

To Whom It May Concern:

November 2, 2009

I am sure you have all heard a lot about Mr. Barg as a musician, conductor, and teacher. And, I could write a whole different letter about that, but I want to tell you about a couple life lessons that Mr. Barg taught me while I worked with him at Sound Encounters in Ottawa, Kansas. I definitely learned a ton about music, musicality and ensemble playing during my three summers at camp in Kansas, but I also learned two things that pertain to all of my life and that impacted who I am now.

The first thing I learned from Mr. Barg is leadership. And, more importantly, leadership regardless of where I sit in orchestra. In rehearsals he requires EVERYONE to move together, breathe together, play together, listen to all the other sections, constantly be looking up, and to be responsible for our individual parts. These were not things we were to take lightly. We would start and stop and start again until everyone was looking up, everyone was breathing together, and everyone moved to cue each other in. We did exercises where we all had to try to be the very last person to start playing. While these were all good musically challenging ideas they also taught us to take responsibility and to be the best we can be while still expecting everyone else to do the same.

As a section leader, I learned to take responsibility and fix problems within my own section. If there was something we were playing wrong or a bowing we needed to change it was (and still is in my college orchestra) my job to stand up, face the other people in my section, tell them what the problem was, and what I thought we should do to fix it. Another part of leadership was helping everyone around us. At Sound Encounters the age range of students can be anywhere from 6 or 7 years old to early 20's to adults. With such a wide variety of age comes a wider variety of size. So many times there were kids who were too short and couldn't see. Being a leader means helping others get the best experience they can, so finding them a better place to sit where they can see or helping them adjust their stand or whatever else they need. One of the many quotes I remember from Mr. Barg is: "How can we expect World Peace if we won't even help people who look like us?" All of these lessons in leadership are definitely important to my success in my current orchestra but they also make me stand out as a human being. They don't just pertain to music, they pertain to life. No matter what field we go into we need to be able to lead our peers and set good examples.

The second, and probably more significant lesson, is one that requires a little of my own background for you all to understand. I worked with Mr. Barg for three summers at Sound Encounters. And, during those summers he was the conductor of the camp orchestra and he taught two classes, conducting and Advanced Conducting (I took both when I was at camp). I have always been pretty timid when it comes to being in front of people performing or being in charge, and my last summer at camp was no exception.

In fact my self confidence was at an all time low that summer. It was my first summer in college and I had taken a pretty big risk in deciding what to go to school for. It had come down to choosing between music, something I loved and knew I could be successful at, and Interior Design, something I loved but wasn't so sure of myself in. When it came time to make the choice I chose Design. At my school the process to get into Interior Design is intense. It requires a year of study were we develop a portfolio. Anyway, the point is, I did not get into my program, and was left doubting myself and whether or not I chose the right path. I found this out four days before I left for Sound Encounters. My plan was to go to Kansas, forget about the disappointment and completely dive into the music so I didn't have to think about it... That didn't exactly go according to plan. First I found out I was going to be first chair of my section in orchestra, which, with the leadership stuff I already talked about, was a big self confidence in itself, but still something I could detach from and just grow musically at the time.

But, I was also in Mr. Barg's Advanced Conducting class. Having taken Conducting the summer before I was expecting to focus on musicality and conducting that music. Naturally that was just the surface of what we covered every afternoon. The way the class was structured is we all brought our instruments and we played for each other while everyone conducted. One afternoon, towards the end of camp, we were working on one of the pieces we were conducting. Each of us was taking turns conducting the rest of the class. I had waited to be last because my confidence level was super low.

When it was finally my turn I got up and I guess the best way to describe what I looked like is: I didn't move at all except from the elbows down. It was a very timid first attempt. When it was over, Mr. Barg asked me how I thought it went. I wasn't really sure, but I responded with, "Okay?" We talked through what worked and what didn't and then I had another shot at conducting the same part of the piece. But, this time Mr. Barg said I had to move the stand out of my way, I had to use big gestures (even if they felt silly), I had to close my eyes, and I couldn't conduct beats, I needed to conduct the music. That moment, by far, has been one of the scariest moments of my life. It required me to completely break down every wall an overcome every insecurity, but I did it. And it was incredible. I had never felt so free or so sure of myself as a person, as a musician, and as a leader. That moment left a permanent change in my personality, and because of it I have been free to try and fail many times. A few days later, at the final concert for camp, we had just finished our last piece and everyone was exiting the stage. Mr. Barg was standing at the bottom of the stairs, congratulating everyone as he normally does. As I came down the stairs Mr. Barg looked at me and said "Shoulders Back. Go change the World." Which is now my daily motto.

I don't think Mr. Barg really knows the extent of the impact he has had on me as a person and my life. He changed my life simply by believing in me and by challenging me to "Expand my comfort zone" (another one of his phrases). He is one of the most influential people I have ever met and I only encountered him for 10 days each summer for three years. When I got back to school in the fall I decided Interior Design wasn't for

me and changed my major to Fashion Design. I fail in some form almost every day but by doing so I further realize my goals and I learn how to succeed. When I graduate I want to affect change in the fashion world by working on the carbon footprints of companies, developing a greener industry, and advocating for healthy models. I also want to be certified to teach Suzuki Violin so that I may get the chance to influence someone the way Mr. Barg has and continues to influence me.

Sincerely,

Kati Brandt  
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