

July 2018

Beverly Mahone-Gibbs: What Forensics Did for Me

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Recommended Citation

Mahone, B. (2018). Beverly Mahone-Gibbs: What forensics did for me. *Speaker & Gavel*, 55(1), 73-74.

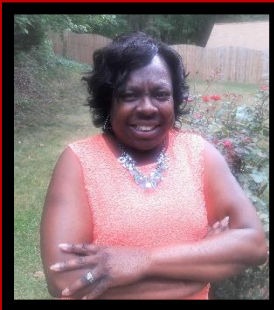
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Alumni Corner

Beverly Mahone-Gibbs: What Forensics Did For Me Ohio University (Athens, OH) Forensic Alumni (1976-1979)

Beverly Mahone-Gibbs



Beverly is a veteran journalist, author, coach, and motivational speaker. Her broadcasting career has taken her to Ohio, West Virginia, Boston, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and Saudi Arabia. Beverly has appeared on numerous radio and talk programs including MSNBC-TV and the locally-produced *My Carolina Today*. She was also featured in the New York Times for her first book. She has written five books total including the Amazon Best Sellers, *How to Get on the News Without Committing Murder* and *The Baby Boomer/Millennial Divide: Making it Work at Work*. She has written for, or been covered by the *Huffington Post*, *Forbes*, and *Newsweek*. She says that while she loved duo, poetry, and prose, her greatest accomplishment was placing 7th in After dinner speaking at the National Tournament in 1977. "I never knew I was a closet comedian!"

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Proper APA citation for this article is:

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Beverly Mahone-Gibbs
Communications Coach
BAMedia

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ALUMNI CORNER: The forensic community is filled with alumni who will tout the benefits they received through their participation in intercollegiate speech and debate activities. As directors of forensics programs face battles for budgets and sometimes for their program's very existence, having a collection of published testimonies about the positive influence of forensics can be a tremendous help. To that end, Speaker & Gavel is setting aside space in each issue for our alumni to talk about how forensics has helped them in their professional life. These are our alumni's stories.

Keywords: forensics, benefits of forensics, Alumni Corner

Forensics in college taught me about life and how to navigate through challenges and disappointments. It prepared me, as an African-American, for the real world where I would always find myself in competition with others on some level. It taught me how to bring my communication “A-game” to every job interview and performance evaluation, every public speaking presentation, every networking event, every book I’ve written, every parent-teacher conference, my marriage, and just about every other aspect of my life.

I came to the Ohio University Forensics team as a freshman in 1975. Prior to that, I enjoyed success as a competitor in high school, where I was a state and national qualifier three years in a row (Original Oratory). But college was different. I found myself competing on a much larger stage with others who were equally as good as or even better than me. College was also a lot different for me because my high school team was very diverse and I walked into a college program as one of just two people of color out of our 30 plus roster.

To be honest, I had a hard time acclimating because of the lack of diversity and the feeling that no one really cared if I was there or not. There was some unspoken rule on the team at the time that freshmen didn’t get to compete at the big tournaments so I spent much of my first year trying to get to know the “who’s who” of OU Forensics and to fit in. It was during that “fitting in” period that I got to study my white peers to try to understand them better.

A number of them gave me the impression they had little or no interaction with other races prior to coming to OU so their opinion of young blacks in America could easily be shaped by their impressions of me. I was a part of the “Say it loud, I’m black and I’m proud” movement so I was a personality that had to grow on them if they were

I credit my 30 plus year career as a radio and television journalist to being a member of a forensics team.

open-minded enough to accept me. Thankfully, an assistant coach by the name of Janet Bury helped bridge that gap and to this day some of my dearest friends came from that group.

I credit my 30 plus year career as a radio and television journalist to being a member of a forensics team. Competition in Original Oratory taught me how to write and tell a story effectively. As the other half of the dramatic and humorous duo teams, I learned about voice inflection for my on-camera appearances and, believe it or not, how to make an interview guest feel at ease in sharing their news story with me. Forensics gave me the vocabulary tools and poise necessary to allow me to compete on the same levels as my white colleagues during newsroom meetings, as well as being able to debate my points without coming across as an angry black woman or a belligerent imbecile.

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I developed a powerful voice in a world where I might, otherwise, be considered voiceless. I can extemporaneously articulate my thoughts and ideas with clarity when necessary. I have gone into job interviews with confidence and I have never meet a stranger at a networking event because of the ease I feel when presenting myself.

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When I was a part of Toastmasters, we were told to look just above the head of the people in the audience so we wouldn't feel nervous and they would still think we were looking at them. As a motivational speaker, I look everyone in the eye and make them feel as if I'm only talking to them. That's the power of forensics.

I am proud to say I have passed on what I learned from forensics to my daughter, who won her own public speaking contest when she was in high school. Today, I am a Communications and Vocabulary Coach, working primarily with high school students to help them prepare for their futures. I also encourage them to join their school's speech and debate team if they have one. (Sadly, many do not in the urban areas). In addition, I credit the fact that I became a best-selling author to my experience in forensics. Not only did forensics teach me how to research and write clearly and concisely, it taught me how to market myself and my ideas to judges and readers.

I can't imagine what my life would've been like without having the opportunity to be a part of a forensics team in high school and college. I'm so glad there were those who were willing to invest their time and energy into my future success.

