Brittany Smyth

Interview Assignment

I believe that Jan Murphy’s story on “PHEAA” was very important, because it showed in depth what was really going on with how the public’s funds were being spent. The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) was getting out of control with spending. The Board members went on a retreat at the Nemacolin Woodlands Resort and spent $135,637.74. The PHEAA’s 20 board members and the agency's staff members and guests spent $9,542 for spa treatments, almost $9,000 for golf outings, $665 for cigars, $583 for cooking lessons and $115.54 for a pedicure and manicure. The amount spent on the trip is almost enough to provide a $3,500 state grant. The maximum the state offers for 39 college students. This agency somehow became the example of how NOT to run government in Pennsylvania.  Being appointed to its Board became a political plum and an excuse to spend tax funds like drunken sailors on leave.  Most of these Board members are state legislators. If PHEAA made money on its college loans those fund then s belonged to the people.  They were not lottery winnings to be squandered on luxurious retreats for Board members.  These Board members violated their responsibilities by going on the retreats and voting to approve them. I was very happy with Jan Murphy’s reaction to her story. She wrote a good, detailed story that targeted an issue that needed to be rectified. After the story had been printed, PHEAA’s President and CEO Dick Willey made major changes. Such as eliminating the luxurious board member retreats and he cut down on the travel expenses. I definitely consider this story to contribute to the people’s right to know in a democracy, because these students are busting their butts after college to pay these student loans off, and they deserve to know where there money is going and how it is being spent. Jan Murphy didn’t really come across any problems in covering this story. She created a big change in having this story printed. If it wasn’t for her PHEAA wouldn’t have made any changes and the spending probably would have escalated. In one of Jan Murphy’s interviews she said she came across a difficult problem regarding a murder story. A stripper was murdered in her home by her boyfriend who took his life as well. Her editor had told her to call the mother of the murdered girl for an interview and when Jan called and talked about the murder the mother was just hearing about it for the first time. Jan Felt heart wrenched and said it was a horrible that she had to be the one to tell her first.

Susan Snyder’s story Amber’s Story really hit home with me. I used to think that reporters were so nosy and got too involved and annoying in people’s personal lives. I felt that they asked too many personal questions, and just basically didn’t have the right to intrude in people’s lives unless they were asked too. It was comforting to hear that Susan Snyder was an emotional person who took this family’s story and made it something beautiful. Amber was a little girl who had bone cancer, and Susan Snyder was invited into their home to basically be with Amber and learn about her at all times. In the interview Susan explained how emotional the experience was and how she became a part of this family. I thought that it was truly touching that in the end the reporter wasn’t just trying to dig for details for a story, but truly had a heart that cared, and wrote a story on how much she cared for that family and Amber. I felt that Susan’s story “Writing for Their Lives” was an important story because a class of Philadelphia eighth graders explored the violence and pain in their world through shared diaries, revealing their feelings and fears in a transforming experience. In a five part-series, The Inquirer chronicles their six-month journey. I believe that Susan Snyder wrote this story with a lot of emotion just like how these kids did with their stories. I think one of the most important stories Susan focused on was the one about Eighth grader Naibria Reid who wrote about 23 year old Shannon Hudson who was murdered by her boyfriend. Naibria was touched deeply by the story and after meeting with Shannon’s mom and feeling an instant connection to Shannon and learning about her; she began writing in her diary almost as if she were Shannon. This assignment made Naibria always want to go to school. Her mother was so proud with the improvements that she was seeing with her daughter. Naibria also spoke to about 500 students at a peace rally It’s a chance to really speak It’s a chance to really speak out against the arguments and shootings that have been claiming an increasing number of lives in her city—and that caused her and her mother to move from Germantown to Lawncrest last summer. Nearly half of her 30 classmates have a friend or relative who’s been shot.

I don’t believe that gender played a role in the reporting and writing of these stories from Susan Snyder and Jan Murphy because gender wasn’t targeted or brought up in any aspect of the stories they wrote about. With Jan Murphy’s it was mainly about the money that PHEAA was blowing on extravagant retreats, and Susan Snyder’s was about children of all races, and sexes talking about their feelings they wrote in their personal diary assignment. Jan Murphy reminded me a little bit of Nellie Bly. I know she didn’t go undercover into the PHEAA’S dirty spending schemes and pretend to be one of them; she still was the one to leak and print their undercover spending, which included the hotels, wines, manicures, pedicures, dinners, sodas, etc.