

# “Discovering Who I Am, Who I Want To Be... What I Truly Love”

By Keah Lonergan, President 2010

What Model Congress has given me, first and foremost, is a place where I feel confident, limitless, challenged, and respected. It has given me an outlet to discover and really do what it is that I truly love. Model Congress has shown me that debate excites me and motivates me more than anything else I've done so far in my life. I'm willing to work harder to do well than I am for anything else because *I love debate*. Through Model Congress, I have learned to capitalize on both my flaws and my talents. I've always been argumentative, but it wasn't until I had a forum in which arguing was praised that I realized that my tempestuous nature is not a curse but a gift. Since beginning Model Congress, I've grown from having a chronically aggressive attitude to understanding that disagreeing with an idea is not the same as fighting it. Challenging another's opinion is not offensive, rude, or wrong—in fact, it pays them a great respect by insisting they stand on a stronger foundation of reason. Demanding a better explanation does not have to mean demanding an explanation the same as mine; it simply raises the level of logic in the conversation and makes the exchange more valuable. Model Congress has taught me that debate strengthens thoughts and ideas, fosters passion, and helps me find truth.

Model Congress means more to me than I could express, but its significance goes far beyond just the debate aspect. I find this club so meaningful because of the respect and love it has fostered between myself and my peers. I have learned how to deal with all types of people at conferences, but I've also learned how to work well and closely with people by working my fellow presidents. I can honestly say that at the beginning of this school year, the transition from being treated as an adult over the summer to the immaturity of high school life made me extremely unhappy and angry. I strongly considered graduating early, but one of the primary reasons I didn't was that I couldn't stand the thought of not attending all my senior MC conferences. In a sense, Model Congress is what kept me going through the restlessness and frustration of my senior year. I found an oasis in Model Congress because it was the one place in the school where I could be challenged, respected, and given the same kinds of freedoms and responsibilities that I had this past summer. I was treated like an adult, and that means more to me than almost anything else.

I've learned more from Model Congress than I could ever explain—how to articulate my ideas, how to stand up to intimidating situations, the intricacies of foreign policy legislation, the weight capacity of the Sheraton Boston elevators, the effects of sleep deprivation, how to walk in four-inch heels—but there are two lessons this year that stick out. The first was at Princeton Moot Court earlier this year, although the same lesson snowballed until the final Moot Court in the Spring. Basically, I had set my goal for the conference just to make it to the quarterfinals, so we would beat the round we got eliminated in the last time. But when my partner and I continued advancing all the way to the final round, I started to believe in myself much more. I realized, in a way, that if I can actually believe that I am good at something or capable of achievement, I can do it. It's a clichéd lesson that became a reality as I went on this year to win double awards at Princeton (including a gavel from a MC, which I had never before attained) and a 1<sup>st</sup>-place win at the spring Moot Court tourney. The second lesson was at a practice session, when I was helping some underclassmen draft bills for Columbia. I was getting inwardly frustrated by their carelessness in bill writing, but I came to understand something very important about myself. Interacting with underclassmen this year has mirrored something I should have realized when interacting with upperclassmen in past years: that I often have unrealistic expectations of people. Though this isn't the most attractive quality in a person, it's an important lesson that I will take into account in other aspects of my life.

I realized that this year has been the best yet. I hope it only gets better, but even if this was the (gasp!) peak, I could be satisfied. Because this past year has included everything I really want out of life: a challenge, the avoidance of hunger, sickness, and bad haircuts, good music, the promise of something radically different next year, and the unconditional love and support of a few extraordinary people. Model Congress has made high school not just tolerable, but enjoyable. And that in itself is practically a miracle for someone as much of a product of this deplorably apathetic generation as I. Thank you.

I have appreciated my presidency because it has given me an opportunity to impart the knowledge and wisdom four years of MC has given me on younger students, which I have found very rewarding. As a chair, I tried my best to be fair but firm. I know I pushed certain students out of their comfort zones at times, but I firmly believe that this is necessary to ensuring success at conferences. I tried to be supportive of both my peers and younger kids, especially when they were first getting their feet wet, but I also wasn't afraid to correct them when they were wrong or make suggestions for improvement. I really liked showing the underclassmen how to write bills and brainstorming topics with them because I got to add my own

shadow of experience on everything I helped them with. I know what it's like to struggle to find a topic, so it was nice to help kids find one that they are passionate about. As a sophomore, I kind of figured out my own method for bill writing, and it felt good to pass it along to younger kids who had yet to develop their own process for writing a thoughtful, thorough bill. Beyond just the moments where I had a claim to legitimate authority (prep sessions, the concert, chaperoning at Yale and Columbia, overseeing the PMoot bus home), I feel the biggest way I've contributed is by setting a positive example for the younger kids and continually expressing my passion for and dedication to the advancement of the Model Congress program. I have put so much of myself into this program because I really believe it is the best, most rewarding, challenging and educational activity available to the BHS community.

### **Advice for underclassmen:**

**Voice Your Opinion** -- Either in committee or prep sessions, the most important thing you can do is participate by actively speaking and paying attention. There is never an excuse not to speak. If you don't understand something, ask a question. If you don't like something, say why. If you do, say why. If you don't know, make a speech about that. At the very least, you can always say that a bill is either overly vague or unstructured or it is too specific and structured.

The most important thing is to form an opinion and voice it, even if it is an incomplete or preemptive opinion. One of the most important things to learn from debate is that if you do not express your opinions, you cannot properly see the flaws in your own logic or the prejudices they contain. If you do not speak, your ideas will not progress beyond the confines of your own mind—and that means your ideas will not change. The single most important lesson from debate is to open your mind so you can change your mind. There is no honor in a static mind.

**Respect** -- There are many people in the world who you will not like. There are many who you will find stifling and intolerable. There are some who are downright mean. Too bad. Work with them anyway. Treat them with dignity. You have to give respect to earn respect, and you cannot function well in any setting without feeling respected. This is true especially for Model Congress, where bold opinions are expressed. Don't be a hungry wolf. Don't deliberately incite discord—it inhibits the level of debate where you will actually start to learn something about yourself and change your ideas. Understand that you can respect a person without liking them, agreeing with them, or understanding them.

**Passion** -- If you care about something, you'll want to work harder to do it well. Use this. Direct your time and efforts toward things you care about. There are many times in life when it is necessary to control our emotions (see Respect, above), but we can also use our emotions to fuel our efforts in other areas. Choose committees where you will be interested in the bills, and write bills on topics you feel a strong personal or moral connection to. Speak passionately in committee. People can tell when you are speaking from the heart, and it makes them listen. Never just copy a bill, because then the bill doesn't have any of you in it and you don't have any of the bill in you. You can't speak as passionately about something you didn't work for. When you work hard for something you care about, its success is all the more meaningful.

My fondest memories of high school, by far, involve Model Congress. I cannot help but smile ☺ [sic-petela insert] every time waking up with a neck cramp brings me back to sharing a bed with three girls in Model Congress hotel rooms. I know the first all-nighter I pull in college, I will be energized by the memory of that fateful night at Harvard, whispering like fugitives while working out an argument for our emergency case, only later to find the wall separating our team from our opposition was nearly sound-proof. How could I ever forget learning to iron at 3:00 in the morning, or spending more time in heels than I ever have? Four years ago, I was not so close with my fellow Model Congress senior peers. They were annoying, they were immature, and they seemed comfortable acting their own age! It took me nearly half of my high school career to realize that these were the very attributes that we fundamentally shared, and which made us excellent candidates for teamwork and friendship. I truly love these people more than anyone else in the school. Model Congress has bonded us together in a way I am positive that nothing else possibly could. Even when we wake up in the middle of the night and toss each other unceremoniously off the bed or smack our bedmate in the face while calling them names of varying vulgarity, I have an abiding love for them. Even when I make an epic mistake in court, they forgive me. And even when we annoy the living hell out of each other, yelling "I'm so sick of you!" we make up almost immediately and go back to laughing hysterically.

I have spent over 38 days of my life on MC trips, and yet it's not enough. I don't want it to be over. My best memories from high school almost exclusively involve Model Congress. Model Congress has been instrumental in discovering who I am and who I want to be. I know I will never stop debating, and I know the countless lessons I've learned will stay with me for a lifetime. I am more grateful for the existence of this program that I know how to express. I am infinitely thankful for the gifts of debate, friends, and the splendor of success and camaraderie that I have found through this program, and I will carry them with me for the rest of my life.

**Keah attended 12 conferences, winning 7 Awards (5 Sr year--2 Gavels & PMoot Tourney Winner).** She has deferred admission to the University of Toronto to travel and volunteer in South America for a year, after which she will go to Toronto to major International Relations or Ethics, Society and Law. She is one of our best, ever. My bet for her future – lawyer, activist, Nobel Prize Winner ☺