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Cannon

Last Lecture

Feb 02, 2021

Martina's Onions

If there was a competition for moose-lovers, my mother would take the cake. She wakes me up before dawn to see the sunrise, makes her own teas and wildflower syrups, and binges period dramas for twelve hours without batting an eye. She immigrated to America after high school, and has taught herself five languages on her own.

Mamma taught me how to butcher a pig, throw grenades, and identify which mushrooms were poisonous or not. She taught me to chop firewood, find cheap airline tickets, and most importantly, that I could do anything I set my mind to.

My mother says the word 'onions' differently. I pronounce it UN-ions, she says ON-ions. My siblings and I would tease her about it growing up, but I realized I wouldn't want her to call it anything else.

One day, she called out the name of the tear-inducing vegetable the way we say it, and to my surprise, I hated it. It felt as though something had shifted in my life. Among a million other things, the way my mom pronounces 'onion' sets her apart.

Eventually, she reverted back to her usual way of speaking, and I was grateful, not only to hear the funny little word again, but because it taught me a vital lesson -- The little things that make you up are the most important.

The way my mom says onion is a representation of her: a melting pot of cultures and new languages; sewing ball gowns in seventh grade, and crying out, “Zuzanko! Ne!” as I lift yet another poisonous mushroom to my lips.

Take a hold of your metaphorical onion. Whatever strange things make you up, whatever weird habits, obsessions, or personality traits can be your onion. Embrace and emphasize the person you are because *you* deserve it. Find the things that fill you up like stardust and the side effects of your human experience.

During my senior soccer season, the only thing I wanted was to score a goal. Just the one. That was all I needed. It was cool and all until I went on the field as a striker, a role for people who score. And yet, game after game, practice after practice, I couldn’t do it. Several times, the ball escaped the posts by such tiny margins, I was sure I’d offended some deity and this was my punishment.

While the rest of my friends were captains or starters, I sat on the bench. My job became to roll injured teammates out, scrub the blood out of jerseys, and having everything in my bag (Except for band-aids. Conveniently, I never had band-aids. How does that work?).

In my heart, I knew I still brought value to the team. But it was a difficult sentiment to remember when it spanned across all three sports I played. I just wanted to be the athlete I saw myself as. Compared to these titans of things that I wanted, remembering my value seemed like a soft whisper in raging wind.

The lack of success in my athletic endeavors meant I needed to change my perspective. Soccer’s purpose in my life was not to shine on the field, but to learn the glow from within. Basketball’s purpose was not to drain three-pointers every game, but to expand my mind as to

what I thought I could do. Track's purpose was not to get on the podium, but to push myself further than I thought possible.

Maeser sports are not my onions, but the team mom reputation I've got going for me is. The fact that I need to translate my thoughts from Czech is one of my onions. My (borderline concerning) need to have my calendar perfectly mapped out, my little bag with ladybugs on it, and my obsession with the live-action Cinderella are all onions.

Take a hold of your onions. Find them, cherish them, keep them close. It takes tears, time, and discomfort but it is worth it. You, as you, enrich the lives of countless others. Do not allow someone to take the onion away from you for their small pleasures. Onions, though seemingly insignificant, are the crucial elements in any good soups, marinades and your high school career. Though some may discount it as the vegetable that Shrek made famous or the stupid food that makes you cry, your onions make you who you are.