

Trailblazer: Ella Nilsen '13

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Monday, May 13, 2013

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*“January 31, 2013: my first time coming face to face with a man carrying a semi-automatic rifle.”*

So begins Ella Nilsen’s fine article on the gun debate in the winter issue of *Main Street Magazine*. She has a good reporter’s knack for getting herself to the right place at the right time in order to tell the story. In this case, she was at a pro-gun rally at the N.H. State House.

She doesn’t skirt her emotional reaction, but writes a fact-filled outline of the debate, moving easily from personal, to regional, to national aspects of the issue. One is struck by her passion and determination.

Nilsen, from Dalton, N.H., has already freelanced for three newspapers: the *Union Leader*, *Littleton Courier*, and *Coos County Democrat*. After graduating this spring, she plans to work as a journalist in New Hampshire.

“I think regional journalism is really important,” says Nilsen. “Whether it’s in print or online. A local paper with all of its graduation announcements, sports, and town meetings is the glue that holds communities together. As a reporter, you really live in that community.”

For the past three years, Nilsen has designed, copyedited, and written for *Main Street Magazine*. This past semester, as editor-in-chief, Nilsen described it as “UNH’s only pop culture and campus magazine.” She and the *Main Street* staff have brought the publication up to a new level of sophistication, covering student culture, fashion, music, and hard issues such as UNH divestment and Internet freedom.

With a minor in writing and Asian studies, Nilsen chose to major in history. “I had been thinking about law school,” says Nilsen, “but I really like journalism. I just felt that before I go out in the world and do anything professionally, I needed to know basic facts and how to do research. I’ve really appreciated the major.”

As a first-year student, Nilsen received funding to research her paternal grandmother. “She was Jewish and for personal reasons kept that secret,” says Nilsen. “While I wasn’t able to find that much out, I did learn a lot about the immigration process. It was cool to share my project with my family and my uncles.” Her research article, “No Longer a Secret: Uncovering my Family’s Russian Jewish Heritage,” was published in the spring 2011 issue of *Inquiry*, the UNH undergraduate research journal.

This spring at the Undergraduate Research Conference, Nilsen presented her paper, “Reasserting Their Voice—The Rise and Fall of Congressional Power, 1973—2006.”

Clearly, Nilsen likes tough issues and admits she’s got her eye out for a subject that will sustain a graduate degree in journalism.

Nilsen, who grew up reading *Rolling Stone* by a wood stove, will surely come up with more writing that is fresh and remarkable.

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