

# If a career in journalism was like climbing a hill...

*“Excitement, curiosity, hope. I didn’t know what to feel and expect in advance of the British Council’s Future News Worldwide conference, held at the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of July. Journalism is changing at a rapid pace and questions about our profession’s future are not easily answered. Fortunately, the new generation is there to make up its own answer.”*

July 2018, by Nick de Jager

“During a day-long conference, it is impossible to pay full attention every moment. At least for me, a rather chaotic guy from the Dutch countryside. During a short moment of distraction, I looked out through the windows. I saw a hill. A beautiful hill, a famous hill, a mythical hill, but only its foot. It triggered my imagination. If the foot already looked amazing, what would the top look like?

During the Future News Worldwide conference, the British Council invited one hundred young (aspiring) journalists from all over the world. Delegates with origins varying from Fiji to France, China to Canada and Ghana to Germany. There were a lot of differences between us, but one thing brought us together. We had a shared ambition in our profession: journalism. However, if career progress was like climbing a hill, we are still at the foot.

## Naive view

To climb the hill of journalism, it is necessary to locate the paths and obstacles. I am only twenty years old and likely to have a slightly naive view of my future profession. I do not want to think in problems, I want to think in opportunities. Ironically people who have seen the hill’s peak have faced all those struggles, and can tell you exactly where the opportunities are.

I was inspired by Catherine Gicheru, a distinguished Kenyan journalist believing ordinary people should be centralised in any article. I was nodding yes when Melissa Bell defined her problems with modern day journalism and told how she dealt with those. Her aim for more context in a story felt as a revelation for me, it was a speech I needed to hear to keep believing in my future profession. And how cool was it to hear from David Pratt, who has done war reporting for multiple decades and can genuinely tell what good journalism means to him? Enriching in every way.

Gicheru, Bell and Pratt were amazing, just like the other speeches the British Council had arranged for us. However, it was only partially those speeches which made the conference the incredible experience it was. I can listen to a lot of inspiring talks about journalism on Internet, information these days is very accessible. If you want to be inspired, you do not necessarily have to take a plane to Edinburgh. A couple of minutes on YouTube and you are there.

## Eagerness to talk

What made my Edinburgh trip unforgettable and in some ways life-changing however, is something completely else. It’s the bonding with young people from all over the world. As a student with an ambition in foreign journalism, I try to inform myself about world news every day. Although reading and watching a lot, I still feel like I don’t know anything. Of course, I knew that Ukraine has troubles with Russia, Nepal must deal with a lot of earthquakes and people in Costa Rica speak the same language as people in Uruguay (not entirely true, though). That’s basic knowledge. Yet you rarely get the chance to go in-depth into these subjects. How do Nepalese people deal with earthquakes? How does language connect a Costa Rican with an Uruguayan, while their countries are thousands of miles

from each other? These are questions traditional West-European journalism cannot always answer, as the focus for explanation in newsrooms tends to slip away in our drive for fast reporting.

That's where the power of Future News Worldwide comes in. It did not matter which delegate I came in contact with during and around the conference. It did not matter where he or she has a home. It did not matter which religious, cultural or educational background someone had. In every conversation I felt an eagerness to talk about our countries. We searched for similarities and got to understand our differences.

I loved a conversation I had with delegates from India, Botswana and South Korea about dating. I tried to explain how Dutch men normally pay for the first date. It is so common... In some parts of the world 'going Dutch' is even a stereotype for only paying at the first date, and sharing the bill in future ones. Well, the Botswanan and Indian women were not really happy with me. Weren't my habits a form of showing male superiority? Was I seeing the woman as equal, by taking financial responsibility the first time we see each other? I tried to convince them it is just a nicely-meant gesture, but they didn't agree. To be honest: I have never heard a view like this in my life. It didn't only make me think about the subject, I made me think about the way I look at the world in general. There was not one figment in my arrogant West-European mind that imagined feministic views could be this big in those areas of the world. Even bigger than in The Netherlands, where we like to believe that we rock the subject of equality. I certainly did, I don't anymore.

### **Escaping the bubble**

"When I get home, the first thing I will do is burn down stereotypes", Colombian-Ecuadorian delegate Sebastián Mendoza said in a panel discussion in the conference. I think we tend to see the world through the eyes of our culture. Our education and our media outlets focus on how things are viewed in your country, and not especially in the rest of the world. Thanks to Future News Worldwide, one hundred delegates have a chance to escape this bubble. To see a bigger picture. Isn't that what good journalism is about?

I couldn't see the bigger picture of the hill, looking outside the window during that long day of conference. Later in the week I got to climb it fortunately – indeed walking towards a great view. Now it's time for the hill of journalism. It will be a tough one and I can't see the peak yet, but at least I'm fully equipped to make it an amazing hike."