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Category: Personal Essay & Memoir

The Method to Her Music

THE METHOD TO HER MUSIC

One word describes the band room: chaos.

Students roam around the room, crossing from the cold, hard-tiled floor to the dark, scratchy carpet, passing through rows and rows of chairs and stands. They walk in and out of instrument practice rooms, chattering on and on like swarms of buzzing bumblebees. Every so often, their bodies tense, and they look back at the director's small, yet intimidating office. In anticipation, they look for the slightest sign of her exit, waiting to race back to their seats because no one wants to hear her deafening shouts of reprimand. The day never ends well when she yells, "Quiet!" or "Everyone SIT DOWN!"

A smell of spit penetrates the air, spit produced by instruments that play high and low notes accompanied by the occasional off-pitch note. Some people have already begun practicing their pieces, heavily populating the room with a mix of diverse sounds: polished brass instruments with powerful, elephant-sounding music; bulky drums that are repeatedly pelted by pounding mallets; and elegantly whispering woodwinds.

To the side of the room is the band director's office. Neatly organized and full of music sheets, music books, and music awards, the gray cubicle looks almost lonely. The director sits filling out paperwork, every so often pausing to listen to and frown at the discord outside. Her sensitive ear is an all-in-one tuner and metronome, picking out individual instruments and detecting wrong notes, even from her thick-walled office.

Near the front of the room, from last year's Christmas fundraiser, the poinsettia plants are snakes that grow in pots, shedding their bright green skin for a scarlet red. They reach up, up, up, almost grasping the "band bulletin board" above them, wishing they could thrive in that colorful forest of photos.

Even on the band vacations portrayed in some of the photos, our director led us with a stern expression and assertive voice, leaving us no room for error in our music or behavior. Some kids would mumble under their breaths, "Can't she just have a little fun?" or "Does she really have to triple-check every single thing on the itinerary?". Most have grown to fear her.

Suddenly, the director exits her office, walks across the rough carpet with an air of purpose about her, and silently picks up her baton. That slender rod is a lighting stagehand, redirecting the spotlight of every single student's mind onto the director. All eyes fly onto her, and instruments lift up, ready to sing. This moment seems like a photograph, every person and thing unmoving.

Two words describe the band room: controlled chaos.

I look in her face, the hard-set lines and wrinkled skin, the pursed lips. In that second, I see that underneath that stern façade is just the affectionate concern of a teacher who wants the best for her precious students. I start to remember the sweet notes of encouragement she's left, her proud smiles during concerts, the after-school celebrations. I think about all our cherished moments as a warm family, and feel for her my constant respect and admiration.

Three words describe the band room: beautiful, controlled chaos.