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"Na-na?" I asked and pointed as I tilted my head toward the sky. My mother followed my eyes and replied, "Airplane, Benjamin. That's an airplane." When I grew older and went to overnight camp, the other kids wrote home for candy or mosquito repellent. I remember that I wrote home for a magnifying glass, a compass, and a bug-house. I guess I've always been looking at and exploring the world around me.

I can never go to the dictionary and look up just a single word. I flip through the pages and I become diverted by other drawings or words. When my dad said that my breath was mephitic, I went to the dictionary to look it up. Before I got to "mephitic," I read "masochism." I then turned past it and read "methane." This flipping back and forth continued until I remembered why I was looking in the dictionary. Then I went upstairs and brushed my teeth.

I am a true student. I enjoy learning. When my Freshman year began, some of my friends encouraged me to join the Scholastic Bowl team. Although my friends eventually quit the team, I enjoyed the practices and continued attending. I felt "cultured" to recognize famous people and their works, ancient gods, science, and miscellaneous trivia. Moreover, Scholastic Bowl increased my desire to learn because it placed a concrete and competitive value on how much knowledge I could store and recall. When I learned in Humanities that Akhenaton was the Heretic Pharaoh, I thought that was cool.

Later, I amazed the team when he turned out to be the answer to a Scholastic Bowl question and I "buzzed in" in mid-question with the correct answer. Scholastic Bowl has been the manifestation of my lifelong lust for learning.

I'm not shy about wanting to know more, either. Often, I have raised my hand and asked: "What does it do?; How does it do that?; Why is it like that?" These questions could be in any of my classes. I could just as easily be investigating hydroxide as hypotenuse as haiku. I don't seek the quick, easy answers. I want to know why things are the way they are. By knowing the explanation for one event, I can try to understand other events.

I ask inquisitively, and I see things in a new light. To me, even a cumulonimbus cloud has a silver lining.

As evidence of my constant desire to challenge myself, I joined the Mathletes team during this, my Senior year. I had no need to join another team. I wanted to supplement my math knowledge. I also wanted to test my mathematical abilities and compete with the school's math "brains." Now, I've been asked to represent my school in the calculator, trigonometric graphs, and word problems events.

Whether you have realized it by now or not, Penn was made for me. The fact that there are 103 foreign languages available shows Penn's commitment to students who, like me, want to explore as well as expand their horizons.

Penn's "One University" concept will allow me to taste the linguine of liberal arts and the bratwurst of business along with the egg rolls of engineering. But that would make my breath mephitic and I'd have to brush my teeth again. More importantly, when I take Chemistry, my classmates will be engineers, nurses and economists. I won't be confined to only associating and learning with those in my field. I want to be involved in all areas of learning and to be with students who share my desire for food for thought.

I am determined not to be the typical Freshman. I will meet new people and ask questions nonstop. I will "button" myself into the social fabric of the University by taking part in student activities and by studying diligently. My presence will subtly thread through the University as I join with other students to make Penn truly the school for us. The contribution of my intellectual curiosity, my dry, witty humor, my caring about people, and especially my Flossmooron accent will neither go unnoticed nor unappreciated. Together, Penn, my classmates, and I will discover old and new "na-na's" every day.

SLAM! CRACK! Then silence. I landed from my running jump kick and two boards fell broken at my feet. As I whirled toward the second board breaking station, I wondered if I had gone deaf or if I was in the zone. My mind was spinning as fast as my body. Silently, doubt crept in: "A Red-Belt aspiring to earn his Black-Belt shouldn't be nervous. I've broken boards dozens of times over the last two years. Why am I so uncertain? Could it be because yesterday's practice was so far from perfect?" Suddenly, in mid-whirl, yesterday began flashing through my mind.

I knew the technique, just an elbow strike. I got into my stance, pulled back my elbow, and swung it forward. BOUNCE! "Ki-Ouch," escaped my lips. Whatever I just did wrong, is a singular event. I've been breaking boards like these for two years. One more try, is all I need. I pulled my arm back, concentrated and swung it forward . . . OUCH! My elbow was starting to hurt; maybe I should instead try my running jump kick. I took a few steps back, ran toward the boards, jumped, and shouted "Ki-hop!" I kicked the board-holders' fingers and I apologized. Disappointed, I decided I needed to practice my technique to regain my confidence. Some problem is preventing me from performing the way I want to. With determination I decided that a little elbow grease never hurt anyone and went to practice with on the punching bag.

Later, with renewed confidence, I returned to the board-breaking class. I started with the running jump kick. I looked at the boards, ran forward, jumped, and kicked. The ball of my foot, instead of my heel, hit the boards, auggggh! The boards didn't break! I set the board-holders up again and took a few steps back. I sunk into my stance and focused on getting airborne and kicking the center of the boards with my heel. I'm going to do this, I just need to kick them with my heel. A short run, a jump, and a kick . . . "Ki-hop!" SHATTER! The boards broke! Yes, that's it! Two down, two to go. I was ready for the elbow strike again but unfortunately, class just ended.

Acting quickly, I persuaded two men to stay and help me practice my elbow strike. I set myself up in a deep stance with the boards on a plane level with my shoulder. I rested the striking surface of my elbow on the boards for focus. I visualized pulling back and swinging through the boards. I was ready.

GO! With confidence I swung my elbow toward the center. "Ki-hop!" CRACK! What!? My arm bounced back. I stared in disbelief; only the rear board had broken. I muttered about the irony. My swing had been correct.

I was sure I had done everything perfectly. Suddenly, a frightening thought occurred: "If I've trained improperly, I'll fail tomorrow." So, why didn't they break? Maybe the holders had not held fast. Maybe it was because the boards were warped. Maybe . . .

I completed my whirl to the station just as yesterday finished racing through my mind. I commenced my swing toward the two boards that stood between me and my next belt. There is too much pressure. Can I do it? I tried it yesterday, and yesterday they didn't break. Well, actually, they almost broke yesterday. Almost breaking is the same as almost passing. Maybe these boards are warped, like the ones I had trouble with yesterday.

I cleared my mind of these thoughts. I wouldn't be here if I wasn't ready. I can do this. With my elbow swinging toward the boards, I focused all my energies into them. I was in full motion, "Ki-hop!" CRACK! Applause! I was thrilled by that delightful crack. A great grin exploded across my face. Everything I had learned, came together. I wanted to jump up and down and do cartwheels, but Tae Kwon Do is too formal for that. The instructor was calling for my attention and asked me to turn around and bow out. I bowed, then bent down and grabbed up the wood fragments. At that moment they were as important to me as the belt I would soon be awarded. I had passed! I controlled my smile. It was no big deal. After all, I'd been preparing for this moment for years.