

Reality Over Expectations

By Lucy Calderon

Their feet danced across the stage with such expertise, such ease. In that moment nothing else seemed to matter but one thing...I wanted to someday become a duPont Dazzler.

When I made the team, just one of two freshman, tears flooded my eyes. I could not remember experiencing such overwhelming joy. Unfortunately, in the days, weeks and months to follow, there would be many more tears, but under very different circumstances. I never understood the expression, "Be careful of what you wish for" until I was on my high school dance team.

I experienced verbal abuse from my coaches and teammates. I was locked out of practices for hours on freezing mornings. I was the scapegoat for any point lost at a competition. When I received a concussion at a practice, my coaches ignored my pain, so I danced and competed for a whole month with a head injury. I knew that if I worked hard, I would eventually earn the respect of my coaches and teammates.

That respect never came. My mom says that I did not stand as tall as I used to during those months, that my posture had changed. Of course, I knew I was in a bad place, but I ignored that little voice in the back of my head that had never steered me wrong. My parents' gentle suggestions, turned to pleas that I quit the team. I couldn't, though. I was dancing. I was a Dazzler.

I was hesitant about talking to my counselor and the administration about all that had happened. The year had ended and I had not quit. I began to strip away the glamour of that sparkly black and red jacket started to see the old me, but I could never really go back to the old me.

I knew I would not be returning to the dance team my Sophomore year. I was ready to move on, work on my lackluster grades from the previous year and immerse myself in my Journalism and Communication magnet. I began to do just that, but I was not at peace with my Dazzler experience.

I was thinking about the Dazzlers more than ever, but it was not in the same context. I thought about all of the starry-eyed little girls, dreaming about becoming Dazzlers. What if *they* don't have a stable family life and friends to brighten up their day? Will *they* know how to stick up for themselves? Or will *they*, as I did, suffer in silence? Theirs could be a fate far worse than mine. In the end, I talked. And I wrote. I wrote down all of my experiences for anyone who would listen. I knew I had to do it for all the girls after me. When I was finished talking, writing, and LEADING, the two coaches who had successfully taken our team to the National Championships were fired. I could finally look at all of my Spirit Wear with pride in myself, but disappointed in the team that let me down.

Pain endured is just a lost opportunity if it is not used for growth. It is a chance to change; to alter who you are into a better version of yourself.

I use my newfound voice to contribute to *On the Record* (OTR) my high school newsmagazine. OTR is my platform to write about important, sensitive topics and to educate and help others. My article "Break Your Silence" on sexual assault (before the Me Too movement) received a national award at the National Scholastic Press Association (NSPA). I am a Peer

Educator at Planned Parenthood, where I teach young men and women in my community the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships.

Who would have thought at 15, that at 18 that my senior quote would be: *When people throw stones at you, don't throw them back. Collect them all and build an empire.*