Alison Berg is a thoughtful and articulate young writer. The following is the transcript of our conversation with her. It touches on her choice to be a journalist, the difficulty of confronting authorities while reporting an unpopular news story, and her decision to go public about her experience as a sexual-assault victim.

**Why did you choose journalism as a career path?**
A lot of what I want to do in journalism is give a voice to the voiceless, and being able to speak truth to power and expose — this sounds cheesy — corruption in authority and power.

**What is your take on fake news?**
There is fake news out there; it is a very real thing. But I think the journalism (outlets) that have always been trusted will always be trusted. I really think most of us (reporters) don’t have an agenda. Those who do aren’t really reporters — they’re just people sitting behind their computer screen.

We talk about this (fake news) in the journalism program; actually, it’s alarming how often we talk about this because it’s so real. Media literacy is more important than ever.

**Are you ever accused of being biased or a distributor of fake news?**
All the time. It’s hard to find that line between arguing and standing up. I consider the source. If it’s someone who wants to have a genuine conversation about concerns, I’m happy to have that conversation. But if it’s the Twitter troll, I try to not engage.

It does take a toll if I read the comments. It’s a joke in newsrooms that you just don’t read the comments.

**Why did you choose print journalism over broadcasting?**
I went back and forth for a while. The broadcast professors at USU are incredible. One thing they’re incredible is convincing you. They have good reason — 100 percent job-placement rate. I was leaning toward broadcasting for a while because I felt the job security was better, but I always felt my heart wasn’t really in it.

There are things you can do in print journalism that you can’t do in broadcast. The investigative work you see come out of the *New York Times* — you wouldn’t see that come out of any TV station because the types of stories are different. In TV you have two minutes or however long to tell a story, and it’s often about car crashes and fires. There’s nothing wrong with that, but the kind of truth spoken to power is found in print journalism.
In broadcast you’re telling the story with video. You can tell that same level of descriptive story with your words. If you’re good enough at what you do, you don’t need visuals — your words can say it all.

**Isn’t video important to millennials for their news consumption?**
I think millennials don’t get enough credit. Newspapers in the form of paper won’t be around forever, but I think online news will be around. Journalism in written form is never going to die. The investigative work you see in print will never go away.

**Does it take courage to be a journalist today?**
Absolutely. It’s scary. Foreign correspondents, especially in countries like Russia, are being killed on the streets, and it’s terrifying. I think it’s incredibly brave to be a journalist today.

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On Nov. 13, 2017, the *USU Statesman* published a news story by Alison Berg and fellow student journalist Carter Moore headlined “$8 million of Huntsman School differential tuition being spent without input from students who pay it.”
The story won national awards and result in several open meetings with students.

**How was it reporting a difficult and breaking-news story?**
It was hard and was confusing. There were lot of layers to it, and it was more complicated than I ever imagined it would be. But the end result was I was proud of myself. I hold myself to a high standard, so I’m often not as proud as I could be. But I was really proud of this.

I was happy, of course, with the praise it got, but I was more happy with the fact the students got the transparency they deserved, and that the result of that story was that students were informed and their voices were heard.

**How was it standing up to the business school’s officials?**
We’d heard lots of different things from lots of students. But we wanted to go in with an open mind, so we did. We met with two of the deans, and they were both really nice. They told us that the advisory board (that determines where the differential tuition is spent) had been meeting.
I remember very clearly. We got out of a meeting with one of the deans, and he said, “Yes, we’ve been meeting. Everything is great. Thanks for doing the story.” I remember we felt kind of confused, like, “Oh, I guess they have been meeting — so why is this rumor going around?”

We felt weird about it, so we filed a public records request so we could at least see what they were talking about. And that’s when everything exploded. The dean said, “You know, I forgot.” That was the moment where it was difficult. In those first interviews, we felt they were telling the truth.

I remember seeing (the documents) and thinking, “We are doing something that I never thought I’d have to do in my college career. We are exposing something that wasn’t true, and we’re going to have to speak this truth to someone who has a lot more power than we do.’

It was scary. It was nerve-wracking, but it was also kind of a rush. I didn’t do this for power, but I did feel we had the power to make change. It was rewarding because the students and the school are going to get the transparency they deserve.

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Berg was raped in September 2015, a couple of weeks after she’d arrived at USU as a freshman. Her alleged attacker has been charged with two felonies and will be tried in August 2018. Here she discusses the devastating sexual assault, her decision as a journalist to speak openly about it, and the fallout.

Your decision to tell your story in the Deseret News was very brave. How do you feel about discussing the sexual assault now?
I testified in court about it. I’m pretty much an open book.

For about a year after it happened, I was just destroyed. I wanted to transfer schools. I failed almost all my classes. It was just awful, horrible, horrible. I went into a deep depression. It was just so hard to get through. A lot of, I did think, was because it was my fault.

Why did you decide to tell your story publicly?
It was a long process. I reported it to the USU police the week of spring finals. For a while, the thought of reporting just didn’t come to my mind. I didn’t want to go through all that.
I was doing an assignment in my news-writing class, and I was assigned to one of the local (Cache County) prosecutors. I asked her, “I know someone who was sexually assaulted a while ago. She’s never reported it, and she’s worried that it might be too late to report it.”

The prosecutor (Barbara Lamar, Cache County Criminal Deputy Attorney) said, “Of course it’s not too late. I would encourage her to go to the police and at least see where it goes.” So I did. She inspired me to do that. They were able to charge him.

**You decided to relate your story while a reporting intern at the *Deseret News* in summer 2016?**

I was telling my employers at the *Deseret News* that these charges were coming out, so I might have to take a couple of days off to go to court. I wasn’t just sure how to handle all of it. The editors said, “The normal practice is to not use a sexual assault victim’s name, but we think your story is really impactful. We’re not going to pressure you either way, but we would love to tell that story.”

I said, “Give me some time to think about this.” So I left work that day, and I called Matthew LaPlante (her mentor and an associate professor of journalism). We talked for about four and half hours. We talked a lot about both sides — why I would want to, why I wouldn’t want to, and how this could be empowering for me, or really scary. We just talked through it all.

In the end, I felt I could make a big difference in someone else’s life. The main thing was, I didn’t want to hide behind this anonymous name. I wanted to tell the world, “This is me, this is what happened to me, and I’m stronger than this. And I’m not going to — hide isn’t even the right word — I’m not going to shy away from this any more.”

I completely understand why women wouldn’t want their names told. I totally don’t judge that at all. But, for me personally, I felt I could make a difference for someone else.

**What was the process of completing the *Deseret News* story?**

It was written by a reporter I worked with (in the newsroom). The *Deseret News* had me send in an email statement about what I wanted to be quoted on in the story.

*The Salt Lake Tribune* picked it up pretty soon after. And then ABC 4 (Good4Utah.com) wanted to do a video, so I drove down to their studio and was on TV, which was nerve-wracking. Then the *Herald Journal* and *Cache Valley Daily* wanted to pick it up. All of a sudden, all of these places wanted to talk about it. It felt overwhelming.

**Have you heard from women that you’ve helped them?**
Yes. Actually, I had someone reach out to me last week and tell me that she had been through something similar and wanted some help. So we are going to the police next week. I’ll help her get through this.

**What was the hardest part about bringing charges against your attacker?**
It was going to court and having to testify. That was when I was really vulnerable. Most people I tell (about the assault) are understanding and supportive and most believe you. They don’t really pry, and if they do they’re nice about it. Whereas the defense attorney’s job is to discredit you. Everything he said was trying to discredit me, anything just to make the process worse.

**The comments on the Deseret News story were largely supportive, but some were downright mean. Did that affect you?**
Funny story: I went back and read the comments recently. I don’t know why, I just did. One comment stood out to me, a comment about “Doesn’t the Deseret News have an honor code?” I was like, “Good thing I didn’t read this at the time because it really would have bothered me.”

If you’re hiding behind a fake name on a computer screen, then I just don’t care. I have zero respect for you. It’s easy to type behind a screen; it’s harder to say those things to my face. And nobody has ever said those things to my face. Though I’ve had people who’ve said, “If you weren’t doing this or that (the rape wouldn’t have happened).” Or, “Scott (her attacker) is a nice guy.”

**Was it difficult to testify and admit that you had consumed alcohol at a party the evening of the assault?**
That was part of the case, and it’s hard to have to have the case without that detail. But the other part is, “You know what? So what if I was (drinking).” Part of Utah culture is blaming the victim if they were drinking or for what they were wearing. I wanted to help change that and say, “It’s not my fault.” It’s taken me a long time to get past that. But I’m here now.

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**What do you see for your future?**
I’ve always wanted to make a difference in someone’s life. I love writing day-to-day news stories; that is such an important part of journalism. But that’s not what I want to spend my life doing. I want to spend my life speaking truth to power and making a change in the world.

Sometimes I want to be a White House correspondent at the *Washington Post* because I love politics and I thrive under pressure and a fast-paced environment. But I also love the idea of deep-dive investigative projects, like those done by Pro Publica (a nonprofit news organization that undertakes investigative journalism in the public interest).
I want to make a change in the world, and I want to make a difference. I don’t want to be the same story that shows up on the news app every day. I want to be the person to publish the Pentagon Papers. I want to tell the stories that people don’t want told.