

The lemonade tree in my backyard was the first thing I ever loved. It produced lemons that made the perfect lemonade; sharp and sweet and sour. When I was 12 and finally allowed on social media, I turned my lemonade obsession into a TikTok account called @RatingLemonades, where I reviewed lemonades from restaurants, grocery stores and viewer suggestions. Each drink was rated out of ten based on three criteria: sweet-to-sour ratio, presentation and price. I reviewed Minute Maid, Simply, Chick-fil-A and anything else I could get my hands on.

The account grew fast. Within a few months, it reached more than 20,000 followers and millions of views. Panera even commented on one of my reviews, asking if it could use my video as the official description for its Agave Lemonade. Looking back, @RatingLemonades was my first experience building a beat, understanding an audience and watching how the media moves.

Then came my annual dentist appointment.

Six cavities. Three more forming. My dentist banned me from drinking lemonade and sent a formal letter to my parents and pediatrician to enforce it. Just before the account's six-month mark, @RatingLemonades shut down under doctor's orders.

To my dentist, the cavities meant failure. To me, they showed commitment. When I care about something, I give it everything, even to the dismay of my dentist. That same energy still defines me in my journalism work.

This year at *The Redwood Bark*, I served as spring Social Media Manager and fall Head Copy Editor for a staff of 160 students. I shape headlines, tighten ledes and help writers say exactly what they mean. I approach editing the same way I approached lemonade. Balance matters. Too much sugar hides the truth.

Growing up in Marin County, it is easy to live inside a bubble, one that is polished, privileged and often sugar-coated. But no good lemonade is sugar-coated, and no honest journalism should be either. I have worked intentionally to step outside that comfort by covering stories that are uncomfortable but necessary.

In December 2025, I attended and photographed court proceedings in *Eric Gustafson v. San Francisco Unified School District*, a case examining whether a journalism adviser was reassigned in retaliation for student reporting and testing California Education Code 48907 and student press protections. I attended with other student editors and advisers, observed the hearing, spoke with attorneys and connected with journalism educators across Northern California.

I took a similar approach in my documentary, “What Happened to the Novato High School Newspaper?” which investigated the shutdown, return and final closure of student journalism at my neighboring high school through unsettling court research, archived newspapers and interviews with former student journalists across the country.

Making journalism visible matters as much as producing it. As this semester’s Social Media Editor for *The Bark*, I created reporting-for-social-media templates that increased our online visibility by 83 percent in one month. These templates are now used by our 100-student staff and will last beyond my time in the newsroom.

If I have learned anything, it is that journalism works a lot like lemonade. Reporting the truth can be a little sour, but that is part of the thrill.