

ENG 100: Third Place

Cheerleading Helped Me in Life

By Toni Carpenter

Do you have a passion for a sport? Ever since I was young, I have always wanted to cheer. I started cheering when I was 7 years old but slowly stopped when I turned 18, my senior year of high school. The cheerleading team was a group that made me feel like I belonged somewhere. I enjoyed creating bonds with my teammates and close friends. It was fun sharing a passion with others and doing the things that we all loved to do. Cheerleading helped me overcome my fears, motivated me to do my best, taught me life lessons, and created strong bonds with others.

Cheerleading made me a very strong person not just physically but mentally. It helped me overcome a lot of my fears. One thing that I was terrified of in cheer was throwing my back handspring. I had always wanted to do it, but I had a bad mental block because I thought that I was going to get seriously injured if I didn't do it correctly. I would go to open gyms to work on it and over time I got better and gathered the courage to do it in front of everyone. My coaches kept pushing me harder because they knew that I could do it, but I was afraid. The day I finally threw it I was so relieved. If it wasn't for my coaches or my teammates, I wouldn't have been able to overcome my fear of throwing my back handspring.

Being on the cheer team also motivated me to do my best in the sport and academically. In order to stay on the team, you had to maintain at least a 2.5 GPA and earn grades above a D. If your GPA were to fall below a 2.5 and you earned an F in any class, you would be put on "academic probation" for two weeks. If the grade wasn't brought up within the two weeks, you would be removed from the team. This pushed me to do my best in my classes because I didn't

want to get to the point where I was struggling to balance the sport with school. Within cheerleading itself, our coaches played a big part in the motivation aspect of it. Anytime one of us felt discouraged about doing something, our coaches would calm us down and talk through it. On occasion, there would also be an incentive such as leaving practice early or giving us treats.

Although being a cheerleader may seem easy to others, we had a lot of rules to follow and were very disciplined. One rule that we had was if someone was late to practice, they would have to run for the amount of time that person was running late. For instance, if I came into practice 5 minutes late, I would have to do a 5-minute run around the gym. Another rule was that we could not wear our warm-up outfits to school except for game days. Our warm-up outfits consisted of sweatpants and a bedazzled jacket with our names on them. Since our school had a strict dress code, our coaches were required to submit a form that requested for us to wear our warm-ups to school that day. If one cheerleader was caught wearing a piece of their warm-up outfit on a non-game day, we would have to condition the following practice.

There are many skills that people need in life, and one of those is cooperation. Cheerleading has taught me so much about how to work as a team and it has made me stronger as a person. Although it would get annoying when we all got penalized just because of one person that wasn't doing what they were supposed to, it taught me a lot. This taught the team how to work together to make sure that everyone was on the same page and communicate with one another. If one member of the team looked horrible while cheering, it would make the team look bad as a unit.

Throughout cheer, I've caught onto many of the words we used on a daily basis. One word that we always use is "full-out." "Full-out" basically means that we do our whole routine will all of the stunts and tumbling included. We usually do these during the practices leading up

to our competitions. It's so tiring because we have to do them over and over until the routine is perfected. Another word that we used is "sharp," which means that a person should hit every move very strong and clean. My coach used to always have us hold a motion and she would come by and try to push our arms to see how strong we were. This helped us improve our form and techniques for the games and competitions.

We had many ways to communicate with one another on the team. We had two different group chats. One group chat was with all of the cheerleaders and the coaches and the other one was just the cheerleaders. If there were things that we wanted to discuss as a team, we would talk about it in the coach's group chat. But if we had simple questions like what bow to wear, then we would text in the team group chat. We also had a team Instagram and Twitter account. The coaches use those accounts to post pictures of the team and videos of stunts. This is a way to show the team's progress from the start of the season to the end. This is also a way to motivate others to try out for the team just by looking at what we do.

While I was on the team, we made so many memories. One significant event that I will never forget is the day I fell at our football game. During the senior night football game, I was doing a cheer and all of a sudden, I caught a big charley horse in my calf. I fell to the ground and started crying and laughing in pain. Everyone rushed over to me and tried to help out. My parents ran to the track as soon as they saw everyone crowding around. I had so much going on way before the game that I didn't get a chance to stretch very well. After the fact, we all started laughing because I realized how dramatic I made the whole situation. There are many memories that were made over the years, but this one will never be forgotten.

Cheerleading has helped form me into the woman I am becoming today. Not only am I physically stronger from lifting girls my size into the air, but my mindset is stronger. I learned

how to work with others in order to perfect different techniques. It motivated me to do my absolute best on my schoolwork and within the sport. It also offered the opportunity to create bonds with people and make close friends. Although I have been cheering for quite some time, I don't think I will pursue it in college. Cheerleading takes a lot of time and commitment, and I don't want it to interfere with my work as much. But I might consider trying out once I get adjusted to my college life and workload.