

## Episode 2

### Mapping the Road to Codswallop

Blame the Carter administration.

Before the airlines were deregulated in 1978, flying was a joy. There were flights from everywhere to everywhere else, and because service was mandated by the government and not informed by the capitalist mechanics of airlines trying to make the most money possible by getting the greatest number of passengers to the fewest number of places in the smallest number of planes, there were always empty seats. On a flight from Peoria to Podunk, you could stretch out across your entire aisle because the number of people needing to get from Peoria to Podunk was fairly minimal, especially considering that Podunk does not exist. In pre-regulation America, there were even flights to Brigadoon every hundred years or so. And if you wanted to get from the town of Nighten, New York, to Codswallop, Kentucky, there was a plane to take you there. Nonstop. Three times a day.

Not anymore. Travel from Nighten to Codswallop is via Detroit, changing planes in the Motor City from a Boeing 737 to a six-seater Lego Puddle Wader for the second leg into Codswallop Pseudo-International Airport. And for reasons unknown, the LPW, as it is usually called, has not yet arrived at Detroit Metro, and the Nighten contingent is hanging around a Starbucks counter, waiting God knows why for their connection from God knows where. Which wouldn't have happened when Jimmy Carter was President. No wonder the Man from Plains only served one term.

There are three people representing Nighten Day School. One is a Lincoln-Douglas debater. One is her official coach from Nighten Day. And one is her real albeit unofficial coach, who has worked with her practically every day since they got together last summer.

Last summer? It seems like a million years ago...

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"This is when the hunt begins," Jazz Voleski said. He tapped a bit on his computer, the smallest, lightest MacBook Air in existence. "We've got to plan what tournaments you're going to go to."

They were sitting on a bench behind the student union building at Beardsley College, Ohio. The temperature was nearing a hundred degrees, untempered by the shade of the

maple tree looming above them, but they had been happy to escape the frigid air conditioning inside for a few minutes. They had a half an hour before the next scheduled lecture, “Util in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”

“You get wireless out here?” Haley Millstein asked.

Jazz nodded. “I love this campus. You get wireless everywhere, indoors and out, twenty-four seven.” He shifted the computer so they could both see the screen. “It looks like the same list as last year. No surprises.”

The Combat of Conquerors had just announced what tournaments were assigned qualification limbs at what level for the coming season. Jazz had paged through to the list for LD. “Monteverdi is a no-brainer with the Octos bid. The Pup-a-Roni. Manhattan Lodestone. Messerschmitt. The Chicago Hopeless.”

“I thought the Messerschmitt sucked.”

“It did, for a while,” Jazz said. “But it’s bounced back a little, and it’s usually an easy quarters bid. And with Florida, it’s a quick in and out for transportation. Plus now it’s in January. Why wouldn’t you want to go to Florida in January?”

“Easy quarters bids are hard to find,” Haley said.

“This one won’t last long. Once all you northerners rediscover it, you’ll be crawling all over each other to get there. At the moment it’s mostly just Texans, Floridians and a couple of deep southerners. Its day is coming.”

Haley looked at the list. “King Ivy?”

“Another no-brainer. You live practically next door to it, for one thing, and anybody who’s anybody tends to be there. You get to scope out the COC competition, if nothing else.”

“I live in New York, Jazz. That’s hardly next door to King Ivy.”

“And I live in Casper, Wyoming. We don’t have a next door. Anything under a two-day drive is considered the immediate neighborhood.”

She studied the list on the screen. “After that, it looks like mostly local tournaments. Semis and finals bids.”

“We need to look at each of those on a cost benefit analysis basis. You may or may not be able to pick up a bid, but the important thing is if the competition is worth your time, and if it’s good prep for some other tournament. I mean, even though the Pup is okay on its own, and you’ll probably get a limb, it’s probably more important as a prelude to the Lodestone than as pure Pup. There’s a bunch of tournaments like that, but you don’t have to decide about them yet. We can take them as they come.”

Haley sat back on the bench, and Jazz shut the computer.

“So what do you think will happen?” she asked him. They had talked off and on over the

previous season, and she had sent him the occasional case, but this was the first time he was officially her coach. Or, more to the point, officially her unofficial coach.

“I think you’ll get more bids than you know what to do with. I think you’ll get invited to a bunch of round robins. And I think you’ll break at the COC.”

She gave a small smile. “A Nighten Day debater hasn’t gone to the COC since Jutmoll folded the team.”

“There’s a certain logic to that,” he replied. “You’ve got to be in it to win it. Jutmoll is still around?”

She nodded. “After they shut down the team he was still teaching. He’s older than God but he’s still there. And he did help get approval for the team to get back together again after the economy bounced back, even if it is on a lot smaller scale. He got us restarted. The problem is, Jutmoll’s too old to travel anymore, and you can’t have a team if it doesn’t travel. And he was instrumental in getting us a new coach for next season since he really can’t do it anymore.

“Do you know who the new coach is going to be?”

“Not yet. Jutmoll says they’re still working out the details, but he says he’s young and enthusiastic.”

“No matter who it is, you’re going to need to travel a lot.” He tapped his computer. “And probably without the rest of your team, since none of them are COC-worthy. What does the school think about your debating as an independent?”

“They’ll support it. They say that, if I want, I can officially debate as Nighten Day, as long as I pay for it myself, and I travel with a responsible adult. I’ve talked to the other schools in the area. A couple of them are willing to let me tag along with them on trips.”

“I don’t count as a responsible adult?”

“You’re two years older than I am, Jazz. What do you think?”

“I think that I’m just the right age to coach the person who’s going to win the COC.”

“Yeah, right. Anyhow, whoever the new coach is, I’m going to have to list him—I think it is a him—as my official coach.”

Jazz nodded. “Whatever.” There was a beeping noise, and Jazz pulled his cellphone out of his pocket. “I’ve got to go lecture.” He put the cellphone back into his pocket and stood up. “Coming?”

Haley also stood up. “What was the lecture again?”

“ ‘Util in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.’ ”

She made a face. “I feel like I could give that lecture myself.”

“Good. Then you’ll be ready for COC in nine months.”

He started walking toward the lecture hall, and she fell into step beside him. The topic for September-October would be released in a couple of weeks. And they had a plan of attack for the season.

Welcome to the Bahamas.

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And now they are waiting for the plane to Codswallop. Haley looks at her watch. 10:30, New York and Codswallop time. On the departures board, all it says about their plane is that it is delayed.

“Worrying about it won’t make it arrive any earlier,” Jazz says, looking over the top of the book he is reading. “We’ll get there, sooner or later.”

“I’m not worrying. Just annoyed.”

Jazz nods. He has come to know Haley Millstein well. She does not worry. She does not get nervous. She is as tough as the proverbial nails. And in the last academic year leading up to this moment she has debated at twelve tournaments, won six of them, made it to elimination rounds at all of them, and earned herself nine COC limbs. She is a lean, mean, competing machine, all five foot one and ninety some odd pounds of her. All of their plans have come to fruition. She is not just a contender, she is one of the handful of people considered capable of winning the event. They will be arriving loaded for bear.

Meanwhile, her coach—her *official* coach—is sitting on the other side of the table, his eyes closed, his head drooping, with little snorts of snores occasionally passing through his nose. He has contributed virtually nothing to Haley’s success aside from encouragement, but he has not prevented Jazz from doing the heavy lifting, so there is no animosity among the three of them. It’s just curious that this is the first time he has felt a need to travel with them. Then again, the rules of the COC demanded it, although that was beside the point. Having never been to the COC, he felt that the time had come. After all, he had been a debater himself back in the day, and then a coach for a while at Andrew Johnson High School, before deciding that he wanted to pack up his family and move back to his old home town of Nighten. The COC had always loomed off in the distance as some vague, unattainable debate paradise. And now he was on his way to see it himself.

When he woke up, that is. When the plane arrived to take them to Codswallop. When a year of planning and hard work would culminate in a weekend of debate destiny.

When it all began.

Any minute now.

**Will the LPW arrive in time to get the Nighten Dayers to Codswallop before the tournament is over?**

**Will Haley Millstein break into the elimination rounds?**

**Does Jazz Voleski really understand Util in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?**

**Does anybody really understand Util in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?**

**Why are we being so coy about Haley's official coach?**

**We expect to answer completely different questions in our next episode: "Did Robert Frost write 'Mad Max: The Fury Road Not Taken?' Or, Whose woods these are I think I know, and here's his irons and his putter."**