

# JayMac

Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication Alumni Association



## GAYLORD ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

“There’s nothing more fun than the constant learning that comes with being a reporter.”

**HAILEY BRANSON-POTTS**

**MARK POTTS**

Metro reporter & Videographer  
Los Angeles Times

**Hailey Branson-Potts and Mark Potts share a lot together—a last name, Gaylord degrees, an employer and even a team Pulitzer.** Both graduated from OU in 2010 (Hailey: B.A. Journalism '10; Mark: B.A. Professional Writing '08, B.A. Film & Video Studies '08, M.A. Broadcast Journalism '10) and now produce award-winning journalism for the Los Angeles Times. Here, they share one more thing: an interview about their Gaylord experience and careers.

*What’s your favorite memory from your time at Gaylord College?*

**HAILEY** - As an undergraduate student, I had the incredible opportunity to travel with a graduate student and a small group of Gaylord faculty members to Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Islamabad, Pakistan, in 2010 to lead journalism and leadership workshops for female reporters. I had never before traveled abroad, so this trip was life-changing. I marveled at these brilliant women’s tenacity and love of reporting even under tough circumstances

*What do you consider to be the most significant moments of your career so far?*

**HAILEY** - The most significant moment of my career so far was being part of the Los Angeles Times team that won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News for our coverage of the San Bernardino terrorist attack. I was among our first reporters on the ground in San Bernardino and spent many days there interviewing families of the dead and authorities and covering funerals and the grieving process in the city.

**MARK** - Winning the Pulitzer was shocking and still sort of is. I always make sure to tell people it was a team award. I found out while attending the Dallas International Film Festival with a feature film I directed, *Spaghettiman*. There were many all-caps text messages between Hailey and I. We then used the award to get people to come to the screening that night. I’m sure many were confused how a guy who was part of a Pulitzer Prize winning team had also made a movie about a guy

and still keep in touch with some of them to this day. It was a true joy to be immersed in these cultures — sipping fresh mango lassi in Dhaka, trying a dish made with sheep brain in Islamabad, traveling roads crammed with colorful rickshaws and going shopping for the perfect salwar kameez.

MARK - I had the opportunity to work for Buddy Wiedemann during graduate school, managing the two computer labs. That job taught me quite a bit about managing people, schedules, equipment, and personalities. I was able to meet and talk to a lot of students, help with projects, papers, and other necessities. I also quite enjoyed “Humor Writing” with Doug Marlette, where, three weeks before the end of the semester, he told the entire class they were getting Cs. It was a joke he enjoyed telling students to see how he freaked out. At the time, it was very mean. But now? I love it. The following semester, I took independent study with him where we talked about writing and he helped me with a screenplay and my novel writing class. He taught me so much, not only about comedy writing, but writing people.

*Do you have a favorite faculty/staff member at Gaylord College, and why?*

HAILEY - I still consider two of my professors, John Schmeltzer and former professor Warren Vieth, my lifeline and dear friends. These two pushed me to aim higher, tell better stories and to be sure to enjoy the ride. As they did when I was in school, they continue to provide a sympathetic ear and, at times, tough love when I need an honest answer to my questions about this ever-changing field of journalism. I honestly don't know where I'd be without them.

MARK - I never actually had John Schmeltzer as a professor, but I worked with him through Routes and he has been a mentor of mine for years. I can email or text him at any time and he will always get back to me with advice or the motivational push I need. Peter Gade is a professor I appreciate quite a bit. As I've aged, his

who can sling spaghetti from his hands like Spider-Man...

*What advice would you give to current students aspiring to a journalism career?*

HAILEY - Produce, produce, produce. Get as many internships as you can, as early as you can. I started working for a newspaper in high school and got my first official internship during my sophomore year. Do not wait until you're a senior. Apply for everything, even if you think it is out of your league. Applying in and of itself is good experience. Know what's going on in the industry so you can be realistic — but don't let it get you down. It's always been a changing industry. Know that, even with the challenges, there's nothing more fun than the constant learning that comes with being a reporter.

MARK - Just make stuff. Make it on whatever you have. It doesn't matter as long as you're having fun and are creating. Everything you do is a learning experience. Use your iPhone with your friends. Check out a camera from school and shoot something on the weekends. Spend months preparing a short film. Go cover a march or concert. There is a story everywhere and it doesn't matter how big or small it is. Humans are cool, you just have to talk to them.

*What do you do for fun outside of work?*

HAILEY - Mark and I are huge Los Angeles Dodgers fans, and we go to a lot of games and Spring Training each year. (Fun and work crossed paths this year because we both got to cover the Dodgers' entire postseason and World Series run.) I also love hiking, reading and eating.

MARK - What Hailey said, but I put more emphasis on “eating.”

lessons about journalism, from the positive to the negative, have really had an impact. I wish I could have heated discussions with him now that I'm older and not as naive as I use to be!

*You both work at the Los Angeles Times. How did your career paths converge to the same publication?*

HAILEY - Mark and I got married in July 2010 and both graduated in December. I applied that January to a fellowship program for young reporters at the Los Angeles Times and Chicago Tribune, which are sister papers. I accepted a spring internship at the Tribune and learned a few months later that I got accepted into the program, but in Los Angeles. We did two cross-country moves — Norman to Chicago and Chicago to Los Angeles — within seven months. I started the program in September 2011 and have been at the Times ever since. Mark worked for the entertainment and humor website Break.com for some time, then worked as a video editor for a daily show produced by YouTube and DreamWorks. He freelanced the entire time for the L.A. Times and was hired on full-time in January 2015.



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