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Essay #1: Memoir

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Speak Up

For as long as I can remember, my voice has always been quiet. Throughout my life, people would ask me to either speak up, all because they could barely hear me. But even as I speak, sometimes my nerves would get the better of me and I would stutter and mutter to quickly that no one could understand a single thing I spoke. Other times, I would be told to speak in a lower tone, as I had a tendency of speaking in a high pitch, particularly by my grandpa. Even when I took extra speech classes, it was still an issue I had to deal with.

It was the year 2000 and it was the first day of school. I was dressed in a red shirt with white sleeves and the Teletubbies on the front, red leggings, white stockings, and black buckle shoes. My big sister, Sandra, or Sandi as she prefers, had a matching outfit, but her outfit was purple instead of red and she had a pair of pink sneakers. Mom helped with my hair, making two small braids from the sides of my head and tying them together at the back, which helped keep the rest of my hair back as I hated having my hair down since it kept getting in the way. She did the same hairstyle for Sandi.

As we drove to the elementary school from the family ranch, I was worried about being surrounded by complete strangers and away from everything familiar for who knows how many hours. I cling to my sister, who just happily held my hand as we arrived. It took some reassuring words from her and mom to convince me to even hop out of the car.

While the school itself was small, it was big enough for a number of kids from kindergarten to third grade, along with the few teachers and other faculty staff. The walls were a clean tan-ish color with colorful 80’s carpet that would be replaced in a few short years and soft dull blue cubbies for kids to store their belongings. There was a lot of chatter from parents, faculty, and, of course, the many kids. The constant noise was a lot different from the quiet and rustic ranch that I’d spend my life.

One of the closest doors to the entrance was Mrs. Casterson’s classroom, which was my stop. There weren’t that many kids present, but there were some that were already playing with the toys available while others were still clinging to their parents. I heard my sister cheerfully call out to Mrs. Casterson, a sweet lady with short curly hair that was fading from blonde to grey.

Mrs. Casterson happily greeted Sandi and mom before she put her attention on me. I nervously looked back to her as she knelt down to my level and greeted me sweetly. I gave a small wave as I softly, almost inaudible, said “Hello”.

My time in middle school was when I hardly spoke at all. Why would I? While the many bullies at the time made fun of my appearance from my eyes to my weight, they would then make fun of my voice as soon as I tried to speak up. Even when I would answer a question in class, I would see them glance toward me as they snickered. They would call it “mousy” and some would even insist that I should just keep my mouth shut and that no one wanted to listen to me anyway. The worst part about it is that I believed them.

It was eighth grade when I ended up enrolled in choir to fill up a time slot along with several others in my class, some of whom were thankfully some of the few friends I had. The choir class in question was located at the high school, which I didn’t visit much at the time unless it was for events, such as a music fair or the drug-free awareness event. While I loved singing, a horrible knot was forming in my gut and I started considering skipping class, just so I could avoid the possibility of being embarrassed by my voice. But I had never skipped class before and I knew I would get into trouble, so I ended up sticking it out.

But as I entered the music room with my friends, I almost completely forgot my fear as our new instructor, Mr. Anderson, greeted us with a warm smile and chipper attitude. And as the class began with a few warm-ups that consisted of silly songs, the fear was greatly diminished as everyone sang together, our voices a jumbled mess that was still enjoyable to listen to. Eventually, we were all sorted into Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass, depending on how high and low each one of us could sing. I was placed in the Soprano section and amongst those that could sing the highest. From there, each day became easier for me to sing with everyone and I began to feel better my voice and feel it grow stronger.

I continued taking choir throughout most of my time in high school. It was in my sophomore year when I was chosen along with several others for solo parts for an upcoming Disney themed choir concert that the school was hosting. My part would be the opening bit for “I won’t say I’m in Love” from *Hercules*. We practiced for almost two months in class. When I was home, I would sing as I did homework or chores or even just hum the song as I played games with my siblings; basically, almost every minute. I was even starting to drive my siblings crazy with how often I was singing it.

Eventually the night came of the concert. All the choir members were dressed in white and black with nothing like jewelry to catch off the spotlights or high heels so no one would end up tripping. I had a simple white blouse, black formal pants, and black flat shoes. I let my curly brown hair down so it rested on my shoulders while a white headband helped keep it from getting in the way.

After the bands and middle school choir gave their performances, it was my groups turn to take the stage. We got to our places and sang our first song “Little April Showers” with ease. Afterwards, Mr. Anderson announced the next song and I stepped out from the choir.

Once amongst 23 members, now standing in front of a microphone with anyone, not even my friends, beside me. It seemed only then I noticed how many people were staring at me. I tried rationalizing with myself, saying that I shouldn’t be nervous about people staring at me now that I have been performing in choir for three years now. But then my rational thoughts became overshadowed by one thought that had entered my mind: I couldn’t be judged harshly or critically when I sang with the choir as we were a collective of voices harmonizing together… but now I could be.

I tried looking about to see my family, in the hope that might help calm by nerves, but I couldn’t, even when I could only moments ago when I was with the rest of the choir. I felt my heart flutter against my chest as I continued to try. As I did so just barely heard Mr. Anderson play a few keys on the piano, giving me by que, but I didn’t sing then.

I quickly realized my mistake as I looked over to my instructor, and quickly apologized, trying to keep a smile on my face, even when I so clearly messed up. There were a few small chuckles from the audience and Mr. Anderson gave an understanding nod. As quickly as I could, I took a deep breath, hoping that it would somehow get rid of some of my nerves. Mr. Anderson played the que again and this time, I sang.

After the concert, my parents were quick to reassure me that I had only made a small mistake and that I gave a wonderful performance. I didn’t think it was small at the time and thought I messed up the whole thing. It was only when Mr. Anderson told me that performers are bound to have a few “hiccups” and that it was nothing to worry about when I finally decided that it was ok.

It has gotten easier to speak and communicate with others since then. The stuttering only shows up when I get to nervous or scared, but other than that, I haven’t had much of a problem. I’m still quiet out of habit, but I am more willing to speak to others without fearing that I might be ridiculed for how my voice sounds. I may not be in choir anymore, but I continue to sing almost every day. I can feel my voice getting better with each passing day and I feel better for it. My voice has its own unique ring that can chime with others into a harmony or echo loud and clear for all to hear.