

Anthony Gharib transcript

claire: [00:00:00] Welcome to Uplift All Voices, where we highlight unique people striving to address issues and diverse media representation. In this episode, the Stories Empowered team interviewed Anthony Gharib, an Armenian-American student journalist from USC who specializes in sports writing. In this episode, we asked Anthony about why he chose to pursue journalism and how it has influenced his identity. We also discussed the importance of youth activism, staying informed, and creating change by being aware of worldly issues. Finally, we touched upon Anthony's experience working with high schoolers through LA Times High School Insider, as well as misconceptions in sports writing.

To start off, let's introduce ourselves. My name is Claire Chien and I'm the project director of Uplift All Voices. Hello, my name is Erin Tsai, and I'm a junior that works at Stories Empowered as an editor. Hi, my name is Amy Chen and I'm an editor/writer of Stories Empowered.

erin: [00:01:09] Thanks for coming in. Could you introduce yourself for our viewers?

anthony: [00:01:12] Yeah, sure. My name is Anthony Gharib. I'm a sophomore at USC studying journalism. I'm also part of --well, I work for the LA times youth program, High School Insider as an engagement specialist.

Prior to that, I was a part of High School Insider throughout my school career. For three years, I was a student advisory board member for two years. During high school, I was also part of my high school program for all four years, I was editor-in-chief for two years or [incoherent] for three years.

And I was also a part of my community college paper last year. This is my first year at USC. So last year I was also a part of the community college paper. And now I'm part of the daily Trojan, as the deputy sports editor next semester. And I was a sports writer for the previous semester. So I have a really deep experience with different modes of journalism.

claire: [00:02:04] What inspired you to go into journalism in the first place?

anthony: [00:02:09] So it's kind of a funny story. So I was never really into journalism. I was always into sports. I really liked basketball. And my goal was to be in the NBA, but I kind of realized I wasn't good enough. So I thought, you know, what's another way for me to be a part of sports, but in a different realm.

So I searched up people that I would watch on TV, like on ESPN, for example, inside they were all journalists and I kind of wanted to be like that. So I thought that was the route for me to be on TV and to talk about sports. So that's exactly what I wanted to do. And I kind of figured that out in eighth grade, then from then on, I was just committed to becoming a journalist.

So that's kind of how it started.

claire: [00:02:48] Well, other than that, was there any specific experience or person that led you to go more into journalism?

anthony: [00:02:57] Yeah, definitely my high school journalism advisor. My freshman year, he kind of taught me just the basics of journalism and I kind of fell more in love with it. And he kind of like guided me through it.

He was the one who introduced me to High School Insider, for example, and he was the person who gave me the confidence to write more and to read. And without him, I probably wouldn't be here. As he was the one who kind of made me realize that I had potential.

So he was kind of someone who helped me a lot. And of course, just classmates and, you know, my parents were always pushing me to keep trying, even though they didn't really know what journalism was. But they kept trying to push me into, to try and get out. But definitely my journalism advisor, he helped me through everything.

He was always by my side, always pushing me and always super proud. I still talk to him; every time I have a new article, I still send it to him. So he was someone who really, really helped me. And he was a big inspiration for me.

claire: [00:03:58] So you said you had a lot of support from your parents. Did this go against their expectations for where you were going to go in your future?

anthony: [00:04:10] I'm not sure what they expected, but there's not a lot of Armenian journalists. So it was kind of like, different, but they were fully supportive and they still are.

They understood that they were finally letting me do whatever, but then once they realized that I had potential and that people were liking my content and people were interested in reading it, once they read it, then they became way more supportive because they knew that I could actually make a career out of it.

So I don't know if we want to guess the expectations, but I mean, it probably did. They probably didn't even think that this could be possible.

claire: [00:04:47] Yeah, I really loved that. They really just encouraged you to pursue your passion, even though it might have just been unexpected. So I wanted to know what were your favorite teams or players growing up?

anthony: [00:05:05] So I was a big --I'm still a big-- Lakers fan. So I was like die hard. I literally remember my earliest memory, when I was like four or five, so I've been a big, big fan of them. My favorite player of all time was Kobe Bryant. So no matter what, I was always really into that.

And that really kind of helped me become more passionate about writing, just because that's my main goal, to just write, to be a writer for Lakers, it's like a dream. So that was really what kept me going as I was growing up. And then once I realized that I wanted to pursue journalism, I always was trying to find, or still am trying to find avenues to work for the Lakers or work to write for them.

But it's a process, but that was for sure my favorite team. Still is, everybody who knows me knows I'm a huge, huge Laker fan. So that's really it for me, but I love all the types of sports. I think it's important to be versatile in any field. So the Lakers are my main team, but I love every type of sport.

amy: [00:06:11] Yeah, that's super cool. And how would you say being a Lakers fan and just being a fan of sports in general has affected your identity?

anthony: [00:06:20] Well, it's who I am for sure. I mean, I grew up playing basketball. I grew up watching it, you know, it's been part of my life forever. So it definitely is a part of my identity.

Like I said, everyone who knows me, knows I'm into basketball and knows I love the Lakers, I love Colby. So. It's definitely a part of who I am. But as I grew up, I kind of got more into it. And as I started looking to become a sports journalist, I started paying attention to the game differently. I started watching games differently. I started just figuring out how I could write in an objective way about a team that I love. So it's a part of my identity, for sure. And I'm pretty sure forever it'll be a part of it.

claire: [00:07:04] So at Stories Empowered, we definitely like to ask about representation in general, especially in the media.

So we wanted to ask you, what do you think the importance of representation in sports is? Especially for minorities.

anthony: [00:07:18] It's definitely important. I mean, it's a part of every newsroom. I think the discussion of having a diverse representation, especially in terms of sports. I mean, if you look at the national black MBA, for example, those minorities are represented in a high percentage.

So it's important for minorities to be covering minorities too. And having that type of diversity in newsrooms, it's extremely important. And in terms of other sports, if you look at the NFL, like I said, the NBA, MLB, for baseball, then even hockey too. I mean, it's important. You kind of have the same people covering the same sport cause it just won't be the same angle every time. So it's definitely, definitely important, especially in sports because sports people won't really look at it in terms of color or in terms of race, you just look at who's good and who's playing. So it's important to have that same thing in the newsroom.

erin: [00:08:12] Yeah, that sounds really cool. We know you're a really great at sports writing, but are there any other topics you enjoy writing about too?

anthony: [00:08:19] Yeah, I've written a bunch of editorials too. I wrote a lot throughout high school, I tried a bunch of different stuff. To be honest, it all comes together. You know, having the ability to write, for example, breaking news stories, comes together in any section you're doing, no matter what. It can be an entertainment feature, for sure, obviously news in sports too, of course.

But, yeah, I've written editorials. I wrote a lot throughout high school. I wrote a lot in my community college paper, and of course I wrote some features too, but mostly just game stories, sports analysis pieces. Those are usually what I'm doing right now, but definitely some other things. It's always good to try out different types of articles.

I remember my freshman year in high school, I think I wrote for every single section. So it's good to kind of spread out and see what other things might be interesting too, because you can't be focused on one thing in terms of writing, because you never know, you might have to write a feature one day, next day, I have to write a news piece, then I have to write a review. So, it's good to kind of just be versatile in writing.

erin: [00:09:28] So we know that you're a really good journalist and we also know that you're interning at LA Times High School Insider. So we just wanted to ask as high schoolers, what is interning there like?

anthony: [00:09:44] Yeah, it's definitely a dream come true. About a year ago I got hired. So it's crazy how time goes, but it's insane to be honest.

I mean, I always dreamed about it, but being in a newsroom is just a different feeling where you're seeing things happen day by day and seeing how the content is going. One of the craziest things for me was reading a story and going to the newsroom and seeing the person who wrote the story, which was really bizarre. But, definitely if you're interning at a newsroom, it's great to just see how the day-to-day life of a newspaper is, as you get to kind of see what you need to work on.

So it's been a crazy experience, obviously. Now we've been remote for almost a year now, so it's been tough, but definitely the experience at a newsroom like that, like the LA Times, this is really, really important for someone who's trying to get into that position, but it's been a great, great opportunity for me so far.

amy: [00:10:39] Yeah. That seems like a great experience. And I also wanted to know what it is like working with high schoolers?

anthony: [00:010:49] It's really fun to be honest, because I was in your guys' positions two years ago. So I know what you guys are thinking and how you guys are feeling and it's fun to just relate.

I think it's difficult. If I was in my thirties or forties, trying to talk to that high school student, because you can't really relate as much, but for me, I'm two years out of high school. So I still know what, what trends and stuff I could relate to high schoolers. And it's fun because I want to help them out.

Cause I know how they feel like, like I said, I was in your position before, so it's fun to kind of teach them stuff that I learned and share my knowledge. So it's a really cool experience for me. It's really fun. I love talking to high schoolers. I think they're really cool, but yeah, I mean, it's really, really cool and really fun for me.

claire: [00:11:33] To kind of build on that, what do you think the importance of journalism is like, especially for high schoolers? Why do you think it's important that they get involved in this and try to just be a part of a journalistic kind of environment themselves?

anthony: [00:11:50] Yeah. Well, first I think it's important to be informed.

That was one thing my advisor would tell us. And we were a small staff, like 20, 25 people. And he would always say, "This should be the most informed group of students on campus." And I truly believe that being aware of the news is important because your life decisions and your life choices can be based off of what's going on and you can become more aware.

I think it's important because the young generation is the next generation. So if more young students are going into journalism, then we can finally make the change that we want to see that has been made for years and years. So it's important to get involved. I know some people think that journalism isn't legit, call it fake news, but it's truly far from that.

I know a bunch of people who were just trying to work and get that stigma out of the way. So it's important for young students to just get more involved and be more informed about what's going on. I know a ton of people who have no idea what's going on in the world. And I don't know how I could be like that. But especially for journalists, it's helpful.

But also when I was in high school my advisor would always share articles with us. And that was one thing that was really fun too. So just reading articles and getting to know what's happening this week or how they wrote this one or the editorials, it's always fun. And I think it keeps your mind sharp too, for sure, especially if you're a young student.

amy: [00:13:11] Yeah, it's definitely important to stay informed. And student journalism is a form of activism in itself. So what would you say is your personal opinion about student and youth activism?

anthony: [00:13:25] Yeah, I think that's the key, I mean, it's imperative for the growth of the country to have young people be involved and be activists. If you look at every single movement that's happened in American history, it's been sparked by young people. So it's important for that to always continue.

I wrote an actual editorial, two, three years ago for High School Insider about that. So it's important. I think everything starts with teens and starts with young people. So we should continue to be activists, continue to fight for what we think is right.

claire: [00:13:56] So as a journalist, you're probably working on different articles and projects. So do you have any in the works right now? Would you like to talk about them and is there anything you would like to accomplish as a journalist in the future?

anthony: [00:14:14] I don't know working on anything currently, just because I'm on break.

So our semesters finished a month ago, but I just write just game stories. So the men's basketball team for USC was playing --I just wrote about that. So I don't have any stories in the works yet. But in terms of what I want to do in the future or a goal, for sure trying to

intern at a different newsroom, trying to get that experience of writing for a newsroom. But that's really it for now. I try to take things slow, but I don't really have anything in the works.

claire: [00:14:53] So all of us here are student journalists. And I think one problem that we've been having recently is just like COVID-19 and finding articles to write, especially with these changing times.

So how would you say that COVID-19 has affected sports writing?

anthony: [00:15:10] Definitely it's affected it a lot. I think the first couple of months from about March to August or, well, in terms of professional sports March until like July, there really wasn't anything. And then once I started at USC, nothing was happening.

No sports were going on, so it was kind of hard to find stories. I remembered our staff struggling to find content, but once, you know, that the sports pick up, and once they start playing, it's easier to find it, of course, but it's different. It's definitely difficult. It's not like news or there's something going on every day.

If there's no sports, there's nothing to write about. So it was definitely really, really difficult. I wasn't able to really write much. So it was a struggle, but now things are finally picking up. So it's much, much easier, but sports is a specific section because, like I said, feature and entertainment, opinion news, you could always go on no matter what. You could always find an interview, you could always write your opinion about something. But if there's no sports games is literally nothing to write about. So it was super, super hard in the prime quarantine times.

erin: [00:16:19] So you obviously have a lot of experience in journalism and you've written for both high school and college. But what would you say are the similarities and differences between the two?

anthony: [00:16:32] Yeah. So in terms of my high school paper, we really ran it similar to a legitimate newsroom.

Like we would have dummies. So dummies are kind of --I don't know if you guys know what they are--but dummies are kind of just like layouts that you create for the print paper, if that makes sense. So everyday in a newsroom people have dummies, so they kind of just laid out a piece of paper or something, what they want to put in the paper that day.

So we would have that. We were a monthly publication, so we would have it the week after we would come out with a new issue. And then we would have ideas, so idea lists we would have, people could pitch too, but that wasn't really how newsrooms work.

But definitely the structure of everything, like it goes from section, and then copy to the editor-in-chief. That was how it was in my high school. And that's kind of how it is at USC, which goes from the section to managing to copy. And then depending on the article, it goes to the editor-in-chief too. So in terms of that, it's been very similar and then layouts too, it's been extremely similar with just the way that pages are laid out and articles and all that. That's for sure the same.

But I mean, in terms of similarities, that's where it stops. I mean my high school paper had like twenty people. This one year we had like fifteen and then for *Daily Children*, it was like a hundred staff members.

So it's completely different. But in terms of the structure and the way everything goes, like day-to-day operations, it's kind of similar.

claire: [00:18:12] And to go back to what you specifically do. Do you think people ever have misconceptions about sports writing and what you do as a journalist?

anthony: [00:18:22] I think, yeah. You could say that. That's a good question. But you can for sure say that. I think a lot of people don't think that sports writing is legit, but, I mean, it's as hard as any other type of journalism.

I mean, if people sit and watch games, most of the time they're sitting and watching as a fan, but my, if you sit and watch the game, cause then you have to write about it and have it done in like thirty minutes, right after the game ends.

That's how professionals do it. So it's as hard as people think, but some people really don't think that it's hard and I don't get it, but yeah, I think there's a misconception around it. Just because it's sports and some people don't really like sports, but that's not up to me, but it's still difficult.

It still has its hard parts. Like any type of journalism. It still has the forms of feature and news briefs of a breaking news story. If something breaks, you have to write it quickly. It still has the same aspects as a new section.

amy: [00:19:22] Yeah, that's super fascinating. Thank you for uncovering those misconceptions.

I kind of want to go back a little bit earlier to something that we've kind of mentioned briefly, but how exactly would you propose to implement change among teens right now, as in our generation?

anthony: [00:19:44] What do you mean by that?

amy: [00:19:47] Besides just empowering them and making sure they stay informed, what specific actions would you take to get them to really just make change?

anthony: [00:20:01] Oh, I see. Well, obviously staying informed is the first thing and I guess coming up with reasonable things to do. I know most people would just go rant on like Twitter, or TikTok about certain things, but actually try to create change. For example, if you don't like a bill that passes, calling people in offices like district attorneys and people in your county to like talk to them.

I try to campaign for different stuff. That's something that could happen. And not paying attention to elections and stuff can definitely be harmful. I mean, if you pay attention to every type of thing that goes on in your County, what passes and the people that are in charge, because those are really more important than the president.

A lot of people don't realize that, but pay attention to those. And I think, yeah, staying informed, actually having a legitimate plan of how you want to make change, I think it's the best thing that you could do.

Cause most people just don't have a plan. They just say, "I don't like this". And then they talk about why they don't like it and they don't do anything about it. So that's, that's the most important part, actually doing something about it.

claire: [00:21:14] So for our last question, we always like to ask if you have any advice you could give us.

Especially for us at Stories Empowered, we're all writers and a lot of us are journalists. So what kind of advice would you give to people like us?

anthony: [00:21:27] Yeah, for sure. The main thing I would say is try to read as much as you can. You know, when I was starting, I, first of all, had no experience in journalism at all.

Like I didn't write, I didn't even know what a journalist was: all I knew was sports. That's all I do. So when I first started, I kinda just would go to the LA Times, the New York Times. And then I would just read headlines at first, then if I liked and was interested in the headline, I would read the first couple of paragraphs.

Because I'm sure you guys know, those are the most important paragraphs in a story. And then from that on, just try to read and then replicate that in my writing. So if I found something that I really liked. If somebody did a lead really nicely or an anecdote, I would try to replicate it in my stories.

And then once you read more, you get more comfortable writing. Try different sections. Like I said, when I was in high school, I wrote for every section, just to try to figure out which one I liked more. I was just naturally drawn to sports, but I wanted to try out different things.

So reading a lot, writing a lot. It's basically common knowledge to do that. Or it's normal for people to say that, but it's really the truth. The more you read, the better you write the more people are gonna read your stories. Another thing is pay attention to professional work and just notice what they do and see how you can replicate that.

And also reaching out to people. There's a bunch of people like me who want to help high school students. I mean, even at the LA times, sometimes they might be hard to reach, but if you just try, you'll never know, they might respond. So that's one thing. Try to go to conventions, I know right now it's probably difficult, but going to conventions and just talking to other people.

That's the most important thing, in my opinion, now reading as much as you can. But that's really it; just reading and writing and practicing it. You know, the more you write, the more comfortable you'll get, you'll find your voice, that you'll find your style.

So that's really what's most important, the best advice I could give. And also don't be afraid to try new things. If you want to do other stuff, then go for it.