

## Destination ImagiNation®—University Level Insights from Illinois

By Kristina Anderson 2009



The stadium went hazy as we jumped up to cheer. Thousands of people from across the globe seemed to share in our joy. Screaming and hugging, we somehow made it to the floor and walked across the stage to accept our award. The words still reverberated in our ears: “And in first place: Waukegan DI!” They were words we had been waiting to hear for most of our lives.

When my first DI team formed thirteen years ago, I had no idea what Destination Imagination (or Odyssey of the Mind, as it was called back then) was. There had never been a program in Waukegan before and no one had seen a competition, let alone solved one of the challenges. I was in fourth grade when I signed up and was assigned to a team full of kids I didn’t really know. While we had no clue what we were doing that first year and managed to finish in just about last place at our first tournament, from the beginning I was hooked. There was something about the unknown, about being able to do anything with the challenges that I absolutely loved.



As we grew, so did our DI skills. We learned all of the necessities in life: how to use a drill without stripping every single screw, how to coax local businesses into letting us have their empty boxes, how to write scripts and lyrics and jokes, and of course

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every possible use for duct tape. Most importantly though, we learned how to function as a team. How to work with one another instead of against. How to respect one another. We could instantly determine who would be best at a task, who should play which part, or how to read each person's emotions when making a tough decision. I know my teammates better than I know anyone else in my life, and I can honestly say that they became the best friends I've ever had.



After graduating from high school, our team splintered as we headed off to six different colleges in four different states. Emalie Norton went to Notre Dame, Katie Colver went to Grinnell College in Iowa, Nick Pieroni headed to Illinois State, Sarah Vester left for Calvin College in Michigan, Chris Trigg went to Northwestern and then Stanford, and Adam Peterson and I went off to the University of Illinois at Champaign together. I thought that our days of working together were over, that we'd never be given two minutes of thinking time and four minutes to perform again. That absolutely wasn't the case. There was a gap in our lives that DI had filled that we couldn't just let go. And even though DI isn't about winning but rather the experience, we had never had the honor to run across the stage at Global Finals or heard our names called out for the whole stadium to hear. We had to go back.

Our team actually managed to head back to Globals twice while we were in college, once as freshmen and once as seniors. The first time we went we only participated in DI eXtreme. That night was one of the craziest of my life. We dumpster dove to find supplies that other teams had thrown away, built three machines in the parking lot of the Holiday Inn after begging the employees to let us run extension cords out their front doors, designed costumes out of the clothes we had packed, and wrote and memorized a script all in twelve hours. On top of that, throughout the night there were three "distractions" that required us to run all over the University of Tennessee campus. It was hard but worth it – performing was such a rush.

We knew we had to participate again so our senior year we signed up for not only eXtreme, but also Challenge D (something we had never attempted before). The week of Global Finals was a blur. Most of us had just graduated from college the weekend before so we didn't have much time to prep before leaving for Tennessee. We practiced Instant Challenges in between snack breaks during the ride down and

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filled each other in on the research we had done for Challenge D during short breaks in our schedule.

Due to budgetary restraints we ended up staying at a hotel that was far away from campus, and so we opted to spend the night of eXtreme outside at the performance space in World Fair Park rather than driving back and forth to the hotel. Because of that night, we now know that despite 90°+ temperatures during the day Tennessee can still get pretty chilly at 3am. We also know that at night the park is heavily used by joggers who dislike having to jump over large set pieces as they run. The night was challenging but also amazingly fun.

After eXtreme was over, we got to try our luck with Challenge D. Before we went into the prep room we had never worked with our materials or practiced a full challenge. Because we were such a connected team and knew each other's strengths and weaknesses better than most people know themselves, we were confident that we would be able to put on a great performance. A performance that finally landed us on that stage at Closing Ceremonies, accepting our trophy in front of the crowd.

My team learned a lot through our thirteen years together. DI taught us about perseverance, about not giving up despite finishing last that first year. DI also taught us a lot about ourselves. It showed us what our individual strengths were and in some way influenced all of us on our career path, whether we chose engineering, film, or teaching. We also learned how to be confident and poised, and how to think for ourselves.

I thought my journey with Destination Imagination was complete after I finished high school, and I've never been more wrong in my life. Not only has my team competed at the University Level, we've also volunteered at tournaments and events, worked with teams, and even worked at DI Headquarters. We'll be involved with DI the rest of our lives. This is definitely, definitely not the end.