**My Debate Journey**

My debate journey is not one decorated with accolades or widespread recognition. However, being part of this sport has fueled immense personal growth and transformation.  
From meeting wildly unfiltered and fascinating individuals to engaging in critical discourse on social, economic, political, and even more complex subjects, debate has consistently challenged my initial belief systems—beliefs I had often accepted without much thought. My stance on abortion rights has remained largely the same; I still identify as pro-life. I acknowledge that this might seem like a contradiction, given my commitment to advocating for women's rights and bodily autonomy. However, I believe that feminism is nuanced enough to hold space for diverse perspectives, including mine.

Over time, I have also become more accepting and understanding of the LGBTQIA+ community. Debate exposed me to a wide range of perspectives, personal stories, and the realities many marginalized groups face daily. Listening to arguments about identity, rights, and human dignity challenged me to move beyond passive tolerance toward active empathy.

I realized that acceptance is not simply about agreeing with everything but about recognizing the inherent worth of every individual, regardless of how they identify or whom they love. Being part of conversations that humanized rather than politicized these experiences deepened my belief that rights and dignity must be protected for all people. Debate, in its raw form, forced me to confront my biases and choose compassion over comfort.

Debate has pushed me beyond engaging with issues at a surface level; it has trained me to examine matters from multiple angles. It has taught me to think beyond the confines of my immediate environment and the conditioning I received growing up.

At first, being around debaters made me question what I had been doing with my life. They seemed to hold strong, well-informed opinions on almost every subject imaginable. I often found myself shying away from expressing my thoughts because speaking up meant having to argue against individuals who appeared far more knowledgeable than I was.

Yet, over time, that very discomfort became the furnace in which my critical thinking, confidence, and articulation were forged.

As I spent more time in the debate circuit, I realized that having opinions was just the beginning—**how** you structured and defended them mattered even more. Debate wasn't just about speaking; it was about strategic thinking, sharp articulation, and adapting under pressure.

Of course, I cannot talk enough about how much my brain has adapted to the structure debate demands whenever I am articulating myself.  
Initially, I would come up with four different arguments at once, which meant I often rushed through them, trying to defend all without fully explaining any to completion. In debate, you quickly learn that debaters don’t have the patience to wait for you to find your words—you either make sense quickly and clearly, or you’re cooked. If you don't, your argument gets dragged off course, twisted into something you never intended.

And then there’s the art of lying. In debate, *lying* becomes part of the game; it’s almost like people live to lie persuasively. You learn to spin facts creatively to suit your narrative—after all, isn't lying, in a way, a critical life skill? The ability to think quickly, improvise, and defend even the most absurd positions sharpens not just your wit but your resilience in any kind of argument.

In conclusion, my time on the debate circuit has been nothing short of transformative. It taught me to structure my thoughts with precision, to embrace the discomfort of defending imperfect positions, and yes, even to wield creative persuasion when the moment calls for it. It also forced me to confront my own contradictions—remaining pro-life while championing women’s autonomy—and to wrestle honestly with where I stand. Perhaps most powerfully, it opened my heart to voices and experiences outside my own: from the LGBTQIA+ community to fellow debaters whose worldviews once felt foreign. Their stories compelled me beyond passive tolerance into genuine empathy, reminding me that acceptance is an ongoing journey, not a checkbox.

Today, I carry these lessons into every conversation, every decision, and every cause I support. I credit debate for sharpening my mind, expanding my compassion, and instilling in me the confidence to hold space for complexity. Without this sport—and the “liberal humans” who populate it—I would not be the thinker, advocate, or person I am today. That, above all, is a victory worth celebrating.

By Lucy Osenyi