

ALL POSTS

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YEAR IN REVIEW

INTERNSHIPS

COMMUNICATIONS

LEGAL/COURT WATCH



David Wolfe Bender · Dec 30, 2020 · 10 min read

## Another Year in Review: Looking at the Good of 2020

This was a difficult year for everybody. That's not really much of a surprise by this point. Pandemics. Wildfires. You name it: it happened. 2020 had no shortage of challenging and problematic moments. I have this tradition of looking back at the year we're all about to leave (usually on Facebook, so this is new), in hopes that I can extrapolate a lesson I've learned or an exciting moment I get to share with my friends and family. But I'll be honest: this year, like most of us, I was lost.

It is, perhaps, the reason why this article was constantly a blank slate. I would write something, and then I would hate it (consequently reverting to my one of my most frequent sequences of keyboard clicks: command+A and delete). Truly, I couldn't really find anything to say.

December rolled around, and with it, we all started to find a way to recap and measure our year. We all do it differently: Google gives us an inspiring video about our "Year in Search." TIME Magazine measures our year by picking the most newsworthy person to feature in a special edition. Jonathan David Larson measures our year in love (if you got that joke, let's be friends). And Spotify "wraps" up our year by telling us that we are addicted to music (and they tell me that I need to take a breather on the "Every Taylor Swift Song" playlist...which will never happen).

And I was still lost. So I did something I honestly don't do as often as I should: look through my photos. What I found surprised me. Contrary to what I thought, for a year where I was stuck inside much of the time, I took *a lot* of photos. Far too many photos. I never found out how many specifically (mainly to keep my sanity), but trust me: *plenty* of photos. I scrolled until March 18th when I realized what this year has really taught me.

**Life works in mysterious ways. And you just simply never know when it's all going to go askew. But when that happens, it doesn't all have to be bad.**

Honestly, I probably should've already known that. There's that old Yiddish aphorism: "We plan, God laughs." It's true apparently.

I had big things planned for this year. The final semester of my Upper School career was going to be the busiest semester of my time in Indianapolis. In the span of just five weeks, I was supposed to go to a national journalism conference, two out-of-state college visits, the VEX Robotics National Championships, and then the VEX Robotics World Championships. And then *snap*: every single one of them was cancelled (some of them even got cancelled on the same day).

Finishing out my time in Upper School with my friends, classmates, and teachers: also cancelled.

The Summer was no exception either: I had rallied a group of journalism friends to get together and cover the 2020 Democratic National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. My family had planned a trip to Greece. Both cancelled.

As I was going through my photos, I found myself on the verge of tears. There were moments this year that were some of the best in my life. It's pathetically fascinating: a year that I am going to likely forever remember as one of the worst on record will also be one of the most formative, surprising, humbling, and stunning.

So I'm done talking about the bad. I've had enough of the bad. If I want to go back to it, I can open my Twitter account at the push of a button. For now, in this piece, I'm focusing on my fond memories in 2020. This is the 2020 I will remember.

## January 24: Students United Podcast Releases

In late 2019, my friend Trace Held and I started work on a long-form, [investigative story](#) into a Department of Justice (DOJ) investigation into the National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC). We studied hundreds of pages of documents in preparation for interviewing four sources with knowledge of the situation.

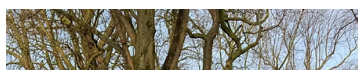
On January 24, 2020, with mere hours until we left together on an international school trip, Trace and I released the podcast. A few months later, it was awarded the top podcast of the year by the [Quill and Scroll International Honours Society for Scholastic Journalism](#).

## January 25: The Hague International Model United Nations Conference

One of the highlights of my Upper School career was, without a doubt, traveling to The Hague, Netherlands, for The Hague International Model United Nations (THIMUN) conference. This model United Nations conference is one of the largest in the world. Additionally, the conference has an operating paper that covers the conference.

Throughout the conference, I had the opportunity to write stories for that newspaper.

But this trip was not just an academic experience, but a time to be with friends. 2020 taught us all that we should never devalue our friendships. At this time in January, COVID-19 had just made major headlines about its impact in Wuhan, China. In fact, I remember we were all joking about the virus when our plane landed (nobody is laughing now). We didn't know it would be a pandemic, let alone kick us out of school.



Standing in a square in The Hague, Netherlands, hours before the first newspaper meeting of the conference

When I think back on my final year in Upper School, this trip was the saving grace of the semester. It was the last time we really got to be together and not have to worry about college or whatever was happening back home. We were just able to be together and have fun.

## May 17: Pinning Ceremony

One of the highlights of a traditional commencement weekend at my school is having the parents fasten the alumni pin on each graduate. That, with our traditional graduation, was cancelled.

Nevertheless, our school put together a "drive-through" pinning ceremony, which turned out to be quite beautiful. Teachers celebrated and cheered for students as we drove through campus. Then we rapidly hopped out of our cars one student at a time to do a quick pinning ceremony.



## May 21: Park Tudor Awards Day

I was more than honoured to receive the Frank Meek Award, the top accolade given by Park Tudor School, my alma mater. In addition to the Meek Award, I won the Journalism and Publications Award for the second year in a row.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ceremony – which is usually given in our beautiful auditorium – was done virtually. Learn more about the Meek Award in the video below.

## May 26: Independence



Sitting with Annie Flowers, on the flight returning to Indianapolis



## Independent Study Presentation

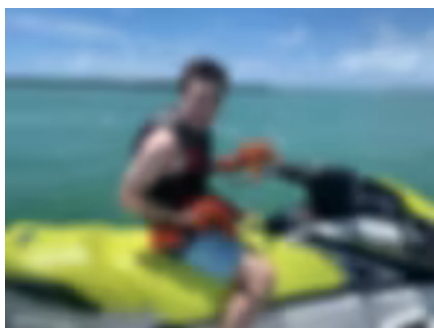
In my final two years of Upper School, I worked on a senior project. It was titled

"Journalism in the 21st Century: Issues, Ethics, and Transformations."

I had been planning my final presentation for months, so I was disappointed when the pandemic took us out of school, as I knew it meant the presentation would likely be cancelled.

However, with the help of some very generous teachers and friends, I did the presentation virtually.

We used my mom's office building as a mock studio. I brought in my audio equipment and hooked up a camera to my computer, and I gave the presentation to 125 people on Zoom (Very 2020!).



Holding up two Starfish in Islamorada, Florida

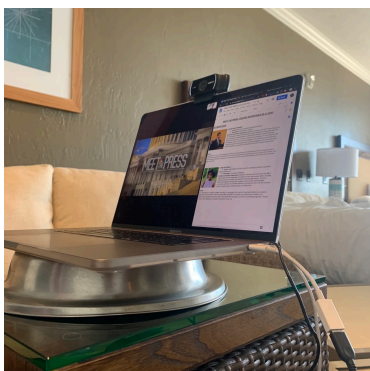
## June 12: Travelled to Islamorada, Florida

I took a really fun trip to Southern Florida with my friend Zach Phelps and his parents. It was a wonderful escape from a summer that, at one point, was filled with events, but eventually became too isolated.

We went jet skiing in the ocean (picture included), finding every wake we could try and hop. To my amazement, I only fell off once (fine, I fell off twice).

## June 13: Meet the College Press

In what was the experience of a lifetime, I had the honour of being featured on a recurring digital news segment called NBC's Meet the Press: College Roundtable. Each of the six episodes featured a panel made up of two or three student journalists from colleges across the country. *Meet The Press* anchor Chuck Todd moderated the panel. The opportunity to work with the producers at NBC and Mr. Todd was an incredible opportunity, and I am so thankful that I could be apart of it.



During my episode, I was on a panel that posed questions to Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto regarding policies surrounding COVID-19 and community policing. You can watch that episode [here](#). The photos above show two shots of live action and a behind-the-scenes view of when I was filming.



## June 28: Prom...Done Differently

Prom got cancelled due to the pandemic, but one of my friends decided to host a mini-prom with our friend group at her house. It was a cute little event, and it was amazing to have the opportunity to see friends.

(Plus, our pictures were awesome; credit: Haley Foster)



## July 2: **UNSTOPPABLE** — Artisan41 is Published

It was actually really funny (maybe not "haha" funny, but definitely ironic): on the same day we were let out of school for the pandemic, we were scheduled to have an *Artisan* meeting to prepare for our big design extravaganza, which was going to take place a few days later. The *Artisan* is my school's literary arts magazine, and this edition was going to be my fourth publication with the magazine (second as a Senior Editor).

So naturally, when they announced school was let out, I was very concerned for the publication. What was going to happen to it? Will we still put it together? How can we do a magazine without being *in* school?

By this time, we had done all of the pre-design work: we established our tone, message, and theme for the edition. We knew how we wanted it to look even before we had started to put it on paper. I honestly, for a few days, thought all of that work was going to be for nothing, as it would be impossible to create a magazine outside of school. But after being out for a few days, we decided that we would still move forward with the creation of the magazine. And at the same time, we scrapped our original tone, message, and theme. Back to square one.

What happened next was a masterclass in persistence. We did every spread from home, using cloud technology to do our editing from a distance rather than together on our traditional "design day." And yet, we still had more than a dozen students design and edit spreads. (This would not have been possible without having the best staff on the planet, all of whom worked tirelessly to assure this publication went to print, in addition to the most supportive adviser ever. Thank you, Ms. Gellin.).

We put together a publication we were all very proud of. It had an entirely different theme, rebranded for the school year this would come to be. We picked a single word, one that we thought exemplified both our school community and our magazine staff: **UNSTOPPABLE**. Artisan41, the 41st edition of the magazine, was delivered on July 2, 2020. I have included a photo of our cover, which took snippets of art from different spreads of the magazine.



## July 12: Graduated from Park Tudor, Class of 2020

For a while, it seemed like a graduation ceremony wasn't going to happen for our class. We got kicked out of school on March 11, 2020 (also my birthday...what a day!).

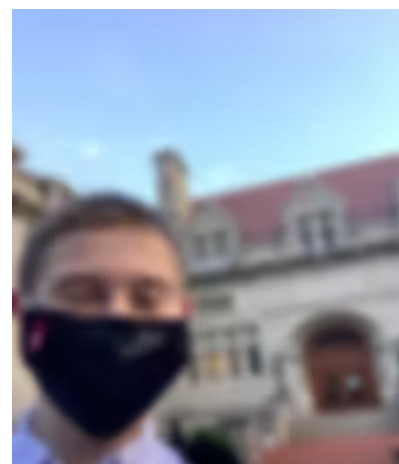
The date of our graduation continued to get kicked down the line by various local and state guidelines. Eventually, our school was able to put on a safe event for the graduates and our parents. It was a gorgeous ceremony, and it was the first time in a while (maybe ever) that Park Tudor School hosted their graduation ceremonies on our campus instead of an off-site facility.

## August 10: Started Courses at Indiana University

I took a two-week journalism seminar prior to the start of regular classes at IU, so I was on campus a little earlier than most.

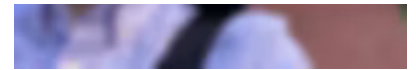
It was thrilling to be on campus at IU, living in my cute little dorm. I took 21 credits from the beginning of this semester until the end, and I can honestly say that I enjoyed waking up and going to class each day.

## October 22: The Presidential Debate





It took a few arguments, but I finally convinced my parents to allow me to drive to Nashville for the Presidential Debate being hosted at Belmont University.



In front of Franklin Hall – the home of the Media School – on my first day of classes at Indiana University

First, some backstory: two of the Presidential debates were being hosted at Notre Dame University (South Bend, Indiana) and the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, Michigan). Upon learning these locations and noticing they aren't too long of drives from my house, I rallied a few friends to try and obtain press credentials to the debates. That was back in February. Months later, the Commission on Presidential Debates (rightly) announced that press access would be far tighter than usual, with fewer reporters gaining access. Our idea was rendered dead.

However, with a debate being in Nashville, I decided to drive down after my morning class to get shots of what was happening off Belmont University's campus. I got there four hours or so prior to the debate. I took video of the protests outside. I ended up using the film for a class project. You can watch the news clip of my coverage [here](#).

***Sidenote:*** I drove back from Nashville to Bloomington overnight. I got back at 4:00 AM EST. Worth it.

While I was down there, I got to see three friends who go to school in Nashville.

Very few people were wearing masks in those protests, but I was. The only time I took my mask off was to get this photo, which was taken by my friend Jonah Hillman (a Belmont student).



Standing outside the security gates at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee

## November 26: Best Surprise Ever

I got home from university before my best friend Kaelie Paugh did. Without telling me, she stopped by my house on the way from the airport. Best. Surprise. Ever.

It got even better when we found out that my Ring doorbell captured the entire thing on video.

## Other Ways to Recap My Year:

- I spent too much time listening to Taylor Swift music.
- I wrote 26 stories for the Indiana Daily Student, Indiana University's independent, award-winning newspaper.
- I sent around 22,100 tweets.

## What's Next?

Well, who knows? Making plans doesn't really work anymore. Nevertheless, here are some things I am personally excited about for the upcoming year:

- I have a new beat with the Indiana Daily Student next semester! I will be covering the City of Bloomington. This will be my second semester working for the IDS, and I am beyond excited. Last semester, I covered student government. I'm sad to leave the student government beat, but I am more excited than ever to get to work covering a city I love.
- I am registered for another 19 credit hours at Indiana University during the Spring semester, and I am ready to both drown myself in work and dive straight into the material (seriously, I want this next semester to start so bad).
- I will still be listening to far too much Taylor Swift music.
- I will still be tweeting...even when people say I tweet too much.