

Why music? Music is a passion that has always been innate in me. My father served in the Army Band for over 20 years, so it was plain to see that I was immersed in music since before birth. After a few moves to foreign countries, something became apparent to me. Foods, lifestyles, transportation, and languages are different in every country of the world, but music is the same no matter where one travels. This became a comfort to me through my frustrations of traveling. A simple melody can emote any feeling desired by the composer and is interpreted in the same general sense by its listener. Whether the listener is Christian or Muslim, German or American, the melody is the same. Music is heard sounding from a cathedral, walking the streets of Germany, as well as blasting out of the speaker of a convertible in Virginia. Music is universal.

I have sat through hundreds of concert performances since I was born. When I was just a toddler, I am told that I would get up in the middle of the concert and start conducting the band from my seat! I would sit intently and listen to the sweet melodies that sounded through the concert halls, tapping my toes along. I remember longing for the day that I would get an instrument of my own. At eight years old, I was given my first instrument – a trumpet. My small apartment in Germany was filled with blasting, not-so-beautiful music, but it was music nonetheless. At age twelve, I made an instrument my own – a French horn. I would sit in my room, hours on end, figuring out the fingerings and what the perfect embouchure was. My first year at Poquoson Middle School in seventh grade, I was instantly first chair above four other horns, without private lessons or instruction. The band director was blown away and said that I had a gift. That was when my passion for music truly began to soar.

It was during my sophomore year of high school that I made the life-changing decision to pursue music as a career. I considered many other occupations, but when I took a look at my life, there was one thing that remained constant through every change I encountered – music. From that self-realization moment on, I threw myself into my music studies. I took a music theory course at my school, two choir classes, two band classes, and private lessons on top of everything. My practice time was at the top of my list of my priorities every day. It was when I told my high school band director about my plans that I knew I was doing the right thing. "Teaching music is your calling, Brianna," his encouraging words echo through my head every day.

When I was appointed as the marching band's drum major in my senior year, not only did I learn valuable lessons, I truly grew up. My band director relies heavily on student leadership within the band. I never realized how heavily until he handed me a stack of checks and receipts to fill out, alphabetize, and turn in. He continued to give me the most arduous and tedious of tasks. It did not take long to come to the understanding that being a leader is not about being in the spotlight - it is about giving everything one has for the sake of others. I showed up for rehearsals one or two hours early every day, and I was always the last one to leave. I made sacrifices left and right during my summer to assure that everything was in check for band. During band camp,

it was my responsibility to make sure everything was happening when it was supposed to happen. I went from taking care of the four members of my French horn section to taking care of the entire band. It was not long before I realized that being a drum major had little to do with conducting and shouting commands, but instead had a lot to do with setting the example and being a role model. I did not see myself as above the mass of the band; I saw myself as an equal with an abundance of responsibility weighing on my shoulders. I experienced a few instances of heartache where a band member would disagree with something I told him or her to do. Rather than breaking down, I learned how to compromise and cope with conflicting forces.

After marching band season, my band director entrusted his beginning band class to me and allowed me to teach them the fundamentals of music every day in class. It seemed like the class was learning a lot from me, but I was truly learning from them. They taught me that in order to receive respect, one must give respect. I learned how to be a strong role model, both in musicianship and in life. Ultimately, I was able to see them grow into strong musicians, knowing that I played a key role in it. When I heard the class play their rhythm exercises without skipping a beat, perform their circle of fourths without cracking one note, and play through their concert pieces with incredible tone, that was it. I knew that I was where I was supposed to be.

I look at where my life is headed, and I cannot help but smile. I see a life full of band rehearsals, private horn students, my very own band members, and concerts. A life full of music is one that I would love to lead. During my four years of high school, I took every class possible that involved music. However, many Advanced Placement courses, extracurricular activities, and hours of studying got in the way. Now that I am headed toward Virginia Commonwealth University to major in music education, I can finally fill my days with music. Why music? Well, for me, there has never been anything but music.