

“The Club That Changed My Life”

Delaram Takyar, The Persian Powerhouse, BHS 2011, Harvard 2015

Flashback.

I’m wearing my favorite red button-down shirt. It’s supposed to bring me good luck. My hands are slightly trembling and my carefully memorized speech is slipping through my fingers. I don’t want to do this. I don’t want to be here. I’m a sophomore in high school, sitting in my very first committee session, and my nerves have taken over. For weeks I have been writing and editing my bill. I have practiced my speech in front of the mirror, in front of my parents, in front of my four-year-old brother. I hear my name called, and I walk to the front of the room. I begin my speech and my voice shakes. I speak too fast. But once the debate starts, once the other delegates bombard me with questions, attempting to make me stumble, that’s when I find my confidence. I fight for my bill because I believe in it. I look around and I see that it is not my words that convince my committee, it is my confidence. For close to an hour there are questions, amendments, and speeches against my bill. I am frustrated, but I am determined. I give one final speech. And then it’s time to vote. I hesitatingly glance around the room. “All in favor of passing ‘An Act to Mandate Paid Maternity Leave’ raise their placards” and the hands shoot up. Not a single person in opposition. ***I’m a sophomore in high school, sitting in my very first committee session, and I have found confidence. I have found conviction.***

Flashback.

It’s past midnight, it’s raining, and I’m walking around a hotel just outside of Princeton, New Jersey. I’m with my best friend. We have been walking for an hour now, talking about our lives, laughing and sharing memories. Tomorrow, we will wake up at 8 AM, take a shuttle to the Princeton campus, and compete in our first moot court tournament as partners. We’re not talking about that, though. We’ve spent hours practicing. We have prepared for this weekend. Now we try to be calm, we try to ignore our nerves. We’re ready, we reassure each other. ***I never competed in a varsity sport in high school. I didn’t identify as an athlete. But I knew what it meant to be part of a team. I knew because Caitlin taught me. I found the meaning of “team” in her reassuring look after I was sure we lost our first round. I found it when I was sick at the beginning of the tournament and Cait hugged me and told me that she still believed in me. I found it in our synchrony, when the judge commended us on our balance. I found the meaning of “team” two days after that walk in the rain, in Whig hall at Princeton University, when Cait and I held hands, closed our eyes, and waited to hear the results of the final round. I found it in the tears in our eyes when we accepted our trophy. In our shared laughter and triumph. I found my team when I found my best friend. And I found my best friend when I joined Model Congress.***

Flashback.

I’m in a conference room in the Hyatt Hotel in Washington. For the next four days I will act as a member of the Supreme Court. For someone who aspires to enter the world of constitutional law, this is a dream come true. Along with 8 other “justices” I will help rule on the most pressing judicial matters of our time. We will make decisions about free speech at funerals, about Miranda rights, restrictions on violent video games, and the meaning of marriage. I want to spend the rest of my life doing this. Our debate starts with a simple question, “do we need the Bill of Rights?” ***I have known that I want to pursue a career in law for a few years now. But it is in this moment, in the millisecond that it takes me to react to another delegate’s suggestion that the Bill of Rights is superfluous, it is in that second that I find my passion.*** When I turn to him and in an effusive outburst rant about the importance of liberty, ***it is in that moment that I realize; I want to spend the rest of my life doing this. I have found passion.***

Flashback.

It’s almost 6 PM on a Friday night. The school is empty except for a few students finishing up sports practices and waiting for rides home. I’m sitting at my locker and I glance across the senior balcony. There is a single light on in a classroom. I’m not surprised. That light is always on, because that teacher is always working. In the book, *The Last Lecture*, Randy Pausch makes a comment about hard work that has always inspired me. He writes, “I got tenure a year early. Junior faculty members used to say to me: ‘What’s your

secret?' I said: 'It's pretty simple: call me any Friday night in my office at ten o'clock and I'll tell you.'"

This is what I think about as I walk to Petela's room. I walk in and as always he's sitting at his desk, a billion to-do lists spread out in front of him, busy writing away. He looks up. "Takyar! What are you still doing here?" I laugh. I have lost count of the number of times I have walked into this classroom. Happy, sad, discouraged, exhilarated. I always find inspiration. It's not just the plethora of books in every corner, the motivational quotes, or the photos filled with memories. It's the teacher behind them all. The teacher, who for three years now, has shown me the value of hard work. The teacher who has reassured me when I have been concerned about the prospect of college decision letters. The teacher who always has confidence in me when I am ready to give up. Petela has given every student who has walked into his classroom a gift. It is not the gift of a good grade, comfortable couches, festive Christmas decorations or Academy-award winning films (though, of course, he has given us those as well). It is the gift of inspiration. ***On any given night I know I can walk into room A23 and find my favorite teacher, working hard at his desk, ready to offer advice and inspiration, yet again. That is the secret. And it is for that, Petela, that I want to thank you.***

Flashback.

Today is a sad day. After three years of attending conferences, writing bills, giving speeches, and debating at practice sessions, our time has finally come. ***It is the day of the Model Congress banquet. Our final MC event as high school seniors. Today is a sad day.*** Everyone gathers in the auditorium. I have given hundreds of speeches. I have learned to overcome my nerves. I know how to speak confidently. And yet somehow, on this night, just before I begin, my mind goes blank. I'm filled with sadness. My voice cracks. And then, out of the corner of my eye, I see a familiar face, smiling and snapping yet another photograph. I nod and begin to speak. ***My last Model Congress speech ever.***

Fast forward to November 6, 2011.

I'm on the highway between New York and Boston. We've been driving for close to two hours, and my teammates in the car are all slowly drifting to sleep, exhausted after a difficult weekend. ***I'm on my way back from my first college mock trial tournament and I'm writing my model congress reflection. I'm writing it six months after graduating from high school. This is unconventional, I know. But I have gained a perspective now that I didn't have at the time of graduation.*** I left high school exhilarated by the opportunities that awaited me. I was excited by the idea of attending college, making discoveries, and creating a new life for myself away from home. The thought of leaving did not sadden me. ***And yet somehow, 6 months later, there are tears streaming down my face. I'm writing my Model Congress reflection, and the memories are overwhelming me.*** I am remembering the first time I spoke in a full session, in front of 200 people. Making new friends over lunch at Louie's during Yale Model Congress. Receiving my first gavel at Columbia. Leading practice debate sessions as a senior. Seeing pieces of myself reflected in the new members of the club. I am remembering saying goodbye. I am remembering thinking that a chapter of my life had ended.

I heard my voice for the first time in college. I had never really heard it before. I heard it at two in the morning, when I turned to my roommate and burst into a passionate tirade about individual rights. I heard it during my American Constitutional Law class, when I cited Supreme Court precedents and argued the importance of free speech. I heard it when I fervently discussed politics and election outcomes with my friends. I heard it at my first Mock Trial tournament. I heard it sitting in the dining hall around midnight, talking about education reform. ***And somewhere along the way, I realized that this voice hadn't always been mine. I did not used to speak with this conviction, with this confidence. This was the voice that Model Congress gave me.***

I do not miss high school. I love being a college student. But sitting here, six months later, looking back, I do miss late-night committee session. I miss parliamentary procedure, and nerdy Model Congress jokes. I miss midnight bowling and seeing the Blue Man Group perform. I miss debating politics, and being Moot Court partners with my best friend. I miss seeing the flash of a camera in the room just before I'm about to give a speech. I don't miss high school. ***But I do miss Model Congress, the club that changed my life.***

Delaram Takyar, BHS MC President 2011, attended 12 conferences winning an amazing 5 gavels & 1 hon. mention. She won the Princeton Moot Court Tourney w/ Caitlin ONeill in 2009, was Runner-up 2010. At the world's 2nd greatest university Huhverd, Takyar plans to major in social studies w/ sights on law school, hopefully Yale, the world's #1. I would not be surprised one day to see her seated on the bench of the Supreme Court. At Harvard, Takyar is on the mock trial team, is a jr staffer for HModelCongress Boston, HMC SanFran and HMC-Europe as well as a member of the HMC mentoring board. Needless to say, our fifty+ bhsmer's goin to HMC in Feb. will be well taken care of and prepared by the Persian powerhouse ☺