Creative Writing: My Summer Off Essay, Research Paper

Creative Writing: My Summer Off

Memory can be so fickle. Like some great book that is slowly loosing

its pages, you begin with an entire novel full of details and descriptions and,

if you’re not careful, you end up with nothing more than the cover and the brief

synopsis on the back page. My novel on the subject of the end of summer school

debate has lost its share of pages but the back-cover synopsis, the essence of

the entire experience, is still with me.

?We are about to begin our annual debating tournament,? the instructor

beamed with an enthusiasm that let each of us know how happy he was that we had

made it this far. ?It will be the culmination of your six weeks of learning and

will count as a considerable part of your grade for the course. We will begin

at eight tomorrow morning. Get some practice, get some sleep, see you there.?

I don’t know what drew me to the course but I can remember my parents

telling me they felt I should go to summer school. I was opposed to the concept

of summer school right up to the moment I was issued the dictum ?go to school or

get a job?, at which point I became the world’s greatest advocate of off-season

learning. Besides, I was only fifteen and the workplace just wasn’t ready for

me. So I thumbed through the course book, singing a chorus of no’s until I

arrived on the Debate and Public Speaking page. There resided a large

photograph of a boy confidently standing behind an ornate podium, clearly frozen

in the middle of some captivating and influential argument. I read the passage

describing the course and was immediately sold. How could a stuffy math class

or a trivial course in art compare to ?a course that teaches students the skills

and techniques of competitive debate, culminating in a week long tournament??

So I filled out the forms and mailed them and before I knew It I was sitting in

a lecture hall, learning the skills and techniques of competitive debate.

As I have said, I was only fifteen and perhaps this debating course was

not yet ready for me either. I was both the youngest and least experienced of

the lot. Little could be done to gain ground on the former adversity, but I set

about rectifying th latter by filling a notebook with all the wisdom that the

teacher could impart to us during the hour long periods. When it was time for

the first debate, I studied up on my notes, reviewed my speech, marched over to

the outdoor amphitheater and was summarily destroyed by a girl would surely go

on to be a lawyer, if she wasn’t one already. Two days later I was bludgeoned

by a boy who lied to the judge so convincingly that all my facts were forgotten,

he would be a politician. And so the sorry sequence continued, the opponents

kept changing but the results remained the same. I grew bitter and frustrated

but I did not walk away. Instead I compiled lists, long lists, of what I had

done wrong and how to do better. With each debate the lists grew longer, until

their growth was halted by the teacher’s announcement that the tournament would

begin in a day and we were to get some rest.

That night I studied and review my lists, reliving the anguish that

accompanied each pointer: ?Don’t let your speech blow away in the wind. Look

the judge in the eye. Breath deeply. Don’t stutter.? The following morning I

went into the debate and rambled through a mediocre speech in a mediocre tone.

When I had delivered my mediocre conclusion, I waited for the judge’s decision

because it is the polite thing to do, not because I needed further confirmation

of my imminent loss. So I sat there In my chair adding to the list as the judge

announced that each of us had garnered the same number of points, but, because

ties were not allowed, he had awarded the debate to me. I was dumbfounded but I

concealed my disbelief so the judge would think me deserving of his accolade.

When I shook hands with my opponent, it felt different than it had previously,

maybe it is because this time I was giving the hand shake rather than receiving

it. I had taken the grand prize and that hand shake was merely his consolation

gift. I erased each of the points I had added to the list, I was becoming

better at debate, but I was not ready to argue with success. Maybe the list now

covered every possible pitfall, making loss an impossibility, but I doubted it.

I am proud to say that I was giving the hand shake at the end of each of

the next four rounds, placing myself in the semi-finals. I never assumed that a

debate was going to be easy, but when the politician walked into the room and

shook my hand, I knew this match would be a challenge. He won the coin toss and

chose the affirmative side, which gave him the power to define the terms of the

debate. The resolution given to him was ?be it resolved that two heads are

better than one.? With all the shrewdness he had employed in our previous

debate, he defined the terms as ?sexual reproduction is better than asexual

reproduction? and proceeded to present a convincing case as to why life is

better because of sex. I probably spoke for two minutes before I could think up

a proper response. but I did. I based my case on the lower rate of birth

defects in asexual reproduction, the process of grafting lost limbs back on to

plants and the ability of populations of asexual reproducers to row at

astonishing rates. My words flowed cleanly a smoothly, the speech was well

organized and the logic made sense. I knew I had won and the judge confirmed

this assertion. So out of 50 people, myself being the youngest and least

experienced, I had made it to the final round of a double elimination tournament

without a single loss. I shook his hand and sped home in an elated state.

The following day the final match occurred. It was held in outdoors in

the amphitheater and a crowd of thirty people had gathered to watch. I was so

confidant from the last match that I had not even looked over my sacred list of

debate follies. The sun was shinning and it was going to be a hot day but a

pleasant breeze kept the weather pleasant. I stepped up to the same ornate

podium that was in the photograph and tried to look as convincing and composed

as the boy in the catalogue. As I read the definitions and began to argue,the

breeze, like some malicious hand, snatched my notes from the podium and hurled

them to the ground. I paused and picked them up but the mood was broken and,

for reasons I am still not sure of, the audience turned on me. At first there

was an isolated taunting from a few people in the back rows. But the heckling

spread like a cancer until the entire audience was not listening to me for my

case but instead probing for mistakes to harp on. I lost my cool, began to

breath faster and even stuttered a few times. It was an act of supreme mercy

that time expired before I was able to plunge the dagger any deeper into my

chances of winning. When it came time for the audience to vote on which side

they thought had won, I did not receive a single vote. I had my hand shaken by

my opponent and received a cup for my other consolation prize. Though the cup

looked empty I will always remember it as full of a humiliation with a twist of

humbling.

Even today, I still keep the folly list and review it before each debate.

Sometimes I want nothing more than to forget that humiliating expierence but

one positive result did come of that fateful day. I continued to debate long

after summer school was over, and still pursue the activity today. I was

unwilling to end my debating career on such a sour note so I joined the Loomis

Debate Society and have yet to endure a loss quite as punishing as the summer

school debacle. It was liberating to know that no matter how bad I did on my

first debate for the school, it would be an improvement over my previous

encounter. Since then I have gone to national tournaments, become president of

the Debate Society and had my share of victories and losses, not bad for a

career born in humiliation and a summer off from work. Written on the back of

that book cover, long past when all the pages have fallen out, will always be

the beginning of an enjoyable activity and one of the most emotionally trying

moments of my life.