



ABC CLARION

High school students are welcome to send articles or comics to clarionabc@gmail.com

Essay Competition Third Place

Paranoid

by Steven Mi

Everyone has failures in life, of course, but not everyone interprets them the same way. Some choose to ignore it - the stubborn. Others choose to give up - the timid. Still others choose to improve - the flexible. I am no different. I have seen despair. I have felt it. And I have chosen to improve. Will it be difficult? Yes. Will it be successful? Maybe. Will it be worthwhile? Definitely.

Two years ago, my future in music seemed to be secure. I improved every year. I even became concertmaster of the Regional Intermediate String Orchestra. I was ready for the Chamber Orchestra, I decided. My practicing became more lax and sporadic. I was greatly confident - but not

Essay Competition Second Place

My Audition

by Angelina Li

The summer before sixth grade, my dad went forward with his wish and bought me a violin. It was Franz Hoffmann's Amadeus, a cheap buy for recruits. With this purchase, I began my journey with the violin.

The violin was my fourth musical instrument, after the piano, viola, and the flute. I had only picked it up because my dad continuously suggested me to do so. I went straight to private lessons. It was difficult learning violin from the very beginning, and it didn't help knowing that I was far behind the other violinists who started in primary school. Determined, I practiced vigorously and breezed through the Suzuki books.

A year later, both my parents and my violin teacher decided I would audition

greatly prepared.

On the Saturday of the audition, I went through the solo examinations with little difficulty. Even the tough sight-reading examination seemed relatively easy to me. Then came the two scales. The first scale I played with precision. Great. And for the second, well - I, as I told my family and friends for the rest of that year, "screwed up." There were no excuses. There was no hiding it. I messed up - big time.

On the way back from the audition, I couldn't even meet my parents' eyes, and I didn't say anything either. I felt like dirt. I felt like the prisoner who dreams of riches and wakes in a dark cell. Not very pleasant. Nor did I want to hear about my results - I

for the Central Jersey Regional Orchestra - it would give me a goal to work towards. To give me further incentive, my dad promised me a new violin - a good one - if I made the audition. I ran through the dozens of scales over and over until the tips of my fingers hurt when I pressed down on the strings. I fought through the tedium of practicing the same pieces repeatedly every night. I imagined how beautiful my new violin would sound compared to my current scraggly one. I prayed hard for a successful audition.

On the winter of seventh grade, we drove down to the audition site. I headed into the scales room and played the directed scales. Suddenly, my ears had become deaf to pitch; everything I played sounded out of tune. My fingers jumped around the

anticipated their release about as much as I would have anticipated execution day.

When they inevitably came, I laughed. Just laughed. And then I cried. My bid for a wonderful last year in the Central Jersey Intermediate Orchestra was washed away with that deluge of tears. I knew how pathetic I looked, and liked it. I felt even worse in the weeks afterwards as I related every ugly detail to my friends, acquaintances, and teachers. I became a master at storytelling - for all the wrong reasons.

As I kept talking of my experiences, I became used to it the way I tire of the endless replays of horror movies. And I began to look for what went wrong. Was it because I was lazy? Because I was untalented? Or because I was unprepared? I didn't know, or really want to. So I sought solace in my one other hobby: reading

strings and it was over within thirty seconds. I was still processing what had happened when my feet reached the solo room. I waited in line for half an hour, listening to other peoples' beautiful runs of Haydn's Concerto in G Major. Soon, the inevitable came and the stage was mine. My fingers trembled and my cold hand grew stiff. The spotlight made my heart beat a tattoo. I stumbled through the song. My vibratos failed to form coherently and my bow skidded coarsely down the strings. I grimaced as I finished. For sure, I had blown my chance of making the audition. Upset, I left the room stone-faced and quickly skimmed through the sight-reading room.

I did not make that audition. Nor did I make the auditions the following year and the year after. My first failure was expected; I knew it was unlikely for me to make it in after learning violin for only a

about anything and everything. When I read about several companies - great companies - and their not-as-great histories in *The Innovators*, my epiphany came. Wouldn't having a total guarantee of success solve any and all of these? It probably would. Eureka. And that was that. From then on, I tripled checked my tests before I submitted them; I revised my essays practically into new ones daily; and I practiced a violin piece until I heard it in my dreams. Indeed, as computer revolutionary Andy Grove declared: "Success breeds complacency. Complacency breeds failure. Only the paranoid survive." I have become one of the paranoid.

Judges' Comment: The article is self-aggrandizing. It showed that the author had learned a real lesson: "Only the paranoid survive."

year, but it hurt me that I had spent so much time practicing. My next two failed auditions left me angry and dispirited. Was it all for nothing? Was I that bad? Why was I even auditioning in the first place? I never wished to audition to begin with. After three years of disappointment and stress, I had crossed the line and told my parents I was quitting.

Perhaps, if I wasn't so pushed to audition every year, I would not have hated the violin. Perhaps, if I had succeeded the auditions or even joined another orchestra, my parents would not have placed so much pressure on my performance. Perhaps, if I had the determination I began the violin with, I would not have given up.

Judges' Comment: "Audition" meets the assignment in an honest and unexpected way—not by working harder but by knowing yourself.

First Experiences as a Freshman

by Marina Luo

My first few weeks of high school can be compared to a little fish entering a big pond, or the low person on a totem pole. I find high school to be a bit intimidating. I had to adjust quickly to the diversity around me. True, America is a very diverse country. Children are exposed to diversity as a baby, and even more so as students. However, I find high school's diversity to be on a completely different level. In middle school, all the Asians surrounded themselves with other Asians. All the white people surrounded themselves with other white people. Especially in the cafeteria. The popular people sat with other popular people, and all the Asians sat at the "Asian Table."

The last day of middle school was, for some, the last day they saw their classmates. Some students allied for selective programs at other schools in the district. I had been accepted into one of the selective programs, but this program was at my home school. Everyone says that freshmen tend to stand out from the crowd, but I stuck out like a sore thumb! Since I was in the school's specialized learning center, I only had classes with the students who were also in the program. There goes another half of my friends.

I weaved my way through the hallways, carefully avoiding the seniors. I knew exactly who the seniors were considering they all looked like giants compared to

me. When I left the freshman orientation, I thought I knew where all my classes were, but unfortunately that was over a week ago. I no longer remember anything.

High school teachers are different than middle school teachers because high school teachers are more intimidating. My Algebra II teacher keeps a baseball bat in his closet, which he already took out 3 times. The first time he took the baseball bat out was to show the class that he actually had one. He swung it over his shoulder and walked up and down the aisle.

Another example of how high school teachers are different than 8th grade teachers is that high school teachers are more honest. The first thing my math teacher said

to my class was, "Well, don't you all look stupid." I was a little taken aback. I never had a teacher that would say that to his or her students. I had teachers that probably thought it, but they never said it aloud. My math teacher takes pleasure in insulting his students. The way he puts it is that the truth hurts, but it is still the truth.

The differences between high school and middle school are huge. There are more responsibilities as a high school student. There are also more clubs and sports that people can join. The teachers and the workload are the most difficult aspects of high school. Nevertheless, I am looking forward to the new opportunities that high school will bring.

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