

My Ambition

Author: Emily Pierson

Grade: 12

Teacher: Janet Jelavich

School: Maryville High School, Maryville, MO

As a professional violinist, my great grandfather played in the orchestra in Bangor, Maine, and also was involved in two other musical groups. He had his own jazz band, *Tom Kane and the Jamaica Jazz Band* and was a member of another ensemble with Rudy Vallee. So, I guess, I inherited my passion for music from him. My dream has always been to become a snare drummer and a well-rounded player of many instruments, but I have higher aspirations to become not just a member of the band but a professional musician, like my great grandfather.

I started my education at a parochial school where the high school drumline visited our small grade school gymnasium to perform their indoor show. I saw them march in and immediately noticed the confidence and pride that shown on their faces. Taps brought them to attention, and they began to play. The music pulsed throughout the building like a heavy bass while I sat entranced by their movements and the sounds that followed. From then on, I wanted to play snare drum in that ensemble someday, to capture the attention of every eye and ear in the room in the same way that they caught mine.

Being one year away from high school at the time, I was challenged by the idea of learning a completely new instrument. To go from an ill-taught cornet player to a refined percussionist requires a lot of help and ambition, so I immediately began looking for a percussion instructor. I found Erika, a family friend who for one hour per week helped me advance from no experience at all to understanding basic rhythms and technique. Soon, after tons of practice I was ready, but really nervous for the high school auditions. Being an incoming freshman from a parochial school, tryouts were difficult performing in front of a panel of five instructors that I had never met, with my future peers waiting outside, listening. I buckled under pressure, and I couldn't play the music I had memorized. All I could do was keep playing until I reached the end of the audition and try my hardest not to break into tears. One week later, they informed me that I was one spot away from getting the position I wanted.

Disappointed that I didn't reach my goal, it still inspired me because I saw how close the auditions were. For the next three years, I continued lessons, practiced, and picked up an extra music class to help me become a better player and work my way up the percussion food chain. I soon found that the more I was around music, hearing, and playing it, the more I desired a career in it. Even though my confidence kept telling me *you'll never be good enough*, my hard work finally paid off. At the end of my junior year, I had the best audition and earned the position of center snare. This success has been one of the most important in my life because it made me feel I could aim for higher goals and achieve them. This journey developed a passion and drive for music that will continue throughout my life. Just as importantly, it's given me the confidence that I need to take the next step toward pursuing an education in instrumental music.

In my dream career as a music instructor, I hope to be able to teach my students everything they want to know about their instruments and instill in them a curiosity for understanding, as well as a work ethic that they can apply to anything. A person can learn the meaning of hard work through music by playing something over and over again until it's perfect, then playing it one-hundred times more. Patience and persistence is taught when a performance does not go as it should have. Dedication is necessary in order to find the inspiration to wake up for every early rehearsal and play for hours of independent study and practice.

To me, music is a tool people use to express themselves. It allows them to reminisce and recreate the past as well as dream about the future. It can be used to convey things that couldn't easily be said in regular everyday life. Music is such an essential part of the lives of young people because it's an outlet for us to think about all of the endless possibilities. One of my favorite quotes, by an unknown author, really explains why teenagers grasp so dearly to their I-pods and MP3 players: "Have you ever wondered why young people take to music like a fish to water? ... Maybe it's because music is fun. Plain and simple. It opens up their minds to dream great dreams about where they can go and what they can do when they get older."

I understand that I have a huge challenge awaiting me because I'm not a music prodigy or gifted with any natural talent or perfect pitch. I feel that I wouldn't have been blessed with such a passion and appreciation for music if I wasn't meant to pursue it and learn to be excellent at it. Being a musician is more than hitting the right notes at the right time, but being a musician is about playing what's not there. "A musician may suddenly reach a point where all pleasure in technique falls away and in some moment of inspiration he becomes the instrument through which the music is played" (Edwin Diller Starbuck),

Someday I hope to reach that point. Music has been one of the biggest mental obstacles that I have faced. I don't know if my grandfather came by his playing ability naturally or if he had a similar journey that I've had, becoming the legend that he is to me today. But, I do know that along with my experiences and passion for music, his example will be an important element that will give me the drive to become a true musician.