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College Writing and Research

Narrative Essay

Band Camp, Sprinkles, and the Day We Saved a Life

The phrase “band camp” has a variety of social connotations, many of which originate in the movie *American Pie*. Although some members of my high school marching band may have wished real life was more like *American Pie*, band camp is actually a lot of work. To a true band geek, the mere mention of band camp brings back memories of blistering heat, backbreaking freeze drills, and, if you attended Adel-Desoto-Minburn High School in the summer of 2009, Sprinkles.

Adel is a small town on US Highway 169 in central Iowa. Renowned for brick streets that always seemed to be in need of repair, Adel is the type of sleepy midwestern town that seems to inspire stereotypes. The only stoplight in town was home to three gas stations, and was a three-minute drive from the high school. During our scarce ten-minute water breaks, it was not uncommon for upperclassmen who actually had their driver’s licenses to make the three-minute drive to the store, spend four minutes in air conditioned comfort, and return with a variety of caffeinated beverages, along with the occasional gallons of milk for the ever-popular and disgusting milk-chugging contest. On one such journey, they returned with something that would later become a thing of legend: Sprinkles.

The band had just been granted a ten-minute water breaks. As we collapsed in the corner of the dugout, and attempted to catch our breath, my group of freshmen noticed a group of upperclassmen climbing into a late model, faded blue pickup truck belonging to our drum major. We watched jealously as they drove away, as none of us were old enough to drive. What seemed

like a minute later, we heard our director begin to shout. “Thirty seconds,” roared Mr. Braun from his throne, really a platform perched on top of the shed used for softball equipment. Our practice field was really a softball diamond, and was about ten yards short of a football field on either side, a fact we were grateful for as we attempted to scurry back to our designated places before we earned ourselves a freeze drill. A freeze drill is a popular form of torture used by band directors when their students fail to meet their lofty expectations. The unfortunate students are forced to stand at attention, with feet at a specified angle, head up, and back straight. If Mr. Braun was exceptionally cranky, he would call us to attention, where we would have to have our instruments in playing position. It was difficult, and we were all eager to avoid such punishment. Unfortunately, the absence of our drum major, who served as a student director, guaranteed Mr. Braun would notice the missing group. Sure enough, as Mr. Braun glared across the field, his bald head shining in the sun as he removed his hat to get a better look, he shouted, “Where is Steven?” As if on cue, the faded blue truck appeared, speeding toward us like a raging bull. It rumbled to a stop, and out tumbled our drum major, four other section leaders, and... Sprinkles.

Sprinkles was a medium-sized, mixed-breed dog with a golden yellow, somewhat shaggy coat. No one knows who named her Sprinkles, but it seemed to fit. Band lore says they spotted her begging for food outside the gas station. Not wanting to leave her in the busiest part of town, they decided to do the logical thing: kidnap her and bring her to Band Camp.

This was undoubtedly the friendliest stray dog I've ever seen, and being dropped in the middle of a marching band was a dream come true for her. Like a canine lightning bolt, she dashed from the flute section to the percussionists to the trombones to the trumpets. We all rushed to pet her, and in that moment, Mr. Braun completely lost control of the band. We were all under the spell of this little dog, who minutes before had been alone in the world. Mr. Braun

climbed down, shouting at us to return to our spots. Sprinkles ran up to him. As he looked down at her, he smiled, and reached down to pet her. By the time he looked up, we had all rushed back to our spots. Mr. Braun seemed to forget about freeze drills as he climbed the ladder back to his throne. Sprinkles settled at the front of the band, near his perch. She almost appeared to be smiling.

As the day carried on, we began to notice Sprinkles had a problem. More specifically, a problem with her digestive system. As we dashed from one set to the next with terrifying speed, we heard an uproar on the other side of the field. I looked over from my spot in the trumpet section, assuming someone had fallen. My gaze halted the scene of the chaos, also known as the flute section, to see Sprinkles the dog depositing liquidy landmines all over the practice field. It appeared one of the flute players, all of whom were too cool for the tan lines inevitably acquired during a week of band camp and who thus lacked shoes, had landed in one of the presents. For the second time that day, the band was in an uproar. This time, everyone (except the flutes) laughed hysterically, until we realized we too, would have to brave the now sullied landscape of the front left corner of our practice field. After scrambling to find sticks to mark the 'no march zone' we watched in dismay and slight amusement as she proceeded to make her way around the field. We continued marking the dog poop until the field resembled either a hairbrush or a medieval spike pit. As the day wore on, the temperature rose, and the field began to emit a nauseating odor. As the smell crept ever closer to unbearable, we began to wonder how we would possibly survive the day.

To our relief, Mr. Braun decided we should practice parade marching for the upcoming Sweet Corn Festival, rather than risk our lives on the field. Sprinkles followed along as we perfected the art of maintaining straight lines around a turn, and taught the freshman even the

straight parts of the road were treacherous. At least once a year, someone fell either because they tripped in a basketball-sized pothole in the red brick road, or stumbled over a 'bump,' which usually meant they fell over their own feet. This year, the honor belonged to a red-headed freshman known as Raspberries. Sprinkles rushed over to make sure he was ok, and we carried on without incident, once we stopped laughing.

The marching section of band camp was drawing to a close. After lunch, we would head to the band room for another four delightful hours of jaw busting practice to perfect the instrumental side of our show. As the band began to dissipate, a small group remained on the field. My friends and I looked at our Sprinklers, who was perturbed at the unexpected disappearance of all her new friends. "Well," I said. "We can't just leave her here. What if she gets hit by a car?" We glanced down at her again, and as she stared up at us, I felt my heart break. I heard someone say, "I think the vet clinic down the road does something with the Animal Rescue League. I'll call them and check." A few minutes later, we were informed the clinic worked with the shelter, and could take her. We loaded Sprinkles into the car, and reluctantly took her to the clinic. "Borrowing" one of the saxophone player's neck straps as a makeshift leash, we led her inside, where she was whisked away by the receptionist. The receptionist returned to see a group of disheveled, slightly smelly group of high schoolers still standing in her waiting room. She smiled at us, and said, "Don't worry, kids. She'll be fine. We'll find her a good home." As we slowly made our way back to the car, I glanced back, and whispered to myself, "I really hope so."

A few days later, near the end of band camp, Mr Braun gathered us up inside for an announcement. We sat, uninterested, as he began to speak. "As many of you know, our weimaraner wasn't adjusting well to life with our little girl. With a new baby on the way, we

had to find her a new home. My wife and I have been talking about getting a new dog.” By this point, the entire band had perked up considerably, and was now hanging on his every word. He continued, “We took Taylor (his daughter) to the Adel Vet Clinic so she could meet Sprinkles. She loved her, and since Sprinkles is officially a stray and in need of a new home, we will be adop...” The last word was drowned out by the cheers of the entire band, many of whom used their instruments to express their exuberance.

Sprinkles remains a much loved member of the Braun family. When his youngest daughter was born, we heard stories of a faithful companion standing watch while the baby slept, and his office was littered with pictures of his older daughter, Taylor, playing dress-up with her new best friend, Sprinkles. Once a year, Mr. Braun brings Sprinkles back to band camp, healthy and strong. She runs around the marching field, and smiles in a way only a dog can. Every once in a while, if my friends and I happen to find ourselves in Adel, passing a big yellow house, we can hear a dog bark, children laugh, and know we were there when Sprinkles found her forever home. We turn to each other, and say, “Remember that one time at band camp...”