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My ODUMUN Story: The View from the Beautifier

by Amanda Armstrong

4 May 2011

Before the 2010-2011 school year, Model United Nations was always seemingly illusive and unattainable to me – a mysterious cult dedicated to debating global current events with fervor and tact. It was not available at my high school, like many other things, and I never seemed to have time to attend meetings when I got to Old Dominion University. During my junior year, the society's Secretary-General Nikki Porter was in my Spanish class and offered everyone the opportunity to join in on the fun at the 2009 UN Day simulation. My longtime friend Connor Clarke got to be North Korea, and I was jealous and sad that I had missed something so cool all for the sake of classes. Then, when I was interning at the Virginia General Assembly in 2010, one of my roommates skipped out on work for two days to help with the yearly high school Conference at the Sheraton in Norfolk. I was astounded at her willingness to help and the fact that her bosses let her go. There must be something about Model United Nations I just could not see from the outside. So when April 2010 rolled around and elections for next year's officers were gearing up, there was little convincing required – I could not resist. A current officer, Charisse Hines, emailed me the officer application, and I went all out in giving reasons why I would be a good addition to the club.

When President Tim Gorde emailed me the date of the interview, I made sure that I had no other obligations holding me back. I drove from Northern Virginia, clad in professional attire and ready to show anyone and everyone why I should be a part of that which is MUN. Since I was already President of the ODU Young Democrats, I knew I wanted to hold a supporting role in the society – something administrative. When asked if I liked doing spreadsheets, I told the utter truth – "I revel in the mundane." Little did I know that this moment was the deal-breaker. The current Secretary-Treasurer gave a nudge to her incoming successor, Doug Johnson, and they shared a look of knowing. The excitement of the outgoing Secretary-General Nikki Porter and the friendship of the upcoming society President Jason Buijs did not hurt, either. I was in!

So it is with my surprising entrance into the officer core that I became involved in the Model UN, without ever having stepped foot in a society meeting or event. I took on the role as one of the Assistant-Secretary Treasurers, which, for the majority of the time – really meant Chief Beautifier of the office's whiteboard. My first outing as an officer was the swanky officer dinner at Enrico's, which I was not dressed so swanky for, because no one told me! I looked ridiculous in my sailor-themed sweater, leggings and hounds tooth rain boots, but everyone still accepted me. There was also a fair amount of domestic politics discussion, which I loved. Everyone seemed to be pretty liberal, which was fantastic for me. I even danced to Electric Six's famed "Gay Bar" song with another incoming officer, T.J. Wignall, crashing and burning by knocking down an easel.

The May cookout was the last Model UN activity that year. Again, I requested off from work and drove down to Norfolk from Northern Virginia. It is here that I recognized Model UN as my new family. Everyone was so nice, and they genuinely cared what I had to say. But it was also bittersweet because half of the people there were moving on to bigger and better things, making me regret yet again that I joined MUN so late in my college career. This attitude could not last long, however, because my summer in Vermont was ahead, and when I came back to ODU in the fall, I was ready for all things MUN!

The first order of business was UN Day, primarily organized by Under-Secretary-General Luke Watson. The premier campus MUN event, technically open to the whole surrounding community, UN Day was set to feature talk on Rwandan Genocide and the Pakistani flood crisis. I got to play the Ambassador from Sudan. I researched the topics and my country, and while I was not all about argument, because that would seem pretty hypocritical from Sudan, I really wanted to get a resolution through. I teamed up with Jason Buijs, Ambassador from the United States, as well as Ambassadors from France, South Africa, Finland, Colombia and Chad to write a resolution giving credit to actions promoting stability, condemning actions that promote instability and calling for the African Union and United Nations to assist in peace-keeping, regional diplomacy and corresponding sanctions. As I was rushing around securing signatories, typing the resolution and incorporating edits from the Dias, Secretary-Treasurer Doug Johnson told me to slow down because as an officer, I was not eligible for any awards. But I was not doing it for any award, I wanted to be part of something successful and have fun doing it. Our resolution passed with flying colors and we ended the day on a high note, although we never did discuss the Pakistani flood.

As my work organizing with the Glenn Nye for Congress reelection campaign prevented me from attending the Georgetown Conference and my responsibilities as the Senior Advisor for Phi Eta Sigma barred me from going to UPMUNC, my next big interaction on behalf of the Model UN was the fall scrimmage with William and Mary and Christopher Newport students in Williamsburg. I was in a small crisis committee (my first) dealing with the 1850's conflicts between the British and India, playing the role of Sir Henry Montgomery Lawrence. As a soldier who holed up in Lucknow during the mutiny, my main goal was to shift events so that in this reality, I would not die in 1857. As it turns out, I helped do a lot more than that, attempting to arrange covert operations to kill Indian officials, organizing troop movements and more. But in the end, our soldiers, statesman and British-backed Princes were no match for all the Indian rebels. Truce was only made through a marriage, and the session ended abruptly. Overall, it was good fun, although a bit haphazardly organized, and proved that Hampton Roads universities could do something together, lending to the idea that the area should hold a college conference in the near future.

After November's election, I had more time to immerse myself in Model UN. Our Activities Coordinator, Brittany Gentry, put together a social game night in one of the dormitories, where we played Risk, UNO, Mexican dominoes, and stuffed our faces with pink cake, among other things. I also had the opportunity to attend the first birthday party for the adorable son of my MUN "boss" Doug Johnson. I was joined by President Jason Buijs and MUN alum Charisse Hines. We played the party game "Mafia" and I could not get enough of the

oysters! These events further illuminated my view that MUN is a time for doing new things and a really big family. The camaraderie of the MUNsters never ceases to amaze me.

After Winter Break, I still had no job, so aside from several trips to the General Assembly to lobby for Democratic and student issues, I was ready for more Model UN. I was lucky enough to be able to attend the CIA Simulation at William and Mary in February 2011. This was the second simulation of its kind, but also the largest, with students coming from the host location, William and Mary, as well as Norfolk State, Sweet Briar College, Mary Washington, University of Richmond, Virginia Tech, Washington College, and ODU. Each school was introduced and given loads of pizza, and then we got cracking on picking out relevant information from a never-ending stream of intelligence “traffic.” This traffic centered on the aftermath of the sudden death of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il and the factions created when each of his three sons tried to take control of the country. Our team, consisting of College Conference Coordinator Kyle Mayo, members Connor Clarke, Taylor Diggins, Michelle Clark and myself, was given three questions: who controls the nuclear weapons, what are the regional implications of the civil war, and lastly, which group will come out ahead? I contributed by immediately getting up to the board and creating a graphic representation of each question, as well as outlining problems in various regions and preparing our Situation Report. It was really a lesson in how the CIA operates. While we focused on the more subtle diplomatic problems and the new-world technology, it would appear that the goal was to point out that one of the factions was dealing with Russia, posing a global threat. Apparently, old habits die hard. We all learned one thing, at least – it was not likely that we would be working for the CIA!

Preparation for the yearly Conference, this year ODUMUNC34, was well under way by this time. We were constantly updating who would act as Chair, Vice-Chair, Director and Rapporteur for each committee, as well as finding high school pages, an International Press Corps and support staff. My job was to take the information coming in about students and faculty advisors and compile it into a spreadsheet so that we could print name badges and certificates. That part was easy, but setting up the Microsoft Access program to print these materials with watermarked backgrounds and different data fields oriented in different directions was pure agony. With the help of new members Robby Townsend and Rachelle Ampoyo, we got it all done, though.

Unfortunately, that was just the beginning. At the Conference, I worked in the Registration Office, so I had to make sure each faculty sponsor coming in had the same number of students they paid for and give them a pouch with all of their badges and certificates as well as folders for each student and advisor. We took additional payment, issued receipts, marked overages, and printed corrected name badges and certificates every few hours. Like anything with a line, there are lulls and there are times of chaos when ten people need you and you are literally falling apart, dropping folders and staring at people like a deer in the headlights. It did not help that the previous weekend’s post-packing-party outing with fellow MUNsters Taylor, Jason, Julian and Josefina had given me strep throat. Confused, disoriented, and frustrated cannot express my feelings throughout the Conference, and I had a lot of help! I literally downed an entire bottle of ibuprofen, as well as other over-the-counter remedies. I stayed up all night talking, hunting for high schoolers outside the hotel and making sure they did not go insane at the dance. There was also a huge debacle about a movie screening we were putting on, where I

had to go to my apartment to get DVDs but they were not there, I had to borrow a key from my landlord to get in, and when I got back to the conference other members had already rented from Red Box. Worse was that despite all of my ailments, I had yet more responsibilities that weekend in driving students to the annual Democratic Party of Virginia Jefferson-Jackson Dinner in Richmond. With the Conference and that event, I slept in a hotel for a total of four days, barely ate, did not see the light of day, lost my voice, threw up, and I still cannot fathom how I survived. But I would not have missed it for the world.

The Monday after the conference, I started a new position as an intern in the Office of Health Reform Integration at Amerigroup Corporation, which was awesome but prevented me from doing all of the cool MUN things I had been waiting for. I missed the NATO Simulation in March and other spring events like CHOMUN. I was also largely unable to attend meetings. I recently attended the annual MUN/GPIS cookout, and I could not believe that this was it. I may not see some of these faces ever again. This club has provided me with friendships that I want to last. I do not want it to end, and I do not feel I brought enough to the group, but I got so much out of it. I find myself wishing I had started sooner and even when I was a part of the group, immersed myself more in MUN despite my other responsibilities, as I do not appear to be so well off for all the things that made me miss MUN events. I provided the office with a Snuggie, constantly updated Jason and Adam Bullock's chicken-scratch to legible text on the whiteboard, kept track of events, made a sweet poster for use at University functions, counted over a hundred dollars in change for donations to the IAEA collected at the Conference, and more, but I was unable to contribute in many ways. I still have never gone to a college conference.

In the end, the experience gave me perspective for what I might want to do with my life, because I wish so much that Model UN were real life. Pretending to be someone else and arguing all day is my idea of greatness. It is acting with a purpose and an international political focus. It is like a dream and I will always want more. So my experience with Model UN went out with a whimper, not with a bang, or maybe it was always a whimper. I guess it remains to be seen, as there is one more step left in my Model UN journey, as I will be going to New York City on May 17-20 with twelve fantastic people. Being involved with a number of other activities at Old Dominion, I can safely say that nothing compares to MUN. I tell everyone I can about the Model UN, and I will continue to do so. I will be wearing my Model UN stole as I hit the stage for graduation this Saturday, and when people ask where that awesome thing came from, I will refer them to the best club on campus.

Amanda Armstrong graduated summa cum laude from Old Dominion with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science. As of summer 2011, she is currently on an epic quest for gainful employment.