

Just for friends of Youth Journalism International, the *YJI Insider* is aimed at providing a behind-the-scenes look at this Connecticut-based educational charity and its talented students around the globe.

## Reports From Remote African Village to Icy Lake Superior

Each day, Youth Journalism International students give us all reason to be proud and to feel hopeful about the future. They're such an outstanding group that we've come to expect excellence. But sometimes, a piece of work rises so far above that it makes us wish everyone on the planet could see it. Nigerian YJI student Linus Okechukwu's January [story of a small village struggling to overcome a horrific massacre](#) did just that.

Reporting from a place so remote it's not on any map we could find, Linus interviewed survivors of the murderous attack, and wrote of their suffering but also about how they were healing by celebrating Christmas. It's a remarkable piece. To get the story – which was barely noticed in the local media and not at all outside Nigeria – Linus visited the village several times, snapping photos with his cell phone, even climbing a tree to get an aerial view! Linus now leads a small group of new Nigerian student reporters for YJI.



**YJI students in Nigeria - Festus Iyorah (left) and Linus Okechukwu (right) with University of Pittsburgh Professor Cecil Blake.**

Of course Nigeria is not the only place where YJI reporters are busy. The polar vortex – and a tough winter in general – had students trekking through the snow and ice with their cameras in [Chicago](#), [Toronto](#), [Minnesota](#), [Georgia](#) and [Connecticut](#), sharing the troubles and beauty of winter with readers worldwide.

From India, reporter Harsha Mishra marked the one-year anniversary of the brutal gang rape in Delhi with a [tribute to the victim's bravery and a scathing rebuke of the system](#) slow to punish the attackers. Jenny Neufeld, a YJI student in upstate New York, cleverly compared the [glitches in the Obamacare website with the troubles she and other high school seniors faced](#) with the online Common Application.

YJI reporter Yelena Samofalova, an American who was born in Ukraine, [wrote about her own sadness in watching](#)



**YJI student Allison Hall snapped this shot of Lake Superior from her home of Duluth, Minnesota.**

[the chaos there](#) and from Venezuela, YJI's Mary Granela [did her best to explain that food shortages and an economic crisis](#) are at the root of public protests there. Coverage of the Lunar New Year came from YJI students in [China](#) and [Vietnam](#), along with movie reviews, news and more from the U.S., U.K., Nepal and Pakistan.

Connecticut YJI writers Ambriel Johnson and Alan Burkholder detailed a wild rumpus: the New Britain Museum of American Art's [tribute to artist Maurice Sendak](#) and his *Where the Wild Things Are*. And, sporting YJI's first White House press credentials, newcomer Sherry Sah covered [President Barack Obama's March speech](#) at Central Connecticut State University. All this and more is posted at [www.yjiblog.org](http://www.yjiblog.org). Please check often so you don't miss anything!

## Syrian Teen Resurfaces, Writes Again For YJI

Many YJI supporters might remember [our first story from Syria](#) a little more than a year ago, when a young journalist wrote of fearing death as war raged around.

To protect this brave teen writer living in one of the most dangerous places in the world for a journalist, YJI took the highly unusual step of withholding the student's name or other identifying information. It's something we've done only twice in 20 years.

To our dismay, we lost touch with that writer and worried whether our student was safe. We're now thrilled to report that our young journalist is alive and well.

[The latest report](#) from that brave teen, though with the perspective a year can add, remains full of the fear Syrian youth live with every day.

# Student Spotlight: Kaley Willis, Louisiana

Kaley Willis, a bright and dedicated high school senior from Sulphur, Louisiana, began writing for YJI in March 2010, when she was 13. She plunged in with a [story about what Louisiana teens thought Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico](#) that spring.

Crowned Junior Miss Queen of Pink in 2012, Kaley wrote several articles about the unusual beauty pageant that raises awareness about breast cancer and money for patients who are struggling. She also [wrote from the heart](#) about how much the campaign meant to her.

When her dance troupe traveled to Paris, Kaley brought her [eye-opening visit to the City of Light](#) to YJI's readers, and one Christmas, [she wrote about Cajun holiday traditions](#) of bonfires and Santa gliding through the bayou in a boat pulled by an alligator.



Most recently, Kaley brought you the sights, sounds and flavors of Mardi Gras in a two-part series that began with an [explanation of King Cake](#) and continued with jambalaya, Zydeco, beads and Krewe in [the second part](#). In the photo at left is Kaley in 2010 (with an alligator behind her) and on the right she's at a Mardi Gras parade this year.

## YJI Students Deliver News, Tributes to Nelson Mandela

When former South African President Nelson Mandela died in December, YJI students delivered an impressive collection of stories, reflections and art from North America, Africa and Europe. Never mind that most of these young journalists were small children or not even born when Mandela left public life, YJI writers showed an appreciation for news and history.

Aiman Jarrar in Michigan wrote that Mandela's life showed that [nothing is impossible](#), while South Africans Mariechen Puchert and Nicole Megan Gounder together delivered [a collaboration of words and art](#) that offered an intimate view from Mandela's homeland.

Nigerians [Mary Ngozi](#) and [Linus Okechuwku](#) shared their personal sorrows, and Linus and Nicole rallied to collect [viewpoints of African youth from many countries](#). Gilbert Bwette [wrote of how children in Kampala, Uganda expressed their feelings](#) through drawing pictures of Mandela.

From Scotland, Robert Guthrie observed how [Mandela's legacy will live on](#), and from Connecticut, Sara Nunes, who happened to be in Cape Town when Mandela died, came through with [photos and a thoughtful report on being a visitor](#) to a nation in grief.

20<sup>th</sup> Happy Birthday To Us All

It's YJI's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary and we'll be celebrating milestones all year with you.

Youth Journalism International couldn't have come this far without the tremendous support it gets from students, readers, alums, journalists, teachers, parents, grandparents and friends. Together, we've made something great that keeps growing and getting better. *Thank you!*

We hope you get a chance to check our students' work @ [www.YJlblog.org](#) and on the website, [www.youthjournalism.org](#). If you're on Facebook, be sure to "like" our page. There's much more online than we can begin to fit here.