

EVANNA LYNCH
THE OPPOSITE OF BUTTERFLY HUNTING

Bravery and Butterflies

When you work for a large organization, you invariably receive a lot of emails. Almost daily, I get some sort of notice from within my company: a reminder for an event I won't be attending or an announcement that a person I'm not likely to ever meet is taking on a new position in management.

There was one time in 2019 that someone hit "REPLY ALL" to one of those corporate messages which kicked off a day and a half of notices from people all over the world saying, "Please remove me from this email thread." It culminated in the most beautifully passive aggressive message from the Vice President of our branch of the company *kindly* reminding us that our branch consists of tens of thousands of people from dozens of countries and we were to immediately STOP HITTING REPLY ALL.

I was pretty amused that day and I still look back on it with a big smile.

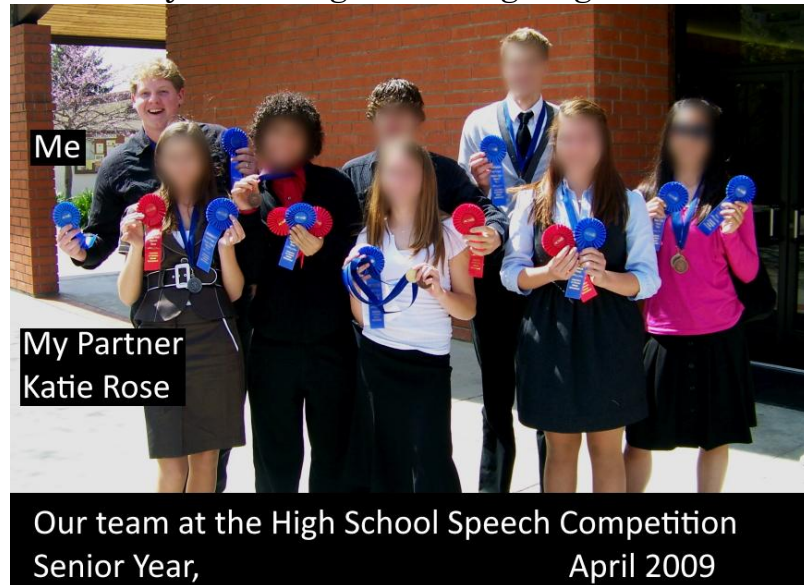
In February of 2020, I was included in a message asking for volunteers to judge a speech competition in Irvine. One of the highlights of High School for me was senior year when my Speech and Debate class allowed me to attend a very similar competition. There'd be a category for dramatic dialogue, where two people act out a scene from a show. I got to perform with Katie Rose, a girl I definitely had a crush on that year. We did a scene from MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON. I had to work especially hard to say the lines without doing an impression of Jimmy Stewart. (It's one of my favorite impressions to do.)

When we timed ourselves in practice, we were within the time limit, but uncomfortably close to being too short. During the competition, I could FEEL that we were moving too fast. We would be disqualified if we came in under time, so I started to stretch.

There was a line toward the end where I said, "Whatever you think, Saunders. If you think it's the right thing to do." I said the line as slowly as I could, dragged it out and moved slowly closer to her with each word, holding eye contact. Then, at the very end, I turned my head away and stepped to the other side of the stage to

deliver the next line. The whole audience let out an “Aaaaaaah!” which made me realize they all thought I was going to kiss her.

We got third place for that performance, and I treasure the memory of that experience much more than the blue ribbon I won for my own solo category.



So, I was thrilled in 2020 to get an invitation to judge that sort of competition for high school-ers a generation or so younger than me. I don't remember the name of the guy who sent it, so I'm gonna call him Mike. My work consists of pretty regular public speaking, but I was also interested because of how it fit within my schedule. I was working two jobs at the time, one hotel overnight and one in the daytime. The competition allowed volunteers to sign up for hour-long blocks.

I remember leaving one hotel at 7:00 in the morning, driving down to Irvine, judging the early morning debate, driving back to Anaheim in time for work, which probably started at 10am, finishing my shift then going right back to Irvine for the persuasive speeches, the final category of the night. Goodness, it's hard to believe the things I used to do to myself.

I was at the judges' registration table and the lady who saw my name immediately went to go find Mike. I think he was confused by someone whose name he didn't recognize (We hadn't met before that) listing him personally on the "How did you hear about this?" part of the online application. It did amuse me that he'd put out the email asking for volunteers from the company but

seemed very surprised one had actually shown up. Still, he was very pleasant and welcoming.

I don't know if that speech competition was the first time I ever heard someone mention the COVID-19 virus, but it was definitely the first time I was affected by it. They announced that due to "the global health situation" we would not be shaking the students' hands. Instead, they would each face us with a respectful nod. I don't think anyone was wearing facemasks at that point. At least, I don't remember noticing them there, but I could very well be wrong about that. Amazing to think back on how quickly our collective perception changed.

I was one of three judges for eight persuasive speeches. I remember a few of them. One boy mentioned "HOTEL CALIFORNIA" by the Eagles. He was using the song to support a broad, generalized statement he was making about American moral-uprightness (or lack thereof). He said "this song is about..." I don't even remember what it was he was saying the song meant, I was just bothered by that phrase.

We'd been encouraged to give thoughtful feedback on the students' evaluation forms because they really did cherish those and use them for practice. On that boy's form, I wrote "Be careful about saying definitively what a song or a piece of art means. Don Henley and Glenn Frey, who wrote the lyrics to HOTEL CALIFORNIA have rather famously never said exactly what the song is about. It's good to reference a popular piece of art, just try to have an actual source if you're going to explain its meaning."

Later on, I commented to another of the judges that I felt HOTEL CALIFORNIA was a strange reference that seemed out of place for his speech. She explained that several of the students had recently heard a sermon in which the minister said that about the song. That meant the student was parrot-ing what he'd heard without doing any research. He got one of my lowest scores.

One young lady gave a delightful speech about the value of children having imaginary friends. The student to whom I gave the top score was a boy who spoke about cyber-security. He performed incredibly well in every criteria on the judging rubrick.

However, the speech that left the biggest impression on me was the one I gave third place I think. The young woman opened

with lyrics from John Mayer, “Fathers be good to your daughters.” She then shared a heart-wrenching story about the abuse she’d endured from her father when she was growing up. She told it in a way that reflected a great degree of maturity and composure. She was calm and professional, didn’t tear up or falter, though I have no doubt the topic was difficult and probably painful for her to discuss in such a public forum. She concluded by repeating the song title, earnestly imploring, “Fathers, be GOOD to your daughters.”

It was a powerful speech.

Generally, we as the judges didn’t say much to the students, but when she gave her nod of gratitude, I did stop her for just a moment to say, “What you shared was incredibly brave.” It was important to me that she be acknowledged and recognized for the courage of that speech. That is absolutely what bravery looks like.

There is another woman who shared her story in a very public and very brave way. Evanna Lynch portrayed Luna Lovegood in four of the Harry Potter films. I remember a day my sister called me, very eager to share that she’d taken an online personality quiz and her cat was a Hufflepuff. I had zero idea what that meant at the time, though I have since seen all of the films and Luna Lovegood is definitely a character I really enjoyed.

That’s not an original thing to say. I know lots of people who love Luna. My friend Zack referred to her as “a breath of fresh air when she came into the series. She was a perfect addition.” Priscilla said, “The character is lovely and I’ve always adored her.” Robin called her “quirky and intelligent, a real role model for me growing up.” Cassie said “she was a bit out there, but sweet and fun all at the same time.” Joyce said, “I think actually I’m quite a bit like Luna. I’m usually confident and march to my own tune.”

My mom was rooting for Lynch when she appeared on DANCING WITH THE STARS, (She came in third place that season) and my sister even named one of her cats Luna. In the interest of clarity, I should point out that was not the cat she learned was a Hufflepuff. She took the same test for Luna, who proved to be a Ravenclaw like her namesake.

These are all just examples from people I know. Luna Lovegood is a character who is beloved all over the world, and the actress is perfectly cast in the role. Speaking of perfect, this woman also found THE single best title for her book, “THE OPPOSITE OF BUTTERFLY HUNTING.” Just... You win at Book Titling, Evanna Lynch. Well done!

Also, here’s a quirk about me that I am very aware of at the moment. In conversations, I typically say the word Flutterby instead of Butterfly. To me, it feels playful and I’ve yet to have someone say it’s obnoxious. I can’t promise I won’t use the wrong word at some point in this writing.

I think that the spectacular title was a large part of why I wanted to read this book, that and some of the most gorgeous cover artwork I’ve ever seen.

When I describe this book to someone, which is frequent because I like talking about it, the first words I tend to use are Intense, Brutal. Evanna Lynch is someone who has gone through absolute Hell. She struggled with an eating disorder that dominated her life for a time. She had to endure multiple different treatment facilities with varying methods of addressing her life-threatening condition. She had family members who cared about her and wanted her to be all right, but often they didn’t know how to get through to her or even how best to act towards her.

As I read it, I found myself heartbroken that young people struggling with mental illness could be treated so harshly, but at the same time, I tried to put myself into the shoes of her caregivers, tried to imagine how I could be helpful or supportive of anyone with such huge challenges. I’m very sympathetic to the way they must have felt overwhelmed.

One of the things I most respect about the book is Lynch’s tone in writing. She doesn’t come across as a victim. I never once had the impression she wanted her readers to feel sorry for her, despite my description here. She is straightforward, impressively detailed and very honest. She openly describes the ways she made life harder on her family, her providers and on herself.

One of the big thoughts she conveys near the end of the book is showing kindness towards your body. “I decide now, in this moment, I want it; I want this body. I want to inhabit her, enjoy

her, care for her, and defend her in this world... I no longer want to be yet another voice telling her she's disgusting or embarrassing or inadequate or too much. I want to be one of those arresting voices of love and compassion to offer her a space where she can go to restore, to feel safe, to grow." I've thought a lot about this idea since reading this book and it has had a significant impact on some of my inner dialogue with regard to my own body.

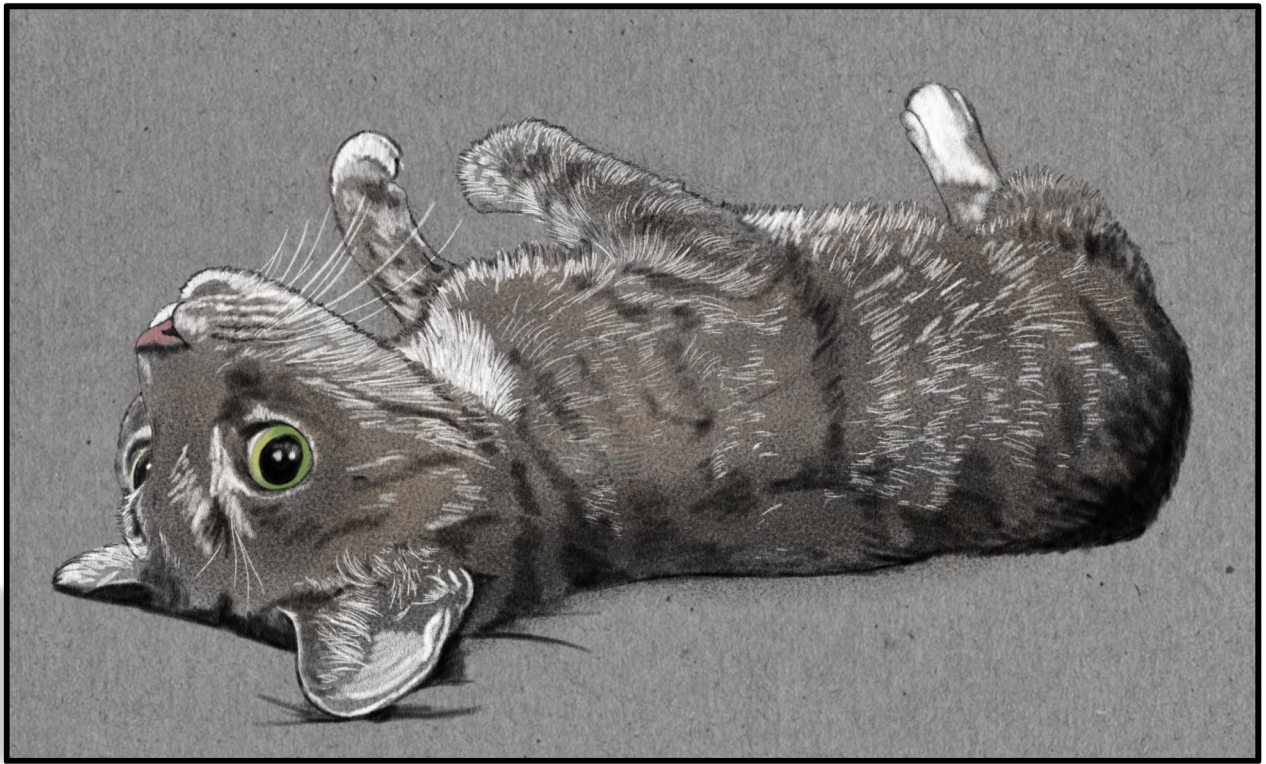
I was fascinated by the vivid detail of Lynch's writing. She describes these moments from when she was ten or eleven years old so thoroughly and completely it's like she's relaying events that happened to her a week ago, even though she is my age. (Well, ALMOST my age. I am, in fact, SIX WHOLE DAYS older than Evanna Lynch, and by sheer coincidence I began writing this on her birthday. What interesting timing.) I've spent a lot of time considering how she processes and expresses her childhood so differently than I do mine. And yes, I know it is quite egocentric to compare myself with her... but I did.

I don't imagine that THE OPPOSITE OF FLUTTERBY HUNTING was an easy book to write. I'm sure that it took tremendous emotional strength and maturity to relive her experiences and bring them to the page.

To Evanna Lynch, and to the young woman who spoke in a speech competition in Irvine in early 2020, I want to say the same thing:

Thank you.

Thank you for the bravery it took to share your story. Thank you for your positivity and for taking something awful that you went through and using it for words of inspiration, words I still think about long after they reached me.



LUNA The Ravenclaw Cat