

Conquering Fear

by Kailey Wong

The lights dimmed and the blinding spotlights flashed almost mockingly in my face as I stood on the stage, overwhelmed by nerves. The familiar butterflies in my stomach awoke when a hundred pairs of eyes suddenly shifted to me. I struggled to hide the fierce pounding of my heart by feigning a serene smile. At that moment, rushing panic filled my heart as though I was drowning. I needed a way to escape the fear holding me back. Although it would not be easy, I would work to slowly break down the walls of my cage of fear.

For the longest time, I retained a paralyzing fear of performing. Although I had been playing at piano recitals, giving speeches, and performing at dance recitals regularly since I was three, appearing in front of others never became easier. A nagging worry always hovered in the back of my mind—I couldn't cope if everything went wrong and I publicly humiliated myself. As I grew older, my fear and insecurity festered and morphed into acute anxiety. Hours before any performance, I was incapacitated with worry. At its worst, I couldn't even muster the strength to eat. I was drowning in my fear, slowly sinking to the ocean floor. So when life threw me a rope to pull myself back to the surface of the water, I knew I had to take it.

Two summers ago, my church's Vacation Bible School (VBS) organizer contacted me to inquire if I would lead the VBS worship team. Fear immediately gripped me at the thought of singing and dancing on stage in front of a large audience. Leading the worship team seemed like such a daunting task. If anything went wrong, I would be ridiculed by my peers daily. Despite my reservations, I responded to the organizer with a resounding yes. Being the VBS worship

team leader was the perfect opportunity to slay the demon eating at my confidence: my fear of performing.

After a month of preparation for VBS, the first worship session finally arrived. As I waited for the students to enter, my anxious mind whispered that I might perform the wrong motions or sing out of tune. Everyone would make fun of me. Still, I had a job to complete. My team was relying on me to set a good example. I dove in headfirst, throwing caution to the wind and replacing my nervousness with budding confidence.

To my relief, the first worship session was a success, and the victory boosted my confidence. Thanks to volunteers' and teammates' words of encouragement, the rest of the week became a little less frightening. As the week progressed, I realized no one was truly judging me. It was okay to make mistakes. With each passing day, my insecurities were assuaged, and it became easier to let my fear go. When I simply lived in the moment, I discovered I could enjoy performing and embrace the thrill of uncertainty.

Although still present, the fear of performing that used to suffocate me has faded to a faint whisper in the corner of my mind. In the absence of its overbearing presence, my self-confidence has flourished. Now that fear has lost its grip on me, I can embrace new opportunities more readily. I have faith that my abilities and preparation will get me through. Even if I do make a mistake and embarrass myself, it is not the end of the world. Instead, it is an experience I can use to learn and grow. Ultimately, in all things big and small, I must learn to step out of my comfort zone. Only then will I be able to overcome my fears before they overcome me.