

SEJ Elyssa Rosen Mentoring Fellowship Essay Michelle Nijhuis and Jillian Keenan

Michelle: I've been a mentor for SEJ since 2007, and several of my mentees have become valued colleagues and friends. But I've never had the chance to attend an SEJ conference with a current mentee until this past September. In New Orleans, Jillian and I had a chance to compare notes on the conference itself, on the ups and downs of freelancing, and on individual (and perhaps, one day, shared) long-term reporting and other creative projects. My other mentor-mentee relationships have taught me that a surprising amount of trust can be built over e-mail and by phone, but there's of course nothing like meeting in person to deepen a relationship. Our experience in New Orleans was fun and useful on its own merits, and I'm sure it will be the foundation of a longer-term connection.

In New Orleans, I was also able to spend some long-overdue in-person time with my very first mentee, Rhitu Chatterjee, who now reports for PRI's *The World from Delhi*, India. Rhitu now has a mentee of her own, Shreya Dasgupta, and both Rhitu and Shreya were able to attend SEJ thanks to the Elyssa Rosen fellowship. So the fellowship allowed me to not only meet Jillian and catch up with Rhitu, but also meet my "grandmentee" Shreya — and Shreya has since asked me to serve as a mentor to her through *Enslia* Magazine, which uses mentor-mentee pairs to develop individual articles. I hope SEJ's mentoring fellowship will continue, and continue to strengthen these formal and informal relationships among journalists at different stages in their careers.

Jillian: My professional correspondence with my mentor, Michelle, has been one of the most valuable experiences of my early career. She has been extraordinarily available and helpful via email and phone throughout our year together, but there is nothing quite like in-person interactions to develop a relationship.

Since Michelle and I live on different coasts, it would have been impossible for us to meet without the generous support of the Elyssa Rosen fellowship. Michelle and I talked about how she developed her own career, various professional struggles she has overcome (so that I can learn from her triumphs), and specific stories we hope to pursue. Great mentors are an invaluable — but rare — resource for early-career Millennials, such as myself, and meeting Michelle was the highlight of my time at the New Orleans conference.

But the conference in general was fantastic. Every panel session was so great that my only regret was the inability to attend all of them! The field trip to various segments of the oil industry was especially fascinating, and I'm grateful I was able to share what I learned with thousands of interested people on Twitter. I left Louisiana inspired, motivated, and with a better grasp of how to continue building my career as an environmental journalist. I hope that future mentor-mentee pairs will have the same opportunity to attend SEJ conferences that Michelle and I did. Thank you!