

Fortune favours a bold Aurora debater as he takes on Canada



By Brock Weir

Stepping up to the podium, 17-year-old Ethan Fitzsimons tasked himself with challenging the old adage 'fortune favours the bold.'

Whether or not he agreed with the statement was beside the point; it's a sentiment we teach people to encourage them to make rash decisions. It was his argument and he was sticking to it. But the Aurora resident wasn't above showing a bit of brass at the Provincial debating championships.

'Can you guess whether or not you're allowed to bring up volunteers in a persuasive speech at a debate tournament?' he muses after the fact.

But, it worked. Calling up his volunteer from the audience, he threw his arms around them to demonstrate the health benefits of hugs in his persuasive speech to the audience.

'It impacts cortisol, it ups serotonin and it also ups dopamine,' says Ethan. 'I also talked about the weird social vibes and stigma we have against people hugging each other nowadays: teachers aren't allowed to hug people anymore; in high school it is okay? It is a weird topic, but I am just a huggy guy. So, I was wondering why people aren't talking about this, so I talked about it.'

Evidently it worked, and his hugs led to an embrace from the judges and, this past weekend, he was off to Winnipeg to represent his school, Pickering College, and his community at the Nationals.

The simple fact is Ethan likes to talk. It's not so much about arguing, but when you grow up the youngest of four, it's best you find your voice.

Ethan's eldest brother found his niche debating and eventually decided to try it himself as a student at Aurora High School. Eventually he was persuaded to make the move to Pickering College and their debate team.

'There is a big age gap [between brothers] so I didn't really understand what debating was,' he says. 'Now that I have gone into it, it has actually helped a lot just in building our bond. It is easier to chat with him because we're on similar wavelengths and I have more conversation topics.'

Describing himself as a 'comedy-based' debater, stepping up to take on these mental and verbal challenges has brought about benefits well beyond the brotherly bond, trickling down in all areas of his life.

'As a debater, I sound and look a lot more confident than I am,' he says, noting it is often more fun to tackle positions contrary to

his own. 'Half the time you do better. If it is a very ethical debate, it can be very difficult for people to do. It is part of realising every argument, particularly controversy, has two sides. People have reasons they believe what they believe and those are valid. I think doing something like that helps you to be a more open-minded person.

'I would rather argue for something I don't believe, as weird as it sounds, versus something I do because you don't get wrapped up too much in yourself. You feel too self-righteous if you're arguing for what you already believe in.'

Speaking to The Auroran last Thursday before he embarked for Manitoba the following day, Ethan was preparing to get in the zone. Of Irish background, his Irish heritage was set to be the centrepiece of the 'interpretive reading' component of the competition, with the rest of the topics still being mulled.

Asked what his dream topic might be, he was unsure but said the first thing that popped into his mind was 'Is world peace possible'?

It is an endless topic and a continuous loop that would be fun to argue, he said. It's also an argument that is unwinnable? but, in the end, the important thing was representing his school and meeting like-minded students from across the country.

'I am sure I will meet people sillier than me, or people who don't even know they were part of the competition and were tricked into coming!' he said with a laugh. 'I think it will be a fun gathering. [As a debater] the biggest thing I have learned is, half the time, fake it until you make it. I felt more confident after a while because I realised if you put in the effort and you genuinely try your best and think 'Okay, you know what? I will do well right here, right now,' you get up and do well. If you are unsure you want to join debating, or even badminton, a swim team, boxing or wrestling, the biggest thing to remember is: you embarrass yourself and it just goes terribly and you realise you have negative talent in that area, so what? Soooo what? I didn't even realise [my talent] was talking until I realised I talked too much about the things I was bad at!

'Actually, it's just gusto. That's what I've learned.'