

## **A Friend Who Believed** **by Renee Yeh (4A)**

The thing that matters most to me in life is a screw. A tiny metal screw, that gives me hope and helps me remember my motivation in life. Why? Well, you'll need to know *my* story!

I was born in 3090, in Hong Kong. I was named Olympia, because I was born on April 6, the anniversary of the first Modern Olympic Games in Athens. I like to think that's the reason I grew up loving competition, loving sports, physical or mental, and wanting one day to be counted as one of the best athletes in the world... an *Olympian*.

But nobody could ever understand my need. My parents, my teachers... all they could ever think about was me becoming perhaps a businessperson someday... one of those sad species who atrophies their muscles sitting behind a desk everyday.

The closest *they* ever let me get to sports was my school chess team. Sadly, I wasn't much of a team player, and often let my competitiveness get in the way. In fact, I once was caught cheating by screaming 'Look!' while frantically repositioning the chess pieces.

Soon, fed up with the monotony of my life and failing to find anyone who shared my views, I took to wandering the streets of 22<sup>nd</sup>-century Hong Kong... it would always make me think.

The city was magnificent, gigantic! Everything shimmered, every corner of every alley meticulously shined by an army of cleaning robots. The weather was always perfect; with the right hint of sun peeking around a lightly cloudy blue sky... climate control had been perfected for years! Rivers of people flowed around this metropolitan monument to man's progress, nature shoved aside for steel.

I would see how perfect the city was, and wonder how I could still feel so alone.

It was on one of these walks that I met someone... something... who would change my life forever.

There, on a street corner, next to an abandoned holodisk shop, I saw what looked a lump of dirty laundry glittering hypnotically in the light.

Suddenly, the 'lump' jumped up: and started to stare at me apprehensively with a little whirring visual sensor... it was an old robot!

“XC-35, personal entertainment system reporting for duty... why are your eyes wet, carbon-based organism?”

I giggled at its naïveté. “I’m crying, silly! Nobody seems to understand me, that’s all!” Was I seriously relying on a dilapidated robot to comfort me?

Beeps and whirrs. “Complaint processed. Why does nobody understand you?”

This time, my rage flew out of me. “Cause I want to be an athlete! THEY say I can’t! That I’m not good enough! THEY won’t even let me try!” Sobs racked my body.

Awkward silence. Then:

“XC-35 can help.”

“What?!” I felt like I was being made fun of. “You’re just a piece of abandoned junk!”

A series of frustrated beeps issued forth from a tiny speaker on XC-35’s buddy. “XC-35 is not ‘junk’. XC-35 has knowledge of many mental sports included in the Olympics, such as Sudoku, as these were programmed into XC-35. XC-35 is also capable of strength training and...”

“I don’t want to hear your whole advertisement! Gosh, you remind me of this annoying animated rabbit we learned about in History... Bugs Bunny! He just kept on talking!”

“Please consider XC-35’s offer. Refrain from verbalization.”

Now or never. I decided to accept.

“OK... I’m in... Bugs.”

That's how 'Bugs' became my 'personal trainer!'"

Whenever I had some spare time I would go train with Bugs. He made working hard fun, he reminded me daily of my purpose: to get to the Olympics. Soon, we were friends... he would tease me in his own special way when he thought I was getting lazy, and I would insult his tatty condition as a bag of bolts.

My parents and teachers watched me improve greatly in every facet, and attributed it to my being a 'late bloomer'.

But in reality, I got better because Bugs was teaching me about Olympic Spirit. He taught me the enduring importance of playing fair, of working hard, teaching me why you had to learn to overcome your weaknesses instead of ignoring them.

Soon, I became a good all-rounder athlete, with Bugs teaching me about everything from chess maneuvers to decreasing my 'drag' while sprinting. He made me believe I could do anything... and for a while, that even seemed true!

Bugs made my dream his mission. I once arrived for 'training' to find he had constructed a whole obstacle course out of trash cans and old robot parts just for me! In fact... he even helped me with my homework sometimes!

One day, it all disappeared.

I was running over to Bugs when I saw a recycling ship parked on the street where Bugs lived. I had known this moment was coming... Bugs was recycled into scrap metal.

"Please don't take him! He's mine!" I screamed as Bugs' still body was thrown into the craft. One of the screws from his front panel came loose, and bounced off the floor, rolling to a stop at my feet.

"I'm sorry, young lady. This particular model has been out of commission since the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century! It needs to be turned into something useful..." The recycling official shrugged indifferently.

"But he is useful! To me! You don't understand!"

The ship zoomed off, my cries unheeded, leaving her in the dust once again alone without hope.

(336 words)

That was all in the past.

Now, ten years later, I stand on the Olympic winners' podium, being idolized by everyone, my face proudly displayed on billions of holoscreens from here to Uranus. I worked hard to get where I am now, gold medal around my neck, in fact, the new record breaker on Earth for most gold medals ever.

After Bugs' recycling, I worked ten times as hard as I ever did before. I felt a duty to that little robot that had cared for me so much. My dream of becoming an Olympian had turned into OUR dream, and more than anything, OUR dream had to be fulfilled... and now, it was.

Tears flowed from my eyes, as I remembered this was all because of Bugs.

Bugs, a hunk of steel who had believed in me, even when everyone else had given up. Bugs, a machine who never had feelings, yet who had seemed to love me despite that!

Bugs had embodied all the qualities of a real Olympian. Bugs had been willing to persevere, and had worked to help me realize my dream, totally selfless. Even after his recycling, I always felt like a part of him was with me.

Actually... a part of him WAS with me. The screw that had fallen from his body the day the recyclers had dragged him away was now on a necklace around my neck. I had kept it ever since then, and it matters so much because it's the only thing I have left of him. It's been the driving force behind my determination to be a great athlete.

Bugs, even in death, helped me realize my destiny.

All because he believed in me.