

I WOULD DO IT AGAIN: THIRTY YEARS OF COACHING

by Dr. Kathryne H. Pugh

Tammy said, "Mrs. Pugh, I don't mean to be nosey, but there's something white that looks like glue in your hair."

"Can't be," I said, "I washed my hair this morning before I left." Then I felt the back of my head and realized that I had put the shampoo in my hair with the intent to wash it, but I had not. So, with styrofoam cup of coffee, steering wheel, and shampoo in hair, I was off for the weekend forensic trip--the fifth weekend running. Then, my hair was dark, and my glasses were single vision ones.

When my fellow teacher strolled into room 208 in 1963 to say, "Kathryne, you have a forensic background; won't you help us here at Maplewood High School, " I did not hesitate to say "yes." As a high school sophomore I had become a member of the National Forensic League; it was natural that as a high school English and Speech teacher I would also be a coach. The thirty years that I served were outstanding. When I retired after thirty years of coaching, I reflected. What did I learn? What can I pass on to the novice coach?

Being at Nationals as a coach was a dominant honor. "Running" a tournament with a staff of subordinates who "follow directions" because their coach "knows how to do it", handing out much deserved trophies at public events as local committee member or chair, making decisions on time limits, rules, and other constitutional demands: these responsibilities bring joy and become routine. Yet, having a student disqualified because of "coaching" error or being denied admittance into the inner circle of coaches because of limited years of coaching experience serves to ebb the excitement already established. Therefore, what things really matter? I will name four.

--First--

The principal boon of the program is the yield. Since 1978 students and teachers are process rather than product writers. Outcomes in all academia are based on the methods used. Knowing how to achieve and knowing what steps to take are valued as more important than "getting there." "Forensicers" (My first troupe pegged themselves by this tag.) know "how to get there";



they also are the ones who change the world, who make a difference. My grandfather, having taught school for forty-two years, was fond of reminding us that he was "represented from the pulpit to the pen." In the legislatures, the law firms, the churches, the classrooms, the offices, the theatres, on the movie sets, as homemakers, salespersons, tellers, business owners, stewards, and laborers, the truth about Forensic students is that they are better because they have experienced the program. Some erstwhile "interpreters" can "read" picture books to their children with a flair that brings rewards in the future. Some prior competitive debaters speak out in a public forum about education reform. Some heretofore competing orators at civic meetings are heard--for what they say as well as who they are. Some extempers think on their feet on the job, often moving up in the world.

--Second--

Some of the best lessons are those that are learned from competition--outside the realm of "public speaking." Getting along with others at 4:00 a.m. sometimes requires compassion, constancy, and discretion. Not "breaking" in debate or "making it" to finals, especially when other team members do, often takes courage. A schoolday impasse and "dateless" weekends are results of one's willingness to "give up" Saturdays when others do not. Most of all, when a student is rejected by a judge for whatever reason and learns to "hold your cool," s/he exercises an arrangement that will take one far. Modern academicians often point out that America trails other nations because "we" are rarely relevant, but have they been on a Forensic van at 3:00 on a Friday morning or 11:00 on a Sunday evening? Have they spilled negative cards, lost an "interp" folder, forgotten an intro-

duction, missed a round, worn the wrong shoes, forgotten money for lunch, or had sources challenged in a round of competition?

A PFS, Previous Forensic Star, would know how to handle the upset and disgruntled "older" employee who is answering the phones in a rude and unsettled way. A PFS would go on with the meeting even though s/he has been up most of the night and doesn't feel very well. A PFS goes on with the conference in the wrong pair of shoes and partially combed hair. A PFS wears a suit and tie even into a jeans and sneakers affair because it is "the right thing to do."

--Third--

Forensics gives structure to life. Balancing entrance tests, band contests, proms, homecoming, and club weekends, Forensic days are arranged amongst classwork, homework, and practice. Rarely is there a day without multiple plans, at least counting points for personal degrees and for school and district success. A typical Thursday or Friday in the life of a Forensicer begins with choices of what to wear to meet the daily routine, what to carry to hand in the coach's room for the afternoon, and how many bags will fit on the van for the weekend. When s/he returns to school on Monday morning with hurriedly or haphazardly completed work, teachers and comrades rarely recognize the hours taken to make the team effort succeed. "Where have you been..." says one, "out of town on *personal* business?" "Yes" is the correct response.

--Fourth--

Depending upon others is mandatory. Forensic tournaments cannot exist without willing drivers and judges: mothers, fathers, ministers and other teachers who use their vehicles and gas, their free time, their extra energies to drive and to judge. These adjuncts become doctors, bankers, counselors, tour guides, and amateur radio persons. Critiquing in areas of expertise and only partial knowledge and baking goodies for judges' lounges at local tournaments, they become "jacks of all trades" along with the coach. Local colleges send their students (often former Forensicers) and faculty to "help out" at all levels, to serve as time-

keepers, as judges, and as helpers in tabulation. Sometimes they are called upon to advise novice coaches or tournament directors.

In 1963 when my colleague addressed me, I did not pause to say "yes," nor would I today--thirty years later because of the product, the learned lessons, the structure, and the interdependence. I have been blessed by my associates (sometimes accomplices). I have learned from others and have grown. With coffee cup in hand and shampoo in hair, I know now the true duties of a Forensic coach. And if you ask me, I would say without hesitation, **"yes, I would do it again."**

(Dr. Kathryne Pugh, a diamond degree coach, is retired from the Metropolitan-Nashville Public Schools in Nashville, TN, and now serves as the Secondary Language Arts Consultant for the Tennessee Department of Education.)