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Significant Experience: Righting A Wrong

My rose-colored glasses were given a slightly darker tint when I, as a New Fairfield High School junior, became a bright and bushy-tailed National Honor Society member this past year. The circumstances surrounding a scandalous series of events, which I will describe in the following, reaffirmed my view of honor within a society that promotes it: I learned that honor is defined by action, not only by words.

At the first society meeting of the year, our new advisor, a cold and humorless figure, emerged from behind the draped curtain of the auditorium stage and fiercely eyeballed the few kids who kept up their conversations. She was annoyed at their apparent disrespect for her authority, and sarcastically demanded “let me know when you’re done talking, because I’d like to begin.” These first words from our newly assigned advisor startled me. Her fragile appearance sharply contrasted with her strong, yet shrill voice. I felt the blood rush to my cheeks as my pulse quickened, even though she wasn’t targeting me. She motioned toward two members in the front row, who obediently came up to the stage where she shoved a stack of papers at them for distribution. She then proceeded to hit every bullet point on the agenda like a robot, and the meeting droned on.

The final topic was the election of new officers, who were required to be seniors, and the candidates were prepared to deliver their speeches. Three groups had already approached the advisor with their six-person “slates”. Group 1 went by the book -- they told the advisor exactly what she wanted to hear; I had no doubt in my mind that they would do a credible job, so I patiently listened. Group 2 gave a lackluster speech, and although they were good students, they didn’t shine. I wondered how the final group,

Group 3, which consisted of six well-rounded, fun-loving kids, would stack up to the previous groups. Surprisingly, the speech that was delivered was dynamic and full of fresh ideas, spiked with some controversy, and softened with a bit of humor. Midway through his speech, the presidential candidate from Group 3 made a strong recommendation that the NHS members should proactively provide services to the community, in addition to the traditional tutoring. This recommendation was inconsistent with the advisor's previously stated goal of having the NHS members provide only in-school tutoring. With that, she abruptly cut him off and ordered him to sit down. Was this her call to make?

So here was my dilemma – Should I vote for Group 1 who would do “the right thing every time” or should I take a chance and vote for Group 3, who will propose and promote creative ideas that could possibly improve the archaic agendas from previous years?

As the ballots were distributed, the advisor remarked, “I trust you will make the right decision.” The ballots were simple -- the numbers one through three in large print, and at the bottom, a place for your name. *A place for your name?* Now I began to have second thoughts about voting for Group 3. Was the new strict advisor going to hold a grudge against me if I voted for a group she obviously disliked? I decided to trust my instincts, and signed my name after circling number three. The ballots were collected by the advisor and the meeting was over. Now we had to wait.

Over a week went by and everybody was anxious to learn the results of the election. Finally, the winning group was announced during homeroom: Group 1 had been elected. I had feelings of disappointment that Group 3 had not won, but I knew that Group 1 would do a respectable job. Suddenly the thought occurred to me that I might be one of only a handful who DID vote for Group 3! I was somewhat concerned that my signature on the ballot associated me with Group 3. I talked it over with some fellow

members, who were similarly worried, as they had also voted for Group 3. Would the advisor hold our decision to support Group 3 against us?

At lunchtime, I was approached by a senior from Group 2, who seemed to be nonpartisan regarding this situation. She courteously asked me to sign my name on the paper she held in her hand and to indicate my original vote, if I felt comfortable with disclosing it. A quick glance at the list revealed to me that the vast majority of the surveyed members had voted for Group 3.

As the day progressed, I heard more and more rumors that Group 3 had actually won. Another couple of days followed with no new details. The results of the survey were apparently brought to the attention of the principal and a special NHS meeting was called. The advisor was not present. With the principal presiding, we were told that there had been “a flaw in the voting system, but not with the counting”. He refused to give us any details, because he wanted to “respect the privacy of some individuals”.

Monday rolled around, and another society meeting was held during lunch. At this time, our principal announced the official winner to be Group 3. He told us that the NHS advisor was not to be blamed, but we all knew she did the unthinkable: she tampered with the votes because of personal animosity towards Group 3. The “honorable” figure who once led our honor society was shown to be a hypocrite, a hypocrite of honor. At the unanimous insistence of the members, the advisor was immediately replaced with the most highly respected teacher at the school.

The principal stated that we had witnessed “a lesson in civics”. More specifically, I felt that we had received a lesson in proactively *righting a wrong*. Knowing that we did the right thing has brought us all together and made us feel good about the positive outcome. The disgraced advisor left the school system shortly thereafter. Honor won out in the end...the honorable students of the New Fairfield National Honor Society prevailed in their choice of elected officers.