

Fall 11-16-2018

My Experience at The Walrus

Megan Levine

Western University, mlevin6@uwo.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/sasahr4pres>



Part of the [Digital Humanities Commons](#)

Citation of this paper:

Levine, Megan, "My Experience at The Walrus" (2018). *SASAH 4th Year Capstone and Other Projects: Presentations*. 1.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/sasahr4pres/1>

Megan Levine

250830414

Experiential Learning Final Essay

30 November 2018

My Experience at *The Walrus*

I've always expected more from myself, and believed I was less. Failure was a shadow tiptoeing behind every step I took, and I'd be terrified of it pouncing and engulfing me whole. Today, I can look failure in the eyes and embrace it. I can look at an opportunity as a learning experience, rather than a make or break. I am not perfect, but I am hardworking and passionate. Most importantly, I have realized that being my own bully will get me nowhere. These are a few of the lessons I learned during a six-week online-editorial internship at one of the most successful magazine companies in Canada: *The Walrus*.

"I didn't want you to be treated like an intern that only fetches me coffee and does all the boring tasks that I don't feel like doing," my supervisor, Cody, explained to me the last week of my internship. "I wanted you to complete meaningful tasks; I wanted you to feel like you were helping out our team."

We were sitting in a quaint pizza parlor, where Cody had just treated me to lunch. Reflecting back on my time at *The Walrus*, I assured him that he had accomplished what he sought out to do as a mentor. I did feel I played an important role while I was there. Those six weeks included computer coding, article formatting, copy editing, and archiving. I had completed the same kind of work as Cody and his assistant, Alex. I was truly a part of the team.

What I learned from my first internship was not what was taught to me; rather, it was what I discovered on my own. I could write pages and pages about the hours I spent flipping through magazines, the giant grin on my face each time I sent out a newsletter, and my journey

to becoming a computer coding “genius” (I finally know the difference between an em dash and an en dash!). However, I’d rather reflect on the moments that made this experience so worthwhile and eye-opening.

I didn’t know what to expect when I received the congratulatory email. I had about a month to figure out living arrangements (being from out of province, this was quite difficult and stressful), familiarize myself with a new city, and mentally prepare myself to work alongside talented publishers and editors. I expected big scary men in business suits and cubicles of desks lined perfectly with robotic employees. *The Walrus*, however, was a friendly environment. The space was a lot smaller than I had expected, and I later found out that only about twenty people make up the entire team. The employees treated each other like family, often shouting out to each other from across the room, giggling, and joking around. “Once a Walrus, always a Walrus” was a phrase I heard often in meetings and quickly discovered applied to everyone who’s ever worked there—including myself.

On my first day, after a small tour of the office, I was escorted to the intern table, which was placed right in the center of all the action. I was the only intern at the time, so I was extremely anxious to have professional eyes constantly looking my way. I was pulling at the sleeves of my blazer and wondering if I was prepared to work at an office. I was only 20—I was convinced I would fail. Because I was bullied when I was young, my mind is constantly in a battle between “you’re not good enough” and “you *are* good enough—prove them wrong.” Amid my inner struggles, a few employees from the editorial team approached me with bright smiles, introduced themselves, and asked me if I wanted coffee. I thought I had heard them wrong. Wasn’t *I* supposed to be one to deliver *them* coffee? Their genuine tones convinced me that they weren’t joking around. This offer continued for a couple weeks, until they eventually realized that I wasn’t politely declining their offer because I was afraid of them: I just don’t drink coffee.

I was astonished by the generosity of the employees. During my internship, I had a conversation with nearly every single one of them in the office. Oftentimes, they would approach me during their lunch breaks and ask what I was working on and how I was finding everything. One instance that I remember vividly occurred when I fell ill at the office. Words on my screen were mushing together in a black blob, and the room had been tilting all morning. I finally found the courage to tell my supervisor that I wasn't feeling well, only to discover that he had left for a meeting. I was scared and conflicted: I knew I couldn't continue working, but I also didn't want to seem unprofessional by leaving. One of the editors thankfully noticed my wobbly figure and pale face and explained that she was going to order me a cab and that *The Walrus* would pay for my ride home. Even though I was just an intern, the staff at *The Walrus* treated me like their own and truly cared about my health and wellbeing. At that moment, I was honoured to be working alongside these incredible people. I learned a few things from this fiasco. One, there are always people around willing to help, even in the most unexpected places. And two, I shouldn't ever be afraid to seek help. I was so focused on pleasing everyone that I forgot that my health should always be my top priority.

Despite my ignorance, my well-being was always at the top of my supervisor's concerns. Cody was the Digital Editor at *The Walrus* and was the one who revamped their website to what it is today. I was terrified to meet him simply because he was in a position of power, but we instantly got along, and I admired his dedication to improving the company, as well as his optimistic, yet realistic outlook on life. Cody was much more than a boss: he was a mentor and a friend. The first week, he made sure I knew exactly how to get home, as he was aware that I was unfamiliar with Toronto. I once asked him if he could give me advice on life after undergrad, as I had felt very lost and confused. We ended up talking in his office for over two hours about all the possibilities that were out there. He gave me tips on how to impress employers, and he even

assured me that I didn't need to go to grad school to land my dream job. He also confided in me that I reminded him a lot of himself when he was my age. He saw potential in me and assured me that if I kept encouraging myself, I would have no problem finding a job. Cody believed in me, and because of his encouragement, I was finally starting to believe in myself.

I proved myself to be a fast learner and productive worker. I surpassed Cody's and my own expectations when I figured out a shortcut to adding GIFs to the articles. Cody explained that the process was too challenging and that he had no problem adding the images once I completed all other edits, but I was determined to figure it out myself. I never considered myself computer savvy, but this internship proved that, with enough hard work and dedication, I could accomplish anything. Working with the digital editors opened my eyes to a whole new field of the publication industry. Magazines, like newspapers, are now being produced and catered to an online audience. I wouldn't be surprised if, in the next few years, print copies are obliterated.

One of my first conversations with Cody was about the engagement of the magazine:

“So, be honest,” he began. “Have you ever heard of us?”

I was ashamed that I had only come across the magazine because my program was offering the internship. However, I did want to be honest, so I told him the truth.

“I'm from Montreal, and I had never noticed these magazines before. But that could just be because I only really know the French ones. . . .”

I was afraid that he would be upset, but his face lit up instead.

He explained how I was helping *The Walrus* by being honest. The magazine should be reaching other provinces and a younger demographic. On average, sixty-year-olds are the ones with subscriptions to the magazine, and he hoped that the website would attract younger readers. We both agreed that social media is a huge source for news and articles and that the publication world needed to adapt to that.

With technology taking over, the publication world is ever changing. *The Walrus* is no exception to that. When I was working there, they were just starting their *Walrus Talks* series, and their website was undergoing some changes. Now, a year later, *The Walrus Talks* is a successful business move for the nonprofit, and from looking at their social media, it seems that these events are their focus nowadays. They've also caught onto the growing trend of podcasts by starting their own: *Pivot*. What amazed me most was that my specific internship doesn't exist anymore. It's been changed to a digital internship, and it primarily involves assisting with social media and the talks. *The Walrus* has rebranded themselves as a more online friendly company, shifting their primary focus from print media to mass media.

I familiarized myself with *The Walrus* as a public image, as well as *The Walrus* from an insider's perspective. When I completed work early, I was encouraged to read their articles. By my last day, I had read nearly every article online and had flipped through every single magazine they had on hand (dating from 2003). The employees often joked that I knew *The Walrus* better than they did.

I understood their image as an educational Canadian magazine. Each article had their own Canadian twist to them—even news stories from other countries were always looked at from a Canadian perspective. The articles I read were thought-provoking and fascinating. I found myself challenging my views and learning something new every day. However, there was a limit to how controversial the topics could be, as I found out.

My first week was unexpected and dramatic to say the least. By the weekend, I was convinced that I had somehow cursed the company. “Jonathan Kay resigns as editor of *The Walrus* amid cultural appropriation controversy” (Haupt) headlined every news platform in Canada. The following week, I sat in all staff meetings, listening in on strategies on what their next move would be and how to respond to Kay's resignation. My dad was amazed that I was

right in the center of a trending Facebook topic. I had all the insight, and I could pinpoint the fake news articles quickly. Kay's departure left a huge hole and impact on the office. Editors were scrambling to make sure everything stayed in place, and some employees, like Cody, were emotionally affected. The chaos was unlike anything I had ever seen—I felt like I was watching the inside of my brain during a panic attack.

Kay's resignation shed a light on the realities of a nonprofit organization. Whether you agree or disagree with Kay's opinion on cultural appropriation, the controversy surrounding it was enough to put *The Walrus* at risk of losing funding. The magazine relies on sponsors, and if those sponsors think that the magazine is associated with problematic ideals, then they may cut ties. A company that relies on the support of the public can't risk hurting its image. Image is everything for nonprofits. If a magazine loses freelance writers and readers, there will always be new ones to back them up. However, losing donors is another story: without money, the magazine can't survive.

I recall overhearing an argument between Kay and the Operations Director. She was begging him to apologize on social media, in hopes that he could salvage his image. However, Kay refused to silence and disregard his own opinion. He chose to leave *The Walrus* so he could practice freedom of speech without tarnishing the magazine's reputation further. Frankly, I admire Kay for his decision. Cody was visibly struck by the news, as he and Kay had worked alongside each other at a previous publishing company. I couldn't imagine the pain he was going through: Kay was a close friend and a support system in the office. I finally understood that he and Kay were still struggling to find their way like I was.

Ever since the departure of Kay, *The Walrus* has been shifting and rebranding themselves to prove that they can still be successful without a big name behind them. Editors were forced to step into larger roles unexpectedly, and everyone put in their best efforts to avoid damage to the

company. Possessing multiple skills ended up being beneficial for a place like *The Walrus*. Therefore, my experience at *The Walrus* taught me how valuable an interdisciplinary education, like the one SASAH offers, is in a fast-paced environment.

I've always only ever thought of myself as a creative worker; I'd spend my whole life struggling to catch a big break in television or music. However, after working at *The Walrus*, I've realized that I am an incredibly hard worker, who is a quick learner able to handle any task thrown my way. Although my creativity took a back seat for six weeks, I was pleased to discover a newfound love for computer coding and the digital world. Plugging in commands to a computer always seemed repetitive and boring to me, but I was surprisingly fascinated at the entire process and felt accomplished to create so many web pages from scratch. I loved working behind the scenes, and I even took coding lessons online when I finished my work early.

We had to take a digital course in SASAH in my second year. I remember not understanding the point of the course. Coding was like math: I would never need to know how to use it. I was wrong. Everything is going digital now. My boss, who was an English major like myself, taught himself how to code, as he saw the benefits of knowing how to create content for the web. He explained that just by possessing a bit of HTML knowledge, I would have an advantage when looking for work. That seemingly pointless class ended up being one of the greatest learning experiences I've had so far at Western. I was taught real-life skills that could assist me with a real job.

Without SASAH, I wouldn't have taken such diverse courses, received the experience of a lifetime at a top magazine company, and gained the confidence I have today. My internship was over a year ago, and I am still grateful for the opportunity and experience I was given. An educational internship allows room for growth without the pressure of failure.

I'm also thankful that I've received the chance to reflect on my internship a year and a half later. I find that I rarely look back at my past work experiences. I've always viewed my past education and jobs as means to an end – they were simply there to get me to where I am today, and nothing more. Once I graduated high school, I wanted to forget about all the boring science and math courses I took. I also wanted to forget the bullies and my insecurities towards my intellect. I had the same mindset after my experience working at a performing arts summer camp with a demanding boss. I remember coming home crying most days, because the pressure to be the perfect employee was too much for me to handle. I wanted to forget these experiences because they hurt me, yet, I should be focusing on the positive memories, and the strengths and skills I built from them. In high school, I learned how to have thick skin, and I proved my classmates, my teachers and myself that I was intelligent, and that when creativity was involved, I excelled. At my job, my boss may have been tough, but she rewarded me multiple times for being an incredible staff member. I never allowed my personal struggles to affect my campers, and I went into work every day with a wide smile. Both experiences not only acted as stepping stones into the next chapters of my life, but they also helped me grow as a person. I wish I could have reflected on those experiences more at the time. Perhaps I would've understood better *why* they were so crucial in getting me to where I am today.

My time at *The Walrus* also had some bumpy roads, but they never stopped me from working as hard as I could. I remember going through a lot that summer. I was planning on going on exchange in England – a place that had endured a lot of terror attacks in the recent months leading up to my trip. I had night terrors nearly every night, and I often came into work restless and anxious. I often expressed my concerns to the two interns I sat with. They were always sweet and understanding, and often reassured me that everything was going to be okay. I appreciated having them as support systems in an office and a city that was foreign to me. I was living on my

own in Toronto, and I had never lived anywhere alone before. I often felt lonely returning to my empty dorm room, and longed for someone to vent to. Most nights, I just sat alone in my room, and waited for the cycle to begin again. Despite my insecurities, my fears and my anxiety, I decided to make the most out of my internship. I didn't know where this experience would take me, but I decided that no matter how well or horrible it went, it would all be worth it.

After listening to my classmates' presentations, I realized that a lot of them had some sort of idea of what career path they wanted to take, and chose their internships based on those interests. I walked into *The Walrus* without any intention of ever working in the publication industry, and I left *The Walrus* more confused than ever. For the longest time, I thought I would work in a creative field. I'd be writing songs for movies, or pitching ideas for scripts. I'm about to complete my final year of university, and I still don't know what I want to do as a career. My dream would be to write songs for pop stars, but that path is highly unlikely. As I've grown older, I've doubted my creative abilities. My insecurities about my talents have deepened. What if I'm not good enough? What if I'm just meant to edit other people's work?

Although *The Walrus* has taught me that there's a whole exciting world of digital editing jobs out there, I'm still not sure if that's something I'd like to do. My passion still lies in my creative work, and I think the hardest decision I'll ever make is whether to let go of my dreams or not. Immediately following my internship, I was certain that I could at the very least set my creative writing passions to the side for a typical office job. I actually enjoyed the nine to five office grind, and I couldn't picture myself working freelance without a boss forcing me to write.

What my internship did clarify, however, is that I have the potential to be great at anything I set my mind to. I also shouldn't stress about not knowing what I want to do yet. I'd rather take 20 years trying to figure out where I fit into this world, than be stuck at a job I hate for the rest of my life. That's why I've decided to take the next year off. I originally wanted to

apply to grad school, but as graduation approaches, I've realized that I need more time to reflect on myself, and discover where I belong without any distractions.

I am grateful for *The Walrus* because I learned that oftentimes life doesn't go as planned, but that doesn't mean we should give up. I sent out an email a week after my internship to Cody, Renee, Joel, and Jen expressing my gratitude. I figured there was no better way to end my reflection than with the reflection I had immediately following the internship. What I couldn't mention in the email, but what I can say now, is that every time I pass a magazine stand and see a copy of *The Walrus*, I smile and think about how lucky I was to work at one of the greatest companies in Canada.

Hello everyone,

It has officially been a week since I last worked as a digital intern at The Walrus. I must say, after working there for 6 weeks, it felt weird waking up in Montreal knowing I wouldn't be coming into work that day.

6 weeks doesn't seem like a long time, but throughout my experience I learned more than I could have ever imagined. I'll be honest, I didn't expect to get much out of this internship. My idea of what an internship looked like was getting coffee for others, doing simple paper work, or being handed the "boring" tasks that my boss wouldn't feel like doing. My internship was the opposite, and for that, I thank Cody specifically.

The work I was given by either Cody or Alex was not only interesting and enjoyable, but it made me feel like I was playing an important role in their daily tasks. I was able to build web posts that would be posted later that day, I helped with archiving by making lists of images in almost every magazine starting from 2003, and I produced the newsletter every week (which was my favourite task of all!) There were many times, however, when I would sit and wait for tasks, although this did allow me to educate myself on all things Walrus. I can proudly say I've read more articles than most (if not all) of the staff that currently works there. Although I wasn't always busy with work, Cody explained to me that he didn't want my internship to be like the one I had initially described. He really made me feel like I was a part of the team, and for that, I am grateful.

Everyone at The Walrus made me feel welcome. My first day, a few of the editorial team asked me if *I* wanted coffee. When I wasn't feeling well, I was never pressured to come in (though I loved work so much that I ignored their advice.) The interns I sat with were wonderful, and I'm glad I made some new friends. I also spoke to the events team about helping out during their event, The Walrus Talks, in London during the fall. They were more than happy to have me aboard because as they said: "Once a Walrus, always a Walrus."

Overall, I really did have an amazing experience. Before working, I wasn't sure what I was interested in doing in the future. But now, I can see myself working in publishing, and I even found a new interest in computer coding! If The Walrus would ever want to have me back, I would gladly work there again.

Thank you so much for allowing me to work as an intern despite my busy schedule. I've not only gained valuable work experience, but I've grown more confident in my abilities, and more hopeful for what's to come. I'll also continue reading The Walrus, even when I'm in England next week for summer school!

Enjoy the rest of your summer!

Best regards,

Megan Levine

THE WALRUS

Lassonde Family Foundation
The Honourable Margaret McCain

Members of the Order of the Walrus

Donald K. Johnson
Jim and Sandra Pitblado



OPTIMISTIC CANADIANS

The Walrus Foundation salutes these community leaders who have made substantial multi-year commitments to the Walrus Foundation. Their

1

¹ Photo of *The Walrus* team on their website. I'm holding the first exclamation point.
Source: <https://thewalrus.ca/about/supporters/>

The Presentation

I was terrified for this presentation for a few reasons. First, one of my biggest fears is public speaking. I generally avoid participating in class because the thought of speaking makes my stomach turn. I think the main reason for my fear is that I'm a perfectionist – I fear embarrassing myself in front of a group of people. Even though speaking about a personal experience should be easy, I knew that I would panic if I didn't have a cheat sheet prepared with everything I wanted to say. Second, I knew that two other students were also presenting on their experiences at *The Walrus*, and I was worried that we would end up giving the same information. I didn't want my presentation to be bland, and most importantly, I didn't want to sound like my experience was just like everyone else's.

Luckily, I knew my experience was unique. The only challenge then was how to convey that. I knew I wanted to speak about the Jonathan Kay scandal because that was a defining moment that made my experience like no other. However, I didn't want my entire presentation to revolve around the scandal, even though it did teach me a lot. I wanted to make sure that everyone knew that although *The Walrus* was a bit chaotic while I worked there, that didn't affect my experience at all (despite Cody feeling awful about the situation). I still learned more than I could've ever imagined. Most importantly, I wanted my presentation to show my growth as a person. I hope I achieved these things, and I also hope that I didn't sound too nervous speaking in front of everyone. I barely slept the night before the presentation, and I was still anxious hours after. I guess some fears I'll never get over no matter how many times I face them.

My presentation:

For those who don't know me, my name is Megan, and I'll be talking about my experience working as an intern for *The Walrus* magazine. My internship was 2 summers ago, so it's been difficult for me to remember every detail. However, my experience could have come

straight out of a TV show, as you will soon see. I not only got to learn a lot about the digital world of publications, but I also learned a lot about the industry itself. There's a lot more that goes on outside of the office than you'd expect. Just for a little background, *The Walrus* is a non-profit, general interest, Canadian magazine that primarily focuses on Canadian issues, and from my understanding, always tries to put a Canadian twist to every article. They publish print magazines every few months, they have a website with even more content, a podcast, and of course, their Walrus Talks speaker series.

So, let's go back in time to spring of 2017. I applied to *The Walrus* without even realizing that it could give me credit, or that I would be doing a presentation on it. When I was in second year, I really wanted to do an internship, because I wanted that work experience I couldn't get from the classroom. At the time, my hope was to be a writer one day, so I thought working at a magazine would be a dream. At the same time, I was also planning to study abroad in Leeds in July. Luckily, the people at *The Walrus* were super accommodating and allowed me to start my internship in early May. Unfortunately for me, being an out of province student, I had about a month to find living arrangements. I ended up living in a dorm room, which wasn't the greatest, but, I made it to Toronto and I couldn't be more excited.

My internship started off a little different than expected, but I'll get into that drama a little later. For now, I'll go over what a day at the office looked like for me. I was super lucky to work in the digital department, run by my amazing boss Cody, along with his assistant, Alex. The first few days, I learned how to do basic coding with HTML, and every day, I was given articles that needed to be formatted for the website. Also, because two magazines were published when I was there, I had to format those articles for the web as well. I was also tasked with an archiving project, which I'll talk about in the next slide. Cody really wanted to update the website, and since I finished a lot of my work quickly, he needed to task me with something I

could work on when I had nothing to do. I think my favourite task was formatting the newsletter. I don't know if any of you have used mail chimp before, but every time you submit a newsletter, that graphic pops up, and I always thought it was super adorable. I made my dad subscribe to the newsletter, and he'd always text me when he received it, which always made me happy. I suddenly had a new passion for the digital world of publications, which as a creative writer, I never thought I'd enjoy doing.

These are examples of some of the archiving projects I worked on. My job was to go through every single magazine ever printed, starting from the year 2004, and check their status on the website. Though the job was tedious, it was really interesting to flip through the older magazines. I made a joke to the staff that I probably read the most articles out of everyone in the office. The funny part is, they agreed!

So now, what you've all been waiting for. My internship started off a little shaky, because, Jonathan Kay, the editor in chief of *The Walrus*, resigned after my very first week. I remember there being a lot of tension in the office the day before he resigned. He was arguing with all the staff, though at the time, I didn't know why. It turns out, he was involved in a cultural appropriation outrage, and *The Walrus* was losing support from writers and donors because of it. The following week at work was extremely hectic. The entire staff, including us interns, attended a mandatory meeting, where we were told exactly what to tell the public if anyone asked. I had never been right in the middle of a trending Facebook topic before. The office did begin to fall apart, however. Cody was extremely devastated by the news, because he and Kay had always worked together. Cody even apologized to me when my internship was over, explaining that he wished he had been more present. It didn't surprise me when he resigned just a few months later. A nonprofit magazine like *The Walrus* depends on making their readers

happy. I now understand the importance of image, and I think *The Walrus* did a nice job at reclaiming theirs.

Despite all the chaos, there were some fun times at the office too. Cody and Alex were wonderful despite everything, and I couldn't have asked for a better team to work with. I had many long chats with Cody about my personal struggles, and he always offered the best advice. He even said I reminded him of himself when he was my age. When I was sick, the staff was always accommodating, and they even paid for my cab ride home once when I could barely stand straight. They always offered me coffee, which was a real shock. Most importantly, I always felt like my job was important, and that I was a part of the family. They always told me, "Once a Walrus, always a Walrus." I even made it on the website, which I think is pretty cool.

I think there were three important lessons I took from this experience. One, I shouldn't be too hard on myself. I should trust that I can complete any task I set my mind to. I shouldn't be scared to try new things, and I also shouldn't doubt myself when I fail. Two, the unexpected is adaptable. Watching *The Walrus* team adapt so quickly to Kay's departure was inspiring. I realized that the art industry is constantly shifting in more ways than one. You need to be quick on your feet, which I think is a skill SASAH has taught me. And lastly, I learned that I don't need to know everything right now, and that's okay. I was really stressed during my internship about my plans for the future. Cody made me realize that I can take my time to decide what's best for me – even he admitted he doesn't know what he wants to do yet. This internship made me realize that I possess a lot of skills that can take me to a variety of places. I just still don't know where that place is yet. It's not the answer I was hoping to get out of this experience, but it's one that I finally accept.

Works Cited

Houpt, Simon. "Jonathan Kay Resigns as Editor of The Walrus Amid Cultural Appropriation Controversy." *The Globe and Mail*, 14 May. 2017,
<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/jonathan-kay-resigns-as-editor-of-the-walrus-amid-conversation-on-cultural-appropriation/article34983133/>