

Leah Wright

February 13, 2019

MCGC Scholarship Essay

### Turning Points

I see my life as a series of turning points.

After five years of color guard with Novi High School, I found my fresh start as a freshman at Michigan State University, in the Spartan Marching Band. I had my mind set on performing with State of Art during the winter of 2017, but after I'd auditioned, and after every other winter guard in Michigan held theirs, State of Art folded for the 2017 season. We'll call this Turning Point #1.

Everything I knew about color guard had been constant up until this point. I would march on the field in the summer and fall, and in the gym in the winter and spring. Over, and over, and over. Nobody ever folded on me – this was late 2016 and I hadn't spent a winter not spinning since 2011. I didn't know anything else.

By some immaculate stroke of luck, I found myself auditioning at an Interplay A rehearsal. The organization had already held auditions, picked their teams, and yet took a chance on an 18-year-old from across the state for reasons I still don't know.

On that day in November of 2016, I was tired, sore, and terrified. I had dreamed of Interplay since I was in eighth grade, watching "Love is an Army" with wide eyes and a fast heart.

On that day in November, I was pulled out into the hallway after I auditioned, and told to pick out my uniform, and then to "go back in the gym and finish rehearsal with your team."

This, we'll call Turning Point #2. Thus began the best two years of my life – which continues to be an immense understatement.

I started that season surrounded by 29 strangers, but it wasn't long before I looked forward to seeing the strangers every weekend, before I started to miss them on the weekdays. I found solace in

the various gyms on the west side of the state, sleeping on air mattresses in middle school choir rooms.

After the season of a lifetime, there was nothing stopping me from going back – I’d found home. Until, in August of that same year, Interplay cut the A team. This was not so much a turning point, but more like a major bump in the road. An enormous pothole, that gave me a flat tire for a bit. Regardless, nothing – not even the disappearance of something I loved so much – could keep me from performing again. I threw everything I had into my audition for Interplay World.

The season that followed was the most difficult thing I’ve ever done, but it was a dream. I remember on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018 standing on the floor as a world class finalist in UD Arena, under the confetti with all the people I loved most in the world, thinking only about how happy I was to be alive, and to be right here, right now. This was, without a doubt, the happiest day of my life.

Interplay Winterguard folded on June 16, 2018. Going into my junior year of college, I was just about done with thinking my early-adult life would have any more turning points, positive that my heart couldn’t take another one. But this, the most jarring and powerful of them all, was Turning Point #3.

On the wall of my bedroom, there’s a photo of Interplay from World Finals. Written on the back, in thin ballpoint pen, are the words: “It was a love so strong that made me wonder, ‘Would my heart still beat on its own?’”

For a long, long time, I did not think that it would.

For a long time, I was frustrated with the color guard world. I didn’t have the words to address the hole in my heart that Interplay had left. Why did I love something so much that constantly hurt me, leveled me, and forced me to start over?

I auditioned for State of Art in November of 2018. Nothing, not even the disappearance of something I loved so much, could keep me from performing again.

The funny thing about these turning points, is they seem to be cyclical – purposefully landing me back where I began. They gave me the journey of a lifetime, and then returned me back home.

I am still here. I am writing this, addressing the hole in my heart. I am still going, and still growing. I plan to be here for as long as I can, whether it be performing at a high level or coaching a young team. The lessons I've learned through this beautiful madness are lessons I wouldn't have gotten anywhere else.

Ideal applicants, and others applying for this scholarship, are dedicated to the activity they love. They probably have their own stories of being thrown around in the color guard world for a little bit, too. But I know that my journey within the circuit and this activity has taught me not only to roll with the punches, but roll with the U-turns, the spin-outs, the crashes. Keep going and enjoy the ride. Sometimes love doesn't come pouring out of us, but it's something that we must come back to, and constantly work on.

I have demonstrated my commitment to the activity by changing and adjusting my anticipated paths, trying new things, and consistently moving forward. As I transition into my senior year at Michigan State, this scholarship would continue to ensure the financial component of my participation. This would be a credential I would carry with me for the rest of my life, giving me the confidence to pursue performance in the future.

So, would my heart still beat on its own? No. The turning points have led me home, and it beats here, surrounded by the people who supported me when I left to drive across the state every weekend. It beats with whomever is on the floor on Saturday nights, from October to April. It never beats alone.