4) Elaborate on one of your extracurricular activities or work experiences that is meaningful to you.

It is 9:45 PM and there are precisely fifteen minutes left to solve the world refugee crisis. A bloc led by myself (the delegate of Mexico), South Africa, and Pakistan has just proposed a working resolution aiming to improve regional transportation networks, but Italy will hear nothing of any motion that does not involve aid for border security for the EU and is poised to lead a revolt that could engulf the rest of the European bloc. There is only one possible course of action left.

I raise my placard and launch into a speech outlining how the two approaches to handling the refugee crisis are not necessarily mutually exclusive and the specifics of how our resolution could incorporate some of their ideas. As my ninety seconds end, I glance across the room and receive a nod from Italy signalling their warm reception to the speech. By 9:58 the committee has passed a resolution.

I relish moments like this in Model UN when the clock is ticking, the room stands divided, and compromise is the only viable solution. Unlike any other academic competition, Model UN not only encourages but necessitates that one work with the other participants to find common ground.

The acquisition of this skill has greatly influenced other facets of my life. As a member of the school’s engineering team that sought to improve the efficiency of offshore solar energy plants, I was able to integrate my ideas for improved mechanical equipment with other ideas such as utilizing the kinetic energy from convection currents. While leading a MicroFinance meeting, I helped the club members jointly decide how to invest our funds despite a disagreement over whether to focus on agricultural or educational entrepreneurs. Even at home, I can employ compromise in situations such as when my sisters and I cannot decide on what to make for dinner. It is for this reason, the applicability of the compromise that it teaches, that I enjoy Model UN.

4) Elaborate on one of your extracurricular activities or work experiences that is meaningful to you.

I walked into the first rehearsal with a plan to sit in silence, mouth some words if necessary. How could I hope to sing without embarrassing myself with people who had practically come out of the womb with a music folder in hand and perfect sight reading abilities?

In retrospect, my decision to sign up for choir in the summer before freshman year is mind-boggling. I was not interested in the act of singing; in fact, I had actively avoided it for fourteen years. I had never performed in an ensemble, and the only venue to ever be graced with my musicality was the shower. At the same time, I had a morbid fascination surrounding choir. For years, friends had told me how much they enjoyed being in choir, and I wanted to find out what all the fuss was about.

Within five minutes of listening to and observing the rest of the choir, I realized a fatal flaw in my reasoning: to not sing in a choir is in itself embarrassing! My heart beat frantically as I glanced around the room in panic. I came prepared with a plan, yet I was still going to have to sing! This was it. The moment that I could not have fathomed ever becoming reality. Images of my new classmates snickering to themselves at my expense for the next four years dominated my thoughts. I took a deep breath and….

Nothing happened! I sang, and no one seemed to mind, or even pay any attention to me at all. Even more surprisingly, I actually kind of liked it! I realized that I was contributing to something that sounded pretty cool, and I was proud of it. When rehearsal ended, I found myself disappointed. I wanted more of that feeling that came from contributing towards a larger artistic goal and producing something that was enjoyable to hear. I had never felt this before.

Over the next few months, choir became a place of refuge for me. Like my initial plans for choir, my ambitions for high school seemed to be crumbling. Classes were harder than I expected. I started to drift away from my best friends in middle school as new social groups formed. However, for forty-five minutes a day, I had the chance to walk into a room across the street from the rest of the high school where my grades and friends didn’t matter and I concentrate on something larger than myself. I shut my brain off from the outside world and focused solely on the music around me.

As I spent more time in choir, I got to know the people in it. I quickly became friends with Gray, a new kid and one of the only other freshman boys in the group, and his passion was acting. “Sure singing is great, but wait until you’re doing it on stage in a musical or giving a pivotal monologue at the climax of a play. That’s the best feeling in the world,” he told me. Most of my other new friends agreed.

While I was initially nervous about the idea, I thought back to the beginning of choir. I had been just as scared because of the vulnerability that comes with being in front of an audience. However, my fears of choir turned out to be easily-surmountable. So I tried it. I auditioned for an upcoming one-act, and (most likely by virtue of the fact that few boys were interested in theatre rather than my natural talent) I got a part. In the end, I loved it. Being on stage was just as exhilarating as singing, if not even more so. This was what I wanted to spend my time doing. Over the next few years, I became more and more involved in theatre, and I did a variety of shows all with the same cast of good friends. It is for this reason that I am glad I signed up for choir, as this action set in motion the chain of events that would eventually lead me to do the things I do and have the friends I have.