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Zora Neale Hurston wrote, “Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.” With Zora’s scripture dancing in my mind, I ponder my own curiosity as an individual, though ambiguous on the surface. I am a varsity cheerleader and so much more, but, in reality, I have a more elusive passion.

Because I was indifferent to the temptation of a doll’s simplicity, when I was eight, my father purchased the National Geographic book, *How Things Work*, for me. I eagerly welcomed the vivid depictions of the inner workings of contraptions as conventional as keyholes and doorknobs. The colorful illustrations and analytical explanations, though intended for the advanced comprehension of the adult mind, challenged my youth, bringing me ever closer to answering the popular childhood questions.

Of course, I was curious. After all, most children are curious. However, some children, including myself, are more inquisitive than others. We don’t just read *How Things Work*; we gather its contents and proceed to understand the entirety of the universe. In fact, our youthful minds strive past the mundane expanse of knowledge taught in elementary school. We are future scientists.

While other people discount their curiosity, sufficing with the existence of an occurrence rather than its reasoning, scientists, like myself, never lose such childhood observations. I relish explanations; I readily nourish my hungry curiosity and my mind’s ache for enlightenment. From anatomy and biology to chemistry and physics, to the span of medicine and dentistry, my academic focus is unmistakable. This future dentist loves science.

The true fortification for my appreciation for science surfaced through my experience in the National Chemistry Olympiad State Finals, a treat for my appetite. I never expected a position in the finals. After all, the contest was intended to be only preparation for my Advanced Placement Chemistry exam and, ultimately, a challenge. On the contrary, I was a state finalist, destined to complete a malicious exam to determine my standing in the eyes of the American Chemical Society.

According to the proctor, the exam would require approximately five hours for the other nine finalists and me. He happily welcomed me and steadily attempted conversation as I timidly entered the deadly silent laboratory classroom, observant of the nine heads that had turned to stare at my presence, pretending not to notice a disbelieving jaw drop. Meanwhile, the proctor eagerly showed me to my station and smiled.

“You know,” he chuckled, “we rarely see any girls at this competition, let alone anyone with your...interests.”

I had to smile. Although it was comical and almost sweet coming from the elderly countenance of a man reminiscent of my grandfather, I had heard that same expression and reaction many times. After all, I was not the typical science competition student, which I affirmed after meekly smiling to each of my puzzled competitors. No problem, I thought. They just did not understand my passion for science.

However, as we began to laboratory section of the exam, a vague, open-ended session for scientific problem-solving, I slowly glanced around to recognize the truth of the situation. Yes, we were all equally puzzled as we stared at our beakers, balances, and test tubes of unknown chemicals, the adrenaline pumping with each anxious second. It was at that moment in my life that I truly accepted the reason for my appreciation of science. I thought past the beauty of the batches of colorfully pigmented solutions in beakers, past the complex principles of light theory, and even past the mechanized harmony of the human body. Instead, I captured the childlike wonder and curiosity behind science, the essential heart of knowledge.

Thus, despite disbelief in the eyes of others, I embrace this heart. Similar to the eccentricities of every organism and chemical, even the rarest compound, every individual delivers a new experience to science. Science has affirmed many things for me, including explanations and a determination to uncover the unknown. Yet, the most significant thing that I have obtained from science is my passion, the sensation that I felt on the day of the exam. After all, good professions stem from the existence of true unmistakable passion. Through my passion for science, I hope to continue to expand my knowledge and uncover "how things work". Wherever my passion journeys, I will always explore. I am a scientist.