

Jack Reigeluth  
'Prancing Out of Your Comfort Zone'  
Tree Talk 07/11/2011  
Camp Pasquaney

I stood there in my spandex shorts, a white undershirt, and a pink fluttery tutu dreading the moment when the curtain would rise and I would prance out on the stage in front of my entire school. Thinking about all of those people looking at me as I humiliated myself terrified me. My parents were even in the audience, and I wondered if my father would be disappointed in having a ballerina for a son. I was so scared that I thought I was going to vomit. I became angry with myself for willingly stepping out of my comfort zone. I tried to think of a way out.

I have always had stage fright, and not just from dancing. I get so scared before school presentations, and always worry that I am going to make a fool of myself. I am even nervous about running announcements as COD, and I got so flustered once that I forgot Mike Hanrahan's name. It was awful. The entire camp looked on and laughed at me, as Mike called me over to his table and whispered his name in my ear. Ever since then I have always used the seating chart and hope that I am never a victim of the CO switch.

Well, with all of my fears and hatred of performing, why did I ever agree to dance in a pink tutu in front of the entire school? As I stood backstage, I was not sure. I tried to convince myself that it would not be a big deal to just walk away, but when I thought about the other dancers who were depending on me, I just could not do it. We spent hours on the choreography, and had been practicing for a month. There was just no way that I could bring myself to let them down. So, as the curtain rose and the song Hold Me Closer Tiny Dancer began to play, I took in a deep breath and pirouetted out to the front of the stage. The roar of applause from the audience gave me a renewed confidence, and all of the steps that I had meticulously rehearsed for the month prior came off perfectly. After the performance was over, I walked backstage and all of the other student who were performing gave me a high five.

Thinking back to that moment, I often wonder why I ever decided to dance in front of the entire school. Well, I guess that it started with me taking ballet. My football coach convinced me that it would help me with my footwork; however, I think he just wanted to amuse himself. During my first ballet practice he had his nose pressed against the window, and we eventually had to close the blinds, as his laughter was so loud we could barely hear the music. Now that I think back to it, my ballet instructor must have been the one. After seeing me dance during tryouts, she said told me that I was the most determined dancer that she had ever seen, but she also said I was the worst dancer too. So I obviously thought performing was a terrible idea. It seemed equal to humiliation and a plunge in the social hierarchy. While I cannot remember how she got me to do it, since the performance I found several reasons why stepping out of my comfort zone was a great idea.

By taking ballet and performing in front of the whole school I was doing something that truly challenged me. In high school, I created a comfort zone for myself by living up to my classmates expectations for me as a meathead. Everyone expected me to act a certain way and so I did. I was pretty much a real life version of Ollie Skjarsen. I lifted weights all the time. Did a minimum

amount of schoolwork, and played lots and lots of football. I even got yelled at by my coach on occasion, who unlike Bosch would use swear words all the time. The problem with my life was that everything was easy and predictable. And as Mr. Vinnie often quotes, “when life looks like easy street there is danger at your door.” Life was easy for me. As a result my relationships were shallow, and I never felt any real sense of accomplishment because I never was challenged. I always stayed in my comfort zone.

By taking ballet and performing up on stage, I struggled through something that I was not just bad, but terrible at; however, I got better. I started learning the steps, and even figured out the beat. I eventually could dance right in time with the rest of the ballerinas, and for the first time in a while felt a real sense of accomplishment. One of the greatest benefits of dancing though was that I started making friends with people that I had never met before, and had conversations that were entirely new to me. Taking ballet and performing up on stage opened up a whole other part of myself, and gave me a profound respect for the arts.

Most of all stepping out of my comfort zone gave me greater confidence. Since that performance I have had to go up on stage several times, and whenever I start to feel stage fright, I just think back to the moment when I finished dancing up there and remember the applause and joyous laughter of the audience.

After the performance, the next time I got up on stage actually was in this very spot. It was seven years ago. Both my brother and father had to sit me down and tell me the importance of giving a tree talk. I disagreed until my father told me that I just had no choice. I had to give one. The weeks leading up to it I was terrified, and once again tried to figure a way out. Remembering my previous success in dancing gave me hope, and while it was not the most eloquent speech ever delivered here, I got through it. Afterwards, I realized what a valuable opportunity it had been to think back on a bazaar incident when a football coach decided to stuff his mouth full of earthworms in an attempt to motivate his players.

While my tree talk made me feel great. I still fear getting up in front of a crowd, and that is probably why very few of you have ever seen me standing up here before. It took one serious guilt trip from Bubbles to convince me to get back up here again, and for that I thank him.

Here at Pasquaney we have constant opportunities to step outside of our comfort zone. On the ball field this was particularly true for me. During my first few summers, I played right field and each game dropped several pop flies, and had ground balls go through my legs. At the same time the supportive community of Pasquaney made me realize that it was OK to make mistakes, and as a result I went down to the ball field for most of my activity periods. During my last summer, one of my greatest friends was also a baseball enthusiast. He picked me for his team, and I was even good enough to move to center field. And while I still have never gotten a home run on Hobbs field (watch out boys this is going to be the summer), I have gotten on base a few times.

At camp, I especially take my hat off to boys going out on expeditions for the first time. For me there was nothing more difficult than going to the bathroom in the woods for the first time and sleeping on the ground. I love expeditions so much now though that I even chose to take trips

into the wilderness on my own. And in terms of going to the bathroom, I even chose to spend two years in India, a country that has very few toilets you can sit on and no toilet paper.

Outside of camp stepping outside of your comfort zone can be even more difficult. People are not always as nice to you, and are much less forgiving. This was definitely true for me in high school as I was too scared to take on any challenges and lead as a result a life without much meaning. It was only by stepping out of my comfort zone by taking ballet and performing on stage that I was able to feel a true sense of accomplishment. As Christie Mason once said, "We cannot become what we want to be by remaining what we are."