

Winning Speech of the Colonel W. T. Bondurant, Jr. Oratorical Contest

By David Rochelle

As an unknown author once said, "A bend in the road is not the end of the road... unless you fail to make the turn."

In third grade, one of my classmates suffered from constant headaches. Peter couldn't play sports, couldn't go to school, and he couldn't even sleep! During one of his fitful nights, though, he had a dream. In the dream, he heard only five words: *Something's wrong with your head*. He told his parents about his dream and they went to the doctor the following morning. Nothing seemed wrong on the surface, but, as is the case with most medical situations, you have to look under the skin to find the real answer. When the X-Ray results were returned, it was confirmed that my classmate was suffering from a brain tumor.

This is where I always like to stop and evaluate the strength of my classmate's parents. They could have totally broken down as soon as the results were confirmed. I can think of many instances where situations like this occur and the people in charge simply collapse. Many people feel as if the entire track of their lives has broken apart, and there is nothing for the train to do but crash. However, my classmate's parents didn't fall apart. Instead, they kept hope alive, praying that the tumor wasn't cancerous. As time passed, they and my friend became inspirational to me.

Fortunately, the tumor was benign. Peter went into surgery, got the tumor removed, and—five years later—is doing just fine. Some effects of the surgery are still present, but fading.

The one thing that will not fade, though, is the impact that this tribulation has had on everyone around Peter. His parents will never forget the traumas and struggles that they went through, nor will they forget the lessons learned from them. These hardships have imbedded in them the value of patience, and the importance of hope. The adversity that they endured will continue to affect them for the rest of their days.

Moreover, my own life has been influenced by this event. I think the greatest thing that I have derived from watching my friend struggle is the value of keeping hope alive. I remember nervously visiting his hospital room a few days before he went into surgery. I had no idea what to expect. Would he be totally immobile and in extreme pain from the medications? It didn't seem like there could be a positive outcome, but when I walked slowly into his hospital room and saw the gigantic smile on his face, the hope I had for him tripled. In fact, I started to understand what hope really meant.

The ripple effects of this trauma are evident not only in my friend's life, but in the lives of all of my other friends. These effects are not as easy to spot because we don't really talk about his surgery, but even so, they are present nonetheless. I think the greatest example of all is the inspiration that he has given all of us. Seeing him miss about half a year of school, struggle through physical therapy and private tutoring for over a year, and getting to where he is today is a miracle, one that has taught us that nothing is impossible.

What's mostly evident, though, is the effect that this surgery had on my friend himself. Even today, some of the physical effects of his operation are still present. I became vividly aware of one of these symptoms last summer while Peter and I were hiking. After an hour or so, his left leg started to shake violently. We had to sit down and rest for ten to twenty minutes, but during that break, Peter said, "It's *really* annoying when this happens." Though this doesn't seem like a very meaningful statement, it went right to my heart. His leg shakes every time he does something very strenuous, which made me think, how many times does his leg actually tremble? He goes hiking thirty to forty times every summer. Peter plays basketball during the school year, so does he deal with this problem every time he does one of these activities? If so, it is amazing to think how many frustrating moments he has to put up with. It really is inspiring to see him want to do all of these activities even though there may be harsh aggravation that comes with them. It also influenced me when I saw him happily get up after ten minutes, ready to continue the hike.

Today, if I feel like I am ever in a hopeless situation, I look back to that visit to the hospital, and remember the huge smile on my friend's face, and I regain all hope that I had lost. Also, his battle with the tumor has taught me how to face challenges with a positive attitude. It seems that facing difficulties I have now with a positive attitude actually lessens the severity of these problems, and helps to make these setbacks pass more quickly.

It really is interesting to think that negative situations can actually have positive effects. Just as we learn from our mistakes, the adversity we face helps us to mature in physical, mental, and emotional ways. So many positives came out of my friend's surgery, mainly the value of hope, the importance of patience, and the significance of a positive attitude. Of course, it's sometimes interesting to think about what life would be like now if my friend hadn't encountered such a trial in his life. He would probably be faster. He would probably be stronger, but I don't know. What I do know, however, is how different my life, his parents' lives, and all of his friends' lives would be if he hadn't gone through this ordeal. The lessons that this tribulation has taught me remind me of a quote made by M. Kathleen Casey: "Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional." Hopefully, for the rest of my life, I will be able to face challenges with hope, patience, and an attitude to conquer them. Ironically, it is the suffering of my friend to which I attribute much of this understanding.