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CHRIS DAVIS: Hello, everyone. Welcome to the *Career and Academic Resource Center Podcast*, the *CARC Podcast*. I am Chris Davis, the associate director of the Career and Academic Resource Center and the host of our podcast. And today it is my great pleasure to be speaking to Denise Hruby, who is a 2024-- or 2023 to '24 Nieman Foundation for Journalism Fellow at Harvard University.

She's an Austrian-born environment reporter who has written for the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *National Geographic*, and many other outlets. And she has spent the past year as a Nieman Fellow studying how journalists can improve reporting on climate change and biodiversity to better inform solutions to the planet's problems.

I'm thrilled to have Denise here today. A couple of things -- in the notes for today's podcast, I'm going to be including some references to the pieces that Denise has written in the past few years, including a fascinating, wide-ranging interview that she did with the Salata Institute here at Harvard University earlier this year. Denise also worked with-- or two of our students, I should say, two of our Harvard Extension students worked as faculty aides for her during her time as a fellow here at Harvard. So I'm eager to hear her thoughts about that. But first and foremost, Denise, welcome today. Thank you so much for joining us.

DENISE HRUBY: Thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited to be here.

CHRIS DAVIS: Thank you. No, it's an honor to be able to speak to you. So first and foremost, I wanted to start out with a quote from you from that Salata Institute interview earlier this year to ask you to kind of expand on it. I think it's a nice starting place for our conversation today. But you had said, "I don't see why the climate is not on the front page of every newspaper every single day. Every story has a climate change angle, every election story, every economic decision." I wondered if you could start out expanding a little bit on that.

DENISE HRUBY: I mean, it should be on the front page every day. I think you don't necessarily need to call it a climate change story. I don't think it needs to be climate in every headline, but it does affect everything we do and everything we work on, whether it's politics or the economy, whether it's our health or the way we live our lives, even our culture. So to give you an example, the way I really-- a point when I really started to change a bit the way I thought about it was when I-- in 2018, I had just spent a few years reporting in China, and then I returned to Europe to be based in Austria for a few years where I'm originally from.

And I was trying to look at initially how climate change affects, I guess, the economy and just the, quote unquote, "weather patterns." But then I realized that it's really also changing the culture and the identity of my people, because one thing that-- I grew up in the mountains, in the Alps, and winter is such a big deal there. From November through March, usually, we would have just snow covering the mountains. And it's a huge part of the economy.

But it's also part of the way of life, because growing up when I was young, everyone skied-- everyone. 60% of Austrians skied on a regular basis. And if you were anywhere from near the mountains, you definitely skied. My elementary school went on skiing trips-- a public school. It's just normal.

I understand that that's often a bit hard for people to wrap their head around it, because in the US, it's sort of seen as an upper-class sport, I guess. But at home, there was so different, and it was the one sport that brought everyone together. It's the one sport that we are consistently good at. I'm going to upset a lot of Austrian football fans right now, but-- and so, yeah, it's part of the culture and part of the identity.

And then I realized that my godchildren, who are now sort of at an elementary school age, they don't have that same childhood anymore because there just isn't as much snow anymore. And sure, there's been winters where we had not as much snow in the past when I was young, as well, but now it's the norm. And so I really also started to think about, how does it change our culture and our traditions and what's important to us as people?

And that's just one way that we can think of bringing in climate into beats that we usually would not think of as having a climate angle to it. It requires some creativity, I think. But I guarantee you, no matter which beat, which desk you're on at any newspaper today or any publication or broadcaster, you will come across stories that have a climate angle.

And given how much it will fundamentally change the way we all live, the way our economy works, and to the extent that it already threatens our entire civilization and the lives we've come to build, it really seems quite imperative to me that we all start to incorporate it into our reporting more and more. And yeah, it should be on the front page in the top of the news every day, and there's so much to report on.

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CHRIS DAVIS: And I wanted to kind of circle back to one of the things that had been described as what you were working on now that your Nieman fellowship is in the rearview mirror. I saw that the goal for the work that you were doing was to study how journalists can improve the reporting being done on climate change. I wanted to ask you to expand on that, climate in the newsroom. What are your thoughts on that? What has your fellowship contributed to your knowledge going forward on how journalists can improve reporting on this area?

DENISE HRUBY: I think I want to start by saying that journalism isn't activism. Well, I think a lot of climate journalists get accused of being activists or maybe some even see themselves as activists. I do not. I'm a very traditionally trained journalist, but I do see it as my role to give my readers the information they need to make informed decisions about their own lives, about maybe whether they want to put a bird feeder in their backyard or not, whether that make sense, something small like that or up to who they should vote for in any election.

And to do that, you need to make sure that people have all the facts and all the information and understand all the issues that are out there. So I report the truth, and I report a lot on climate science as well. But because climate is so negative, like I said before, people don't want to engage with it anymore.

And what I found in-- and that's a disservice to our own industry, too, because we depend on our readers. You don't want to drive them away. You want more readers to come to you. So if you produce stories that turn them off and make them want to cancel their subscription, that's pretty bad for a business.

Now, we have to cover the negative stories because it's the news. I can't just cherry pick. If I was running a publication, I cannot pretend that some negative things are not happening. But what I'm trying to do and what I think we need to do as climate journalists more is to try to bring some solutions and some more positive examples into that reporting that we're already doing.

So I do not at all believe that the newspaper should only be filled with cheerful, inspiring, happy stories, because that's not portraying the world as it is. But we need to seek those out a little bit more, I think, to make sure that our readers don't stop reading us, but also that they are still engaged with the world and still want to-- or think about climate change and think about how it affects them. And so, yeah, bringing in some more positive examples whenever possible. It takes a lot of time to find these stories, I will say. It takes a lot of effort sometimes to report them, as well, especially if the next negative report has already been sent to you in a press release.

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So the way I sometimes think about this issue is also we do a lot of telling people that the house is on fire. So I don't know where you or the listeners are sitting right now, but if you think about just you right in that moment and someone coming in through the door and telling you their office is on fire, it's burning down, the house is on fire, that's important information to have. You would definitely want to know about that. But wouldn't it be maybe even more helpful if that person also told you, and the emergency exit is just to your left, and the fire extinguisher is right on that wall, or any other number of things that could potentially be done, or to say the fire brigade is on the way, something like that?

That's, I feel like, where we are with climate journalism. A lot of it is still just screaming, the house is on fire. And with a lot of stories, that is unfortunately all you can do. But sometimes you can also point to perhaps this is an emergency exit, perhaps this is the fire extinguisher. And I think that's what I'd like to see all of us do a little bit more, because I think that's actually just in the best interest of our readers to show them which options they have. Whether they want to take that emergency exit or get that fire extinguisher, that's up to them. I'm not telling-- it's not my role as a journalist to tell them exactly what to do, but they need to know what the options are.

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CHRIS DAVIS: I wanted to follow up on that by asking a kind of clarifying question in the spirit of this exact conversation. I hear what you're saying. And also, I wonder, to dig further a little bit-- yeah, climate is inherently not a fun subject, but it's also one that I think it's fair to say globally now has been politicized pretty ruthlessly. There's public health. There's other certainly political areas that a certain segment of the population is just not going to engage with, for whatever reason-- ideology, et cetera, et cetera. And for a journalist and especially one in the field where there is a part of the population in most every Western country at this point that has a specific attitude towards climate change as it being a non-issue, what is the journalist's job to engage or not engage with that readership?

DENISE HRUBY: You know, this year as a Nieman fellow has given me the time to really think about that once you're not constantly on deadline. So this was a great privilege that I'm incredibly grateful for. And I think, early in my career, I thought that just by hitting people with the facts over and over again, you can convince them, because you're so right. It has been turned into-- it's been totally politicized.

But that's also just madness, because it's not a political issue. It is just a scientific fact. Climate change is happening. It is threatening our civilization, the way we live, the comforts that we have, the type of life that we appreciate and have gotten used to. And that's my baseline. And I'm not sure if it, at this point, makes sense to try and convince someone as a journalist who thinks that climate change is a hoax that it isn't. I'm also not sure if we can.

And that actually is more maybe based on my own personal experience during the pandemic. You brought up public health. I think most of us have probably had a friend, a neighbor, a family member who just did not believe that the virus was real, that a vaccine could help, all those things I'm not even going to--

CHRIS DAVIS: Oh, I know exactly what you mean.

DENISE HRUBY: --regurgitate all of that. Yeah. And I've had that in my own life, as well. And I spent a tremendous amount of time and effort trying to convince that person in my life that-- of the effects. And they just wouldn't be convinced, even if you have that personal relationship, which, as research shows us, is the only way to even actually start having the conversation.

So I don't think that, as journalists, it's what we should-- I'm not sure if that is how we should spend our time and resources. Part of the research I've been doing this year, as well, and with the help of the faculty research aide program, is looking into exactly that. So how many-- how bad is it? How many people do think that it is a hoax and can no longer be convinced?

Because if you look at elections in any country, probably at this point, not just the US-- I mean, we just had elections in the European Union. And there was a significant shift to far right parties, who generally do not take climate seriously. That's actually a euphemism. But, yeah. So these parties do get a lot of support.

But if you look at the research in the US, roughly around 75% of people in the US-- and this is the Yale Center for Climate Communications-- believe-- not believe-- know that climate change is happening, that it is a threat to our way of life, and, very importantly for us as journalists, they want to know about it.

That's a tremendous amount of people. Like, around 75% say they do want to know what's happening. They do want to know about the science. They want to know about what happens with climate change in their own backyard, but also on a national level and even internationally, which is very interesting because a lot of readers in the US are not that interested about what's happening in other countries. When it comes to climate change, they actually say they are interested, and they want to know what their local leaders are doing, what leaders, again, on a national and an international level are doing about it. So if we have 75% of people in this country who want to know about it, then that's a lot of readers that can support any significant business, I think.

CHRIS DAVIS: The last question that I wanted to ask you before we wrap up and you alluded to it-- this is something that comes up in some of the conversations I have on the podcast. Particularly, I bring it up when the guest has had experience on the instructor side of the faculty aide program, which you mentioned, which is a program that I run. You, over the course of your time as a Nieman fellow, had the opportunity to work with two Extension [School] students who were faculty aides on similar but not exactly the same projects. I think the more recent one was focused on biodiversity loss.

DENISE HRUBY: Yeah. So the program was really, really helpful. And it's such a rare treat to have someone who can really assist you in your research because we're so-- journalists are so used to doing all of this on our own. And it was also great to have people who are so smart and where you can bounce ideas off of. And so, yeah, big shout out to Christina Williams and Robert Familiar, who were my two research assistants. And they were both incredible, and I loved working with them.

I guess I'll point just to a couple of examples. So one thing I wanted to do is to think about, how do we build more capacity for climate journalism? Do we need to train people more, whether it's in the US or elsewhere in the world, and what are the needs? So the program helped or assisted me and the research aides assisted me in finding what's already out there in terms of workshops.

So, for example, the BBC, but also Agence France-Presse, AFP, the big French or international news agency, they have their own training programs for journalists. So we looked into that, looked into how they're structured, how they are done. But then, also, at a, I'm going to say, more basic level, what about journalism schools and classes at universities? What's already out there? Because it's been a while since I was in J School, and I was hoping that a lot of things have changed. And a lot definitely has.

But I found that while there's some schools that have an environmental or climate reporting component and some even have tremendous programs, there isn't enough about it or on it yet. And this goes back to me saying that it will-- whether you want to be a climate journalist or not doesn't even really matter because climate will factor into your beat, whatever you will cover in the future. And it will become, unfortunately, an ever more significant part of your work, again, whichever beat you will be covering.

And so it seems imperative, actually, that people who are studying journalism today also get some basic knowledge about climate science and how climate journalism works and how to maybe think about it within their own beat, because you'd never think about having someone, I don't know, cover the US elections who doesn't understand the electoral college or the importance of states like Iowa or-- so many examples that would just not fly.

Yet, journalists, not of their own doing, are often confronted with having to report a story that has a climate angle in it. And it's kind of new to them. And even if they're interested in it, they might not fully understand the science yet. And I think having that basic knowledge is so fundamental. You need to understand the basics to do your work well.

And I think that's something where we need to build more capacity, and that's something that I've been also trying to do this year by thinking about workshops that we could design for journalists that would bring that into the newsroom a little bit more with just a few hours of a workshop to just get them familiar with it and also having it more-- like, having it play a bigger role in the journalism schools, as well. And so, yeah, the researchers were really, really helpful with that. And it's just one example. I could go on and on. But yeah.

CHRIS DAVIS: That is very helpful, and thank you for sharing that. And I have to say, I could talk to you for much longer. There's so much to talk about here, but this has already been-- this conversation has exceeded my expectations. And I just want to thank you for taking the time. I'm sure it's been a whirlwind of a year. Thank you, Denise, for taking the time to share all this with our students.

DENISE HRUBY: Thank you so much for having me. It was such a pleasure. And yeah, all the best for the program and the students. I had such a great time working with them.

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CHRIS DAVIS: You have listened to the *CARC Podcast*. This is the podcast for the Career and Academic Resource Center here at Harvard Extension School, and I hope you will join us again.

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