
With my teammates around me, I pick up the disc. With a heave and a shout, “Ultimate!” I throw the disc with all of my might down the field.

With this throw, the Millsaps Ultimate team begins its first tournament in the school’s history. Ever since my brother taught me to play Ultimate in high school, I have been waiting for this day. For months our team has practiced throws, offensive plays, and defensive formations in preparation for this day. On Fridays, when we played for fun, our team was unstoppable. With hearts full of confidence, we race down the field after the disc.

My story is not one of conquering racial divisions and stereotypes. Mine has not been a journey leading me to confidence in my alternative sexual orientation. I have not conquered the difficulties of a handicap, either mental or physical. Never have I felt discrimination based on my gender. Nor has my religion ever exposed me to any particular hardships. No, my life has been merely the journey of a white, Christian, middle-class, heterosexual, male youth. In fact, if it were not for my life experiences and subsequent reactions, I may not have anything unique to offer the world; yet as it is, my average statistics combined with all that I have learned through a liberal arts education have given me an appreciation for humanity as a whole and the solidarity that we all share in this life (and in death).

Not only am I a standard member of the majority, but I have led a very privileged and blessed life. I grew up with two loving parents who went out of their way to make sure that their kids were comfortable. While we were never an exceptionally wealthy family, we always had enough to live comfortably and something left over for a family vacation. All in all, my
childhood and adolescence were very pleasant and carefree. When I came to Millsaps, it was with little appreciation for the weight and struggle of life.

As a freshman, I was fairly rambunctious as I struggled to find a group of friends. I tried to adapt the same attitude that I sported in high school. I wrote my papers the day they were due, barely studied, and concentrated on acquiring as many friends as I could. I quickly realized that the challenge offered by Millsaps was far greater than I had anticipated. After a few strictly graded papers, I knew I needed to change my priorities, but I was far too immature to do this on my own. Yet I soon realized that my friends were as serious about their studies as I wanted to be. With a concerted effort and the help of my friends, I focused more of my attention on my studies and my school work.

As my sophomore and junior years progressed, I realized more and more that my true passions lay in my studies. In response to this realization, I began taking more classes, averaging twenty hour semesters, and in the fall of my junior year took on an honors project. My increased workload kept me very busy, and while I reserved time for my friends, I found myself enjoying my studies more and more. I was eager to learn and to read as much as I could.

Up until this point in my college career, I had experienced little which was out of the ordinary. My life had maintained its carefree nature, with hardships few and far between (my studies, while difficult, hardly constituted hardships). By spending meaningful time with my close friends and giving attention to my studies, I continued to live my comfortable, untroubled life. Yet despite the ease and enjoyment of my life, I lacked a sense of direction. That my studies were important and meaningful to me, I knew; but why they were so, I could not be sure.

Thirty second after I threw the disc for our inaugural tournament game, the point is over. It is clear that our team is woefully outmatched by our opposition. After many dropped passes,
missed opportunities, and poor decisions, we are defeated and team morale is low. All of our practice and commitment seem to have mattered for naught when up against such insurmountable opponents as these teams. By the end of the second game, our team is beginning to lose all hope.

Nothing in my easy, carefree life could have prepared me for the summer after my junior year. While I was away on a school sponsored trip to Greece, one of my very best friends, Jordy Rourke, passed away without warning. To say that I was devastated would be an understatement. I had no idea how to react. In my comfortable, sheltered life, there was no experience to teach me how to act or feel in this situation. I felt more alone than I had ever felt.

As my friends, classmates, and professor tried to comfort me, I realized there was nothing that could be said that would relieve the pain and mourning I felt. Though I spent the next few days amidst some of the most beautiful landscapes in Greece, I lived in a kind of daze. Nothing seemed real. I wanted to wake up.

As captain of the team, I take the team aside and try to encourage them, despite my own frustration. I tell them to calm down and remember the basics which we spent so much time practicing. If we catch the discs that are thrown to us and make smart decisions, we can play with any one of these teams.

It was not until the day before we flew back to America that I achieved some significant measure of comfort. Strangely, this comfort came from the cold, lifeless stone of an ancient theater, rather than the words of a classmate or professor. As I sat in the theater in Athens, I began to think back on all of the Athenian plays that I had read throughout my time at Millsaps
While my favorites had always been the comedies of Aristophanes, I found at this time, the most memorable were the tragedies. These tragedies did not contain any specific words of comfort that spoke to me and my situation. Rather, I gleaned my comfort from their very existence. I imagined sitting in my very seat some two and a half millennia ago and watching a performance of *Trojan Women* or *Seven Against Thebes*. In these plays are expressed the same grief, the same unanswerable questions, and the same frustrations which I myself felt at that moment. I suddenly felt a considerable kinship with the ancient Athenian theater-goers who found comfort for life’s pain in shared appreciation of tragic performances.

The more I thought about this, the more I realized that, while my own personal experiences provided little or no help in dealing with my grief, I was not totally unprepared. On the contrary, I found that I had learned the basics of dealing with this grief through my studies at Millsaps. It is no wonder that a liberal arts education should address the matter of death heavily, for throughout history, death has been the most consistent, universal force to affect humanity. Indeed, all through that summer as I thought back on my classes at Millsaps, I considered what each had to say about death. Some texts dealt with death very generally, such as the accounts of the Crusades, but most handled the subject much more intimately. I thought about the death of Dido in book 4 of Vergil’s *Aeneid*, the journal published by British troops in World War I, *The Wipers Times*, even the plight of the Israelites documented in the beautiful poetry of *Lamentations*. Finally, when I returned to school in August, I read *The Epic of Gilgamesh* for the first time. After the death of Enkidu, Gilgamesh mourns his friend with tears and lamentations which resounded in my heart:

> But what do I do? I only know that a cruel fate robbed me Of my dearest friend too soon.
What state of being holds you now? Are you lost forever?
Do you hear my song? (122-125)

This work, written some four millennia ago, depicts a man enduring the exact same grief that I was enduring, asking the exact same questions that I was asking, and bearing the exact same burdens that I was bearing. While all of these sources, that is to say all of the wisdom of the world, could not offer enough comfort to release me from my pain, I was able to derive a great deal of solace in the knowledge that I was not alone. I began to feel more akin to the human race as a whole. This grief was not an emotion that was unique to me, but had been felt by all men before me and will be felt by all who will come after.

Half-way through the third game, the words of encouragement that I spoke to my teammates seem to take effect. We start connecting as a team. Passes are caught. Our defense holds. The team has fun.

It has been my experience that a liberal arts education best prepares a person to confront the challenges of life. This is not to say that a liberal arts education will allow a person to easily overcome any and all challenges, but rather that it supplies him with the necessary tools and skills to persevere. I do not know how I would have endured without the comfort that I found through these texts.

Now as I stated earlier, I am not a member of any minority, but am a standard member of the majority. Yet in light of my recent experiences and revelations, I have to reject any groupings of human beings, be they religious, sexual, socio-economical, racial, or motivated by some other means. I love that this world is so diverse and treasure our cultural differences, but the fact is that we are all human. We all experience the same grief, the same joy, the same heartache, and the
same gladness. So while my story may not appreciate the hardships of discrimination, I have come to appreciate the beauty of the human race.


We finish the tournament as the champions of the B-bracket, but you wouldn’t know it by watching us celebrate. No, if you had seen this celebration, you would have thought that we were champions of the world.
Works Cited