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Rising Star: Nicole Hong

By [Kirsten Ballard](#) August 20, 2018

Nicole Hong moved around a lot as a child. So when she moved from Pennsylvania to Indiana in the 10th grade, “It was a jarring transition,” she says. She didn’t know anyone at the time, but she had journalism.

“Reporting was an easy excuse to talk to a lot of people and meet people that way,” she says. She became hooked. Even in high school, she saw that journalism could be used as a vehicle to hold those in power accountable.

Nicole’s parents came from China and grew up in a very different media environment. The fact that her reporting was protected by the First Amendment was intoxicating. “I was protected as long as what I wrote was true and accurate, even if it was tough and critical,” she says.

For the last six years, Nicole has been at *The Wall Street Journal*, where she started as a financial markets reporter and worked her way up to being the court and prosecutor reporter. She is serving on the investigative team covering President Trump’s former attorney, Michael Cohen.

“I’ve always been very interested in legal issues,” she says. Even in high school, she was on the debate team and enjoyed talking about the issues with the Fourth Amendment and privacy. For a while, she thought she would go to law school to pursue the interest.

Instead, she started at *The Journal*. While covering finance and markets, one story led her to cover the litigation between Argentina and hedge funds. From there, she was hooked on courts reporting.

Her favorite part of her work is the impact of her stories. “We have a massive platform at *The Journal*; we have millions of readers,” she says. “The editing process is very tough. When these big pieces come out—things we’ve been investigating for weeks—they’re bulletproof. People are going to talk about it.”

Recently, Nicole worked with a colleague to publish a piece on [sexual harassment at law firms](#). They discovered the law firm structure made it possible for partners to easily hop from firm to firm without the allegations of sexual harassment following them.

“I’m very proud of that story,” she says. “It was so grueling.”

The piece took dozens and dozens of cold calls. “We were starting from nothing in the beginning,” she says. “It was sheer persistence and diligence. We were trying to penetrate an industry that is very secretive.”

The internal vetting and editing process at *The Journal* was very intense, but the piece that came out made her incredibly proud.

In the newsroom, Nicole is known as the calm in the center of the storm. “In newsrooms, you’ll find a lot of personalities; someone is always getting really angry about something,” she says. “Getting angry all the time is not a productive way to deal with stuff that comes up in the newsroom. There are times I’ve flipped out, but I try to pick my battles.”

She credits her tranquility to her training at *The Journal* as an intern, where she worked on the newswire side. “I’ve had editors counting down when I was writing breaking news, telling me I had 10 seconds to finish it... nine... eight, and so on. It made me a faster writer and made me calm under pressure.”

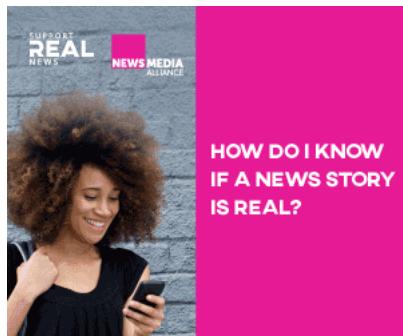
She learned her own style from others in the newsroom. When she first started, she wanted to learn how to get scoops—she felt intimidated watching the veteran reporters. “I’d see male colleagues screaming on the phone, dropping F-bombs as a way to get information. That’s not my temperament.”

Her colleagues often took sources for a round of golf or to smoke a cigar as a way to open up.

“These were not natural activities I’d gravitate towards. I had this existential crisis – I didn’t know how to golf, I didn’t want to scream at people,” she laughs. “I wish I had been told this starting out, but the ability to get scoops is something you can acquire. It’s a skill you can practice and hone, almost like a sport. Sourcing is different for every person, you can pick something that fits your temperament. If you don’t feel like you’re the type of person who can scream on the phone, there are other ways to get scoops and develop sources that can make you feel comfortable.”



Kirsten Ballard



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