

Hurdle

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Course: English 101

Instructor: Mr. Paul Crawford

Assignment: Memoir

“This year is going to be different!” Kathryn Sue said arrogantly; she tried to be cool at our pre-season workout practice. It was the beginning of March again and, as usual, it was time to start our track and field workouts for the upcoming spring season. I was at Ouachita Christian High School practicing like I had for the past four or five years. The air was chilled, making it difficult to breathe, and the tension between the two rival schools was so thick one could cut it with a butter knife. Our schools had been adversaries for as long as I could remember. Here, I was an Oak Grove Tiger in the OCS Eagles’ domain.

I was welcomed by the OCS coach alone, who happened to be a family friend. He was gracious enough to let me—a Tiger—drive an hour a day and practice with his talented Eagle team. He justified this to his team by acknowledging how I came from a financially-deprived school, which could not afford the proper track equipment or facilities and the fact that I was the only female on my tiger track and field team at Oak Grove High School. What Coach Bristow of Ouachita Christian High School did not tell his team was he had known me since the fourth grade. During that time he noticed great potential in me, but most importantly, he believed in me.

Kathryn Sue was a member of Coach Bristow’s gifted Eagle team. We had been rivals in the three hundred meter hurdles for the previous two years. Kathryn Sue always ran right beside me in the races. She challenged me to the very end of each race but had never been able to defeat me. Kathryn Sue and I always got along. We were friends. We laughed and cried together. We even had those silly girl talks about boys. In fact, we were great friends outside of the sport, but

once we stepped into our individual lanes on the oval track, it was as if we had been over-taken by our wild animal instincts. I was a gazelle, and she was a lion chasing after me. Every year, it was a battle of the strongest and fastest. This was my senior year and my last opportunity to run as an Oak Grove Tiger. Kathryn Sue was desperate to take advantage of her final chance to beat me while we were both still in high school. I was also determined never to let an Eagle beat me—especially Kathryn Sue.

During the entire pre-season and regular season workout, I worked diligently. I did this in order to prove—once again—I was the best three hundred meter hurdler in North Louisiana. This year, however, I wanted to be the best in the entire state of Louisiana, not just the north. To fulfill this goal, I ran until I could run no more and practiced each drill with precision, appearing almost robotic. I was going to be the best this year.

As the date of the district meet drew near, I realized Kathryn Sue would not compete against me until the state meet. Yet, I looked forward to the district meet, knowing it would determine who would compete at the state level. I saw it as a mere stepping stone. It was Kathryn Sue's earlier comment that kept me driving forward ever so determined.

I was to compete in the district meet at Cedar Creek High School in Ruston, Louisiana. It was a two hour drive. As I rode with my high school coach, our words were few. We both knew the importance of focus and concentration. I tried to rest and visualize the day's upcoming events. As soon as I stepped out of my vehicle, I heard the red, oval track calling my name. This was going to be my day to dominate. It was a perfect spring day—excellent weather for a track meet. Birds chirped in the distance; one could smell the recently cut green grass—my favorite aroma. Everything was going perfectly.

As my race approached, I got up and began to stretch: first my neck, then my arms, and finally my legs. I even jogged two laps simply to make sure my muscles were good and loose. Next, I pulled a couple of hurdles to the side of the track and began my hurdle drills. I felt terrific! This would be the final step before meeting Kathryn Sue at the state competition and being able to prove that I was indeed the best in our state.

I heard my name called from afar; it was time to begin. I jogged over to the starting line, and as I stepped into lane three, the best lane on the track, I felt like the king of the jungle. The starter raised his charcoal gray start gun in the air and yelled, "On your mark. Get set." Pow! The gunshot echoed through the still spring air. The race began. I ran as fast as my little bird legs would carry me. I stepped over the first five hurdles with ease. I was in the lead with only the last fifty meters and three hurdles remaining. Victory was definitely going to be mine. As I went over the second-to-last hurdle, something suddenly grabbed my left trail leg. The next thing I knew, I lost my balance, and my body crashed toward the firm, red ground below. My mind began to race with thoughts: "Oh no, my goal of being the best is gone! This was my last year to prove myself. I've let everyone down. My dream is over!" Kathryn Sue's arrogant remark, "This year is going to be different!" crept into my consciousness. I pondered on how much Kathryn Sue wanted my title as the best three hundred meter hurdler and recalled how much time and effort I had put into practices. Was all of that hard work and time for nothing, or was I going to stand up and fight for what I had worked so diligently to achieve? All of a sudden, I received a rush of adrenaline and stood up. I was a fighting Tiger. With all of the might I had left, I ran to the finish line.

My coach, who was also my mother, was there to comfort me. Her warm arms surrounded me with love as I burst into tears. I was so disheartened, yet I anxiously waited for

the results of the race to be officially released. When I looked on the results sheet, my heart stopped. After falling, I had still qualified for the state meet. I didn't come in first place, but my dream was still alive!

I had one more week to prepare for my final race at the state meet in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I knew every day of that week I had to practice like it was my last practice. The next day, I set up a hurdle and jogged to the starting line eagerly. I got down in the starting position; then I exploded from the ground running towards the hurdle. The next thing I knew, I was stopped in front of the hurdle staring at it, so I turned around and jogged back to the starting line. I got back down in my starting position, and then ran again towards the hurdle. However, every time, I froze right before I was supposed to clear the hurdle. Thoughts of crashing to the ground bombarded me. I had developed a mental block, so for the following days—instead of critiquing my technique—I had to retrain my mind how to go over a hurdle. Day after day, I did simple drills, over and over, trying to convince myself that I could indeed clear the hurdle successfully. Physically, however, I had enough strength and speed to go over the hurdle; it was mental toughness I was lacking.

The day of the state meet had finally arrived. My mind raced with cascading thoughts: “You can do this—don't fall. It's going to be alright.” I also had mixed emotions about my upcoming race. I was frightened. I was scared. I was confident. I saw Kathryn Sue out of the corner of my eye as I warmed up. She looked focused and determined, which made me even more concerned, but this concern allowed me to build up enough adrenaline and motivation to accomplish my goal of being the best three hundred meter hurdler in the entire state. Not only did I finish in first place, but I also now hold the state record in the three hundred meter hurdles. Kathryn Sue came in third.

Mr. Crawford's comments: Kristen Eubanks' essay titled "Hurdle" was written in my Fall 2008 English 101 class as an assignment to write a memoir. The strength of her essay lies in her obvious passion and the use of vivid details. Ultimately, I believe Kristen learned something about herself as well as how to express her memory in a way readers could relate to.