High School Cover Up

Every summer, high school football teams gather at camps to get to know their new coaches, team members, to condition for the upcoming season, and learn plays. These two to three a day practices take place up to hours away from the player’s hometowns. Players share hotel-like rooms and are often told to leave cell phones, gaming equipment, and laptops at home.

As a high school journalist, you have developed information that the football camp held each year at your school has become out of control in the evenings. Older players often “haze” the younger players. Hazing is a brutal tradition of verbally and physically abusing a person in extreme ways to make them feel as if they have to earn their place on a team. Some of the hazing includes being beaten with broomsticks, whipped with electrical cords, being tied up, and beaten with socks full of tennis balls.

You write a well-researched article about the topic, exposing the coaches for allowing this to happen, students who did the abuse, and getting quotes from students who have been abused. You work hard to get your facts right and spend a great deal of effort checking and double-checking your sources. Your newspapers advisor supports you and your work, but when you’re ready to publish the story in the school newspaper, the principal says you can’t run it unless you make changes. First, you have to eliminate a player’s comments and add a prepared statement from the football coach. If you don’t make those changes, then you aren’t allowed to print the article until after the football season is over so you don’t affect their season and chance at going to state.

What do you do?

School Shooting

You are the editor of the Kansas City Star. A school shooting takes place on the other side of the country. It is the third school shooting this year. In this one, a 15 year old boy opened fire in a school cafeteria killing two students and wounding 22 others. You know the story will be all over the news for days, yet it is not a local story. Since it didn’t happen in Kansas City, you debate how to cover the story. Some parents may not want their children to see the story on the front page because it could scare them. Others encourage you to put it on the front page because they believe it could sell more newspapers.

What do you do?

College Professor Plagiarizes

You are a college journalism student who has written several articles, all of which have been turned down by the editors of the paper. That week, you open up your school’s newspaper and read an article by one of your professors who is doing a guest column. You find that he has used several of the same ideas, sentences, and even quotes from one of your articles that he personally turned down. Is an award winning write, a long time college processor, and well respected in the community. You are a student who has never had anything published. It is likely that it would be his word against yours.

What do you do?

Grocery Store Exposed

You are a journalist for a major TV news station. Your producers have done a great deal of research about a national grocery chain. They believe that some of their stores are asking employees to handle food in an unsafe manner. For example, food is kept at too high of a heat and may have salmonella. Also, some food is left out too long, and other foods are sold long after they’ve expired. Employees also aren’t required to wash their hands often, use gloves, or hairnets.

Customers may get sick if they eat tainted food, and they have a right to know that food store is not handling its food in a safe manner. You think that to prove this story, you will need to get footage of what is happening. You contacted the store and they told you that cameras are banned from entering the store and they will sue or arrest any newscaster with trespassing if they try.

What do you do?

Child Abuse

Working as a journalist for a newspaper, you get a great assignment. You are asked to write a series of articles on poverty in families. You find several families that sign a contract with you. The contract says that you are allowed to observe them and take pictures as often as you would like, but you are not allowed to interfere at any time. That means you cannot talk to them, stop them from doing something dangerous, tell the cops if they’re doing something illegal, or provide them with money or food.

After being a “fly on the wall” for three months you’ve seen a mother allow her three year old daughter to go hungry for 24 hours, living in a filthy apartment, and the same toddler sleeping on a urine-soaked mattress. This little girl is hit by her mother and at one point even begins to bite down on an electrical cord.

You are legally bound to not intervene at the risk of being fired, taken to court, or losing respect as a journalist, but a little girl is at risk.

What do you do?