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Final Report

It's been a month since I graduated from Columbia Journalism School. It still seems a bit surreal. *I did that?* First, there were months when I could only think of the next assignment or the next class and it feels weird that suddenly that's all over. Second, I still don't really associate myself with an institution like Columbia. Before I arrived in New York City in August 2017, I hadn't fully understood exactly how prestigious and famous a school it is. It didn't take me long to learn that everyone knows it. One example: When I opened a bank account in my local bank in the Bronx, the clerk said: "You are my first ever customer to go to Columbia." He seemed proud. I'm proud too, since I loved my studies. I also feel privileged - as I should. It is a privilege to get to go to a school like Columbia and I couldn't have done it without Helsingin Sanomat Foundation. I'm so grateful for this opportunity. I commuted daily from the poorest congressional district in the country to an Ivy League school which guaranteed for remembering to be grateful.

Studying in your 30s is different from studying in your 20s. You appreciate it much more when you're older. Even though we had so much readings that it was basically impossible for a human being to read them all, I was happy that someone actually told me what to read. Most of these studies, stories and books I would have never found if I hadn't had this chance to study at Columbia. I was also privileged because I could fully focus on learning. I didn't really have to worry about my future the same way as many of my classmates did. I already had a job I loved. Others were more critical of our Master of Arts program, expecting it to offer more connections to newsrooms and more hands-on skills. I already had my newsroom and I knew that the skills you can always learn as you go. What you don't usually have is someone

teaching you all kinds of different things about the world and telling you what to read - and the time to read it, at least most of it. This is why I value the M.A. at Columbia Journalism School even though it might seem old-fashioned since we mostly just read, listened, talked and wrote. Luckily, those are all things I happen to enjoy tremendously. In the politics seminar we covered a wide, wide variety of topics from the social logic of strict churches to Federalist Papers and from medieval origins of moderns state to global governance. Of course we talked about Donald Trump and #metoo, too. I appreciated how much the curriculum emphasized critical thinking and the importance of testing your hypotheses. And one of the best things about the M.A. program is that you're allowed to take electives outside the journalism school. Studying political science (I took classes on urban politics and inequality) at the School of International and Public Affairs was invaluable experience for a journalist. It's rare to get a chance to study that extensively anything once you've already started your career. Plus it's always good to witness what the world looks like outside the journalist bubble.

Grad school also offered an opportunity to work on a project longer than I ever had before (even though I had more experience on longform journalism than most of my classmates). In my Master's Project I dived into the past, present and future of one Brooklyn neighborhood. This, as did our classes on oral history and ethnography, helped me better conceptualize and analyze the kind of journalism I've often done in my career already pre-Columbia. Among other things, I realized how I often end up writing about places in transition and about people's relationship to place. My studies also helped to bring a stronger political dimension to this kind of work. (After all, among all the divides in the US today, urban-rural seems to be one that is growing in significance.) This is to say that on top of teaching a ton about the world, this past year also taught me a lot about myself as a journalist and as a person. I hope and expect that being more conscious about my skills and preferences helps me produce better stories and better journalism in the future.