

Levi Bridges

Occupation and employer now and how long you've been there:

I've been working as a freelance international audio reporter and podcast producer (bylines: Public Radio International, National Public Radio, Marketplace) since I graduated from journalism school in May 2017. Until the pandemic began, I was based between Mexico City and Moscow, Russia, although at the moment I am in Maine until travel restrictions are relaxed. Next year I will be moving to Russia full time as an Alfa Fellow in journalism (the fellowship was awarded in 2020 but postponed for a year because of COVID). The fellowship provides funding for journalists to spend a year working with a media outlet of their choice in Moscow.

Hometown:

Sedgwick, Maine

College (s) you attended on your Gannett scholarship and degree(s) earned:

University of California, Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, Master of Journalism

How has Maine shaped your view of the world?

As an independent foreign correspondent working in Mexico and Russia, I'm always amazed when I come back to Maine and how safe it feels here. I see myself trying to tell the stories of the vast majority of the world's people who weren't fortunate to grow up in a place like this. When you live in a state like Maine it's really easy to lose yourself in the sense of peace – and in rural places in general – and forget what life is like for people in the rest of the world. When I'm writing and reporting stories, I have people who live in places like Maine in the back of my mind because those are the people I want to reach.

Why did you want to be a journalist?

When I was growing up, I always thought that I'd become a fiction writer, but during college I realized that I liked writing about real people more. I did an internship with an English-language newspaper in Mexico City while I was studying abroad there as an undergrad and really liked it, so I decided to pursue a career in journalism. I want to be a journalist because I believe that the press plays a crucial and essential role in democracy and I love playing a part in that.

Tell us about your most memorable assignment – and why it has stayed with you.

In 2018 I teamed up with a reporter in California to produce a [radio feature](#) for Public Radio International and station KQED in San Francisco about two undocumented parents who were deported to Mexico. The family made the difficult decision to leave their four young children behind in California to fend for themselves without their parents.

At the time, I was based in Mexico and I spent a day with the parents while my colleague in California was with their children at the same time. We recorded audio of what the family was doing in both Mexico and California and then we had them get on the phone together. It's still one of my most favorite stories that I've ever gotten to produce because deportation and family separation had been in the news a lot, but I felt like we got to illustrate what that reality looks like for families in a way that hadn't been done before.

Why is journalism important today?

Journalism is obviously going through a very tough time as smaller newspapers go under and larger publications continue to lay off their staff. The decrease in working journalists has come at a time when disinformation on the internet and social media has spread at an alarming rate, often filling the gap in traditional, fact-based reporting. This makes the work of journalists who have decided to continue working in the field, often as freelancers who receive very low pay, more important than ever.

How journalists can restore faith in the media and combat disinformation is going to be the most important question that we will have to answer during our careers in the coming decades.

What is your advice to future Gannett scholars?

It's really tough to make a living in this industry, but it is possible. If you crave stability, this probably isn't the right career for you. That said, many journalists do live very comfortable lives, but it can sometimes be a long road to get there.