

in the footsteps of my sister, who had graduated the year before. The people around me had high expectations for my achievements, and I was definitely nervous on the first day. We, as a marching band, had been expecting to enter the season with two band directors: one who had worked with the band in previous years, and a new one whom we hadn't met yet. We were certainly surprised to find, on the first day, that our marching band would be led by two new directors, and that both of the old ones had left.

The previous year, the band had been very successful. It placed second in the state, breaking the school's record for the show's score at the final competition. With new directors, everyone was nervous. We were plunging into a new season without anything to back us up, and no one was sure how well it would go. Could we maintain our reputation from the previous year? Maybe it was stupid to worry about becoming the laughing stock of New Jersey's marching band world, but I definitely worried about it anyway. It wasn't that I didn't have faith in the directors, but I also didn't have much faith in the marching band's chances for the season.

In the early stages of the show, there was no way to tell whether it would fail or succeed. The directors seemed like they knew what they were doing, and during pre-band camp we managed to complete the first movement of our show, New World Symphony, successfully playing and marching it on the field. It was painful, but the knowledge that we were making significant progress was rewarding. We went into band camp with our heads held high, optimistic with the prospect of making even more progress over the course of the week.

Band camp was more than successful. According to some of the older members of the band, the previous year's band camp ended with the band only knowing about two thirds of the show. The trip was cut short that year because of Hurricane Irene, but the general consensus was still that we were making more progress on the show during band camp than the band did in 2011. We definitely got a lot done, progressing significantly more than we had expected. The band directors were content enough with our progress that they gave us more time to relax, loosening the intense training. By the end of the week, we had put the entire show on the field with music. It was ugly, but we had technically "finished" the show.

After a few more weeks of work, we went to our first competition. We performed well, earning the award for the competition's "Best Overall Effect". The entire marching band was proud of its success, and the result encouraged us to work even harder for our next competition. As it turned out, that hard work definitely paid off. In almost all of the subsequent competitions that we participated in, we earned the "Best Overall Effect" award that showcased our show's entertainment value.

Much like the previous year, our marching band season was shadowed by a nasty hurricane. Luckily, this time it occurred long after band camp, once we had mostly refined our show. Because of the hurricane, state championships were postponed a few weeks. We had a bit of trouble getting back on our feet after such a long period of not marching, but by the time the competition came around, we were ready.

The day of the competition, we arrived early in the morning to rehearse the show and make last-minute changes to perfect the exhibition. After loading ourselves onto the bus, we made our way to the state championships, adrenaline rushing through all of us. I won't forget marching onto the field with the knowledge that this single performance would determine the entire season's outcome. If we messed this one up, we threw out all of the work that we had done throughout the year.