

MY ON-GOING LETTER OF RESIGNATION

by Terry Hansen

Every year or two, when I get discouraged, I update my letter of resignation. It is addressed to my principal and it goes something like this:

Dear Sir,

I hereby request that, as you begin hiring for next year, you find someone who can coach forensics. I request being relieved of my duties of coaching forensics at the end of this school year for the following reasons:

I am tired of the constant battle to win support for the forensic program. You indicate you support debate but actions speak louder than words. I cannot get a budget of \$2000 yet the school district is willing to build a multimillion dollar sports facility for our high school. You indicate support, yet I have never, in all my years of coaching, had an administrator either come to a yearly awards dinner for my program or go on a tournament trip with us.

I am tired of having little recognition of the quality of this great program. You do find time for every home football game (and many of them that are away), most of the wrestling matches, many basketball games and a majority of the spring ball games and track meets.

I'm tired of coaching in a small school that, because of the emphasis on sports, always has small forensic squads. I have just earned my second NFL diamond while those coaches who began the same time I did have 4th and 5th diamonds. This is be-

cause of the size of my school squads.

I am tired of my getting approximately 1/3 of the stipend that the majority of coaches in my state get for handling a forensics program.

I am tired of not being allowed to go to out-of-state tournaments. In this state, a majority of schools with strong, active programs attend such tournaments.

I am tired of the Saturdays. We leave at 5 A.M. and return near midnight. I am weary of the overnight tournaments where I get little sleep because I have to control a bunch of kids who are away from home and want to enjoy their perception of the relative freedom of a motel on a Friday night.

I am tired of the kids who care less about debate than I do, who want to travel but don't want to pay the price in terms of time and effort to be winners.

I am tired of the students who refuse to be coached, who have the attitude that because they have won a few tournaments that they know more than I know. I'm tired of the kids who refuse to do what I would like them to do because they selfishly don't or won't care for the team effort.

I would like time to spend with my wife, my family. I would like to have time to travel other than to debate tournaments or to forensic workshops during the summer (last summer I spent a month

away from home by going to two of these).

I'm tired of spending thousands of dollars of my own money (over the years) and for attending summer clinics, and for buying manuals and materials out of my own pocket because my school budget won't afford it.

I want to be able to spend more time to prepare for my English and history classes. As you know, the majority of my teaching load is in these areas yet I am forced to spend such a great deal of time in forensics in order to have a successful program.

I would like to spend my time and effort taking some courses such as a summer history course or a Writer's Digest course in short story writing or poetry writing.

I want the time to write for publication.

I would like the time to more fully take care of my church and adult scouting leadership responsibilities and so many other things.

I would therefor request that as you begin hiring new teachers next year, you hire someone with a forensics background.

Yours Truly,

This is the letter I rewrite with current upgrading every couple of years.

And then I get a letter, or former team members come in, or one of my really active, appreciative debaters drops a few comments and I

reconsider.

I'll get a letter from Joel, who is the only person ever to graduate from college from his family and who is in his final year at law school, telling me how he is working with the local county legal defenders office writing briefs for the practicing attorneys. "The only difference between what I'm doing now and what I did then," he writes, "is the gravity of losing. Thanks for everything. You have done more for me than you'll ever know."

Then Rosa will come in and tell me how she's getting A's in English in college because she writes oratories as her weekly assigned essays. Rosa was a "special ed" student, a "resource" kid who only won one trophy during three years of competition, who, as her mother widely proclaims, "won a full four year college scholarship because of debate." This young lady, because she worked harder than anyone else on the team, won the respect of all and was elected President of our chapter her senior year. She is also one of four to go to

Girls' State from our high school at the beginning of her senior year, because of her skills learned in forensics. She is the only person in her family ever to go to college.

Caleb was a major financial supporter for his family as he worked the family farm during his high school years. His father, unable to work, relied heavily on him, and now, . . .).

Then there are those kids who really don't fit into much else but have found a niche in this program and I see growth in their development and attitudes. Over the years there are a lot of these kids. Then I'll go to tournaments and get the positive interaction with a bunch of great colleagues or I'll call nationals and hear that friendly, supportive voice of Jim Copeland. I appreciate their friendship. It makes a difference.

Darin (as do may others) proclaims he won his four year, full ride scholarship to college (even though that college doesn't currently have a debate program) because of debate and the skills he learned in this activity. His parents confirm that bit of information.

Michelle will come in and ask me about scholarships a year from now. She's one of

the most hard working, enthusiastic members of my current team and one of those I feel will accomplish great things because she's willing to pay that price of effort. I want to make that effort for her to accomplish her goals and dreams. I know her folks can't afford to send her to college. (Then there are Brent and Cami and . . .).

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And then there are my own children. I look at what forensics did for them. I guess the positives outweigh the negatives.

This really is a program that defines mixed emotions.

"Well," I think to myself, "maybe for one more year."