

What it Means to be a Noble Journalist

October 13, 2015 | Andrea Smith

State College, Pa.- On Oct. 9, in the Buckhout Lab Building, Will Yurman, a Penn State College of Communications professor, talked about his journey to becoming a successful journalist before he became a professor.

Yurman classifies himself as a newspaper photographer, who taught himself how to collect and edit audio. He is also very fond of still images. Yurman enjoys long-term projects and works one story at a time.

While speaking to a room full of communication students he says, “I want to give voices to the voiceless”. In 2005, Yurman attended a vigil in Rochester, New York for a young man by the name of Ian Crawford.

Crawford, a homicide victim, was someone whom Yurman’s newspaper, *Rochester (N.Y.) Democrat and Chronicle*, wrote about at the time. It came to Yurman’s attention that his newspaper company didn’t have enough information about the homicide victim to write about him.

Yurman later attended Crawford’s vigil where he talked to the victim’s sister. He mentioned noticing that not much was said about her brother in remembrance of him and he asked her why. She answered “no one cares about a black man from Jamaica.”

From there, Yurman knew he had to change that mentality. He believes that “everyone deserves to be recognized and everyone deserves to have their story heard”.

In 2007, Yurman proposed the idea that every homicide in Rochester, New York be documented. Initially, Yurman’s boss said it would be “too urban”.

His boss thought the idea of minorities recurring on their newspapers would tarnish the name of the newspaper. But eventually he agreed.

Yurman made sure to not make the victims a statistic. He said, “Behind every face there is context and feelings.” In every case, Yurman tried to go beyond the “he was a wonderful boy, I’m going to miss him” phase.

Yurman started by knocking on the doors of the homicide victim’s families. He made it a point to attend the vigils and funerals to get pictures and backgrounds on the victims.

Yurman reveals the difficulty of facing these families; he was very sympathetic to the families and their loss.

Sydni Jones, an aspiring print journalist at Penn State discusses the difficulty of reporting on tragic events, “I wouldn’t feel comfortable asking the victims’ families about their loved one... I feel as though the topic is just too sensitive, too fresh. That person so dear to them just died.”

Of the 58 homicides that took place in Rochester, New York in 2007, Yurman was able to document the deaths of 53. He created a website dedicated to the victims called, “Not Forgotten Rochester’s Victims of Homicide in 2007.”

The website for “Not Forgotten Rochester’s Victims of Homicide in 2007” can be found at [here](#).

To close his speech, Yurman recaps the difficulties and benefits of being a journalist, “this is the notable part about what journalists do. It was depressing but it was a gift to see how people opened up. It was an awful, hard year but I was blessed to have done it.”