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## Two Thousand Hours

### *One hour...*

I held my bag of clothes in one hand, and my saxophone in the other. I couldn't believe that I was finally here, at college, about to start my first day of band camp. With the help of my parents, I moved my stuff into my temporary dorm, gave them a tearful goodbye, and went down to start my new life.

*I have to do this right this time*, I thought. I walked down the twenty-or-so flights of stairs, and looked around at the chaos. Band people left and right, all holding signs depicting various instruments, shouting "Welcome to band camp!" excitedly. I looked around and saw a smaller circle of people, one holding a sign that read *Tenor Sax*. I took a deep breath and approached the group. This was it - this was the group of people that I would spend countless hours with. I would learn music, go set-to-set on drill, and wear the uniform with them. They could potentially become lifelong friends that I would share many experiences with. Maybe one of them would be my best friend in college, who knows?

In high school, I was known as the clarinet-playing-horse-loving-anime geek. But now, I would be known for my tasteful saxophone playing. I walked over with confidence, until the entire group turned to welcome me. They all were super excited to meet me, but my bravery reserves immediately depleted once their eyes were on me. Okay, maybe changing my whole personality would be harder than I thought.

### *Three hundred hours...*

I stood in line with the other tenor saxes, ready to take the field. The November air was chilly, but I was warm under my uniform. I was excited to play during this last performance, but as I watched the percussion march on the field, I felt a longing to be like them. The drumline was respected and everyone knew that they were just inherently and naturally cooler than the rest of the band. At least that's what my saxophone field staff had told me. They practiced more, and had a whole part of the show featured for them.

The drum major's whistle stopped my train of thought. Now was not the time to ponder, I had a show to perform. I gripped my saxophone with my gloved hands, and ran onto the field to play our opening *Music of Queen* medley. Saxophone is what people knew me for, and all of my new friends played saxophone. It would be crazy of me to switch to an instrument that I had never played before. I felt an urge inside me though, an urge to impress my peers by learning something new.

### *Five hundred hours...*

Okay, maybe I was a little crazy. I found myself holding a pair of cymbals, given to me by my new field staff in the parking lot outside of the band building.

For the second time, I was moving into college. It had been a while since I had stepped foot on the campus. This time it was deserted, with only a few people wandering around. Mostly health care workers with masks. My new section leader, Lauren, was also wearing a mask, and handed me the pair of cymbals from a safe distance.

“Here, you can use these and... I guess practice in your dorm room?” She told me, before turning and going back to her car. I hopped back in my mom’s car, holding the bag of cymbals on my lap. This was it, I was crazy enough to try and learn how to play percussion. After being cooped up at home for almost two semesters, I felt ready. People were going to like me, and I was going to impress them with learning how to play this instrument.

### *Five hundred and fifty hours...*

Okay, maybe I wasn’t ready. I stood in the middle of the band room, with the percussion director staring down at me. Our director is known across the country for his percussive skills, and he had just noticed that my feet were not in time.

He stopped the whole group and called me out. “Jackie, you need to play with your feet. If you don’t do that, you will never be able to play correctly.” His words stung, but were true. I could just imagine what the others in the room were thinking. They probably thought that I wasn’t serious about playing the cymbals, or that I wasn’t good enough to be there. I felt my eyes tear up, but I willed the tears away. *I couldn’t cry in front of all of them! That would make things even worse!* I thought to myself. I took a deep breath and nodded in response. I had a lot of practicing to do. I needed people to respect me, and hopefully this would only be a small setback.

### *One thousand hours...*

I counted the beats steadily in my head while I played. *One, Two, Prep, Back, CRASH, Two, Prep, Back, CRASH, Two, Three, Four...* I needed to be totally in tune with the music, or else I would mess up. The rest of my section and the drumline was equally as focused, all sections playing their unique parts that fit so perfectly when put together.

If I messed up, everyone would notice. I felt a rush of excitement while playing... Or maybe it was relief that I didn’t go to the wrong position, or that I didn’t play the sizzle too early? The crowd was the largest it had been for a football game yet. It was Homecoming, where many band alumni and family members would come watch us play our show.

I kept playing the *Pirates of the Caribbean* medley, until we got to the hardest part of the song. I mentally and physically prepared myself for the crash and... played it a bit too early. I could just imagine the disapproving stares that the percussion alumni were giving me, or the *hey guys, make sure that next time we don’t do that* that I would hear from my section leader after this performance.

### *One thousand and three hundred hours...*

When I hit my alarm at 5:30 am on a foggy october morning, I pulled myself out of bed. It was band day! The yearly event where almost two thousand high school band students would come to a UMass game and play music with us.

On the field, I was upbeat, but inside I felt nervous and anxious about how the day would go. I turned to look at the cymbals, and saw that they weren't in the correct drill spots for this part of the song. When I reminded them to go to the correct spot, I got a snarky remark from one of the new members, Alex. I didn't know what to do about him. He just did not seem to like me. I wanted to get to know him, but he just didn't seem to care that much about band or getting to know people.

After the rehearsal, I went up to the new percussion director. I felt like *I* was responsible for Alex enjoying band, and I just wasn't able to get him motivated. I asked my director what to do. After giving me some advice, he ended his talk with me by saying, "Jackie, you don't need to be best friends with everyone." Those words stuck with me for the rest of the season.

*Two thousand hours...*

On October 23rd, 2023, I sat down for a meeting with the other percussion field staff. I took out my phone with my meeting notes, and simply read them out loud. I told them about my opinions on a certain situation, and how I think that they (and I) should improve, in order to improve the experience of the rest of the percussion section.

One of the other field staff members shook his head in disagreement at one of my points. However, instead of stopping my speech, or even crying, I looked at him for a moment, and continued talking. It was okay that he didn't agree with me - I would find out soon in a moment, when he got a chance to share his ideas. But that would be *after* I finished talking. I wasn't going to stop because I was worried about his opinion. While this is a small improvement, my freshman year self would have burst into tears at the mere thought that someone didn't like me, no matter who they were. I did not have to get along with everybody. It was okay if someone didn't like me - if I didn't do anything wrong, it was *their* problem.

I took this mindset into my responsibilities outside of band. If I felt like I wasn't perfectly qualified for an internship, well, I might as well apply anyway. If I was stressing over an interview for too long, I should just focus on my qualifications and relax, and not worry about every tiny little thing that could go wrong. My two thousand hours in band have taught me to simply stop caring *so much*... if I cared too much about what others thought of me, I would spiral into a heap of emotions.