones are you listening to?

EYDIS: Oh my god, all of them. I'm super into Call Her Daddy. I love Alex Cooper. I think she's a genius. I love Jake Shane. I listen to his podcast. I listen to Alex Earle's podcast.

Yeah, those are kind of the main ones I'm listening to right now. But, yeah, I love Alex Cooper. Shout out to Alex Cooper. She's a queen.

SIROVY: I don't listen to that podcast, but I know exactly the one you're talking about. It's like the top women podcast. Yeah, okay, well, if you have nothing else you want to chat about, then I'm going to do my little end spiel here and we can close up.

This episode was produced by Kaylie Sirovy. As always, we appreciate you listening in and feel free to leave us an email at podcasting@mndaily.com with any questions, comments, or concerns. I'm Kaylie.

EYDIS: I'm Sophie.

SIROVY: And this has been In The Know.