

# Celebrating Writers and Writing in our Communities

---

Volume 1

Issue 1 *Celebrating Writers and Writing in our  
Communities*

Article 36

---

October 2019

## Conquering the Stage

L Grace Bugnacki

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/rwc>

---

### Recommended Citation

Bugnacki, L Grace (2019) "Conquering the Stage," *Celebrating Writers and Writing in our Communities*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 36.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/rwc/vol1/iss1/36>

This Narrative is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons @ Humboldt State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Celebrating Writers and Writing in our Communities* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Humboldt State University. For more information, please contact [kyle.morgan@humboldt.edu](mailto:kyle.morgan@humboldt.edu).

# Conquering the Stage

**By: L. Grace Bugnacki**

When I was three years old, I asked my parents for a violin. We were sitting in a church pew and my oldest sister's best friend was playing her violin in a musical number during Sacrament Meeting. I don't remember how long it was after that Sunday, or how many more times I asked for a violin until I got one, but I remember being in awe as I sat next to my mom on her bed as she unzipped the black violin case, revealing the dark Irish green velvet that surrounded the holy instrument that I played religiously without lessons for three years. I thank my mother often for never telling me to stop playing my violin, even though for some three odd years I had no idea how to play; I was just sawing the instrument with my bow, putting my fingers down on random places on the strings and thinking to myself, "Wow, I must be as good as Mozart!" I wasn't nearly as good as Mozart and I'm still not.

I didn't start getting violin lessons until I was six or seven years old. In the town I grew up in, most successful student musicians began taking lessons when they were three. So by the time I started violin lessons, I was a few years behind. I was fortunate enough to be taught by a patient and loving teacher who never once told me I that I was behind the rest of the kids my age. I remember my first recital vividly, I was one of the first students to perform. I was scheduled to play early on in the recital, sandwiched between two five-year-olds. Later during the recital I

watched a boy two years older than me play a Bach Concerto. But that didn't bother me at the time, I was completely oblivious to the years of experience and work that had separated me from the rest of the kids in my age group. I didn't even fully realize how behind I was until I was ten years old.

Every year, the youth music program that I was part of put on a student "Bach Concert", in which students only played pieces by Bach, to honor and celebrate him and his influence in our music and education. I was playing in the Children's Ensemble which had students from about the age of two months to twelve. During a rehearsal I was placed next to a girl who couldn't be more than five. The young girl looked at the music which I had on the stand in front of me, music covered with the names of the notes and their fingerings. She squinted her eyes, first at the music and then me. Then, in the most innocently judgmental tone I have probably ever heard in my life so far, she asked, "You don't know how to read music?" She said it so loudly, loud enough for the whole ensemble to hear, and I was MORTIFIED. I was so flustered and caught off guard that I lied to her, saying that my music was from a few years ago when I was still learning how to play, but honestly, I just barely knew how to read music. I remember during the concert I stood on the stage, looking out at the daunting audience and feeling so insecure standing with the ensemble who I felt was judging me deeply, because of how behind I was. I later had a rather mean girl who was also in the ensemble tell me that I was exceedingly far behind in music when compared to her and her friends. I felt awful and embarrassed. Quite honestly, I didn't want to play anymore because I felt judged and out of place for starting violin so late and not being as good as everyone else. But my

parents never let me quit. They never told me I was bad or not good enough. They were constantly reminding me that I had so much potential.

When I was twelve my family moved to Eureka, where I was enrolled at Zane Middle School. Eureka City Schools has a music program, which was something my previous school district didn't have. So because of this, I got to take music classes at school. I didn't feel as judged in the school orchestra and it wasn't long before I lost my fear of being behind. It was during this time that I actually began excelled to be more than I ever thought I would be in music. In the seventh grade, Mr. McCay, my music teacher at Zane placed me in the First Violin section, which was something he had never done before. In eighth grade, I was placed as First Chair Violin, which made me the Concert Mistress. In Middle School this title doesn't mean much, but I was very proud of holding this title. At the end of my eighth grade year, my fellow orchestra members voted for me to receive the Outstanding Musician award which was given out to one orchestra student every year. During my freshman year, I played in the first violin section, which was uncommon for a freshman to do. I also taught myself how to play the viola, which I never imagined myself doing. When my sophomore year came around, I got placed as First Chair Violin, which once again gave me the title of Concert Mistress, and this time, the title meant more. It not only meant that I was a distinguished violinist, but I was the leader and someone that the rest of the orchestra could look up to.

In the spring of my sophomore year, the orchestra traveled to Chico to participate in an instrumental festival. It wasn't until our guide was leading me and the rest of the orchestra to the stage

that I realized something, that I had been on this stage before. It was the stage I performed on at the Bach Concert, when the five year old exposed me to the whole ensemble. For a brief moment as I took my seat on the stage, I felt terrified and incompetent. I felt all of the fear that I had previously let go of, rush back into me. I felt like I was nine again, unable to read music and embarrassed to be so behind. But then I looked at the music, which I could read fluently with no issues, and I looked at looked at my fellow students who were looking up to me. That's when I realized that I had come a long way since that Bach Concert when I was nine years old. I still wasn't a violin virtuoso, but I was able to recognize the progress which I had made because I didn't give up or quit when I felt so behind and discouraged. I was able to once again let go of all of my fears and perform in pieces in front of me.

I performed on this stage twice. This stage is nothing special. People don't come from all around the world to perform on this stage. But to me, this stage symbolizes growth. It symbolizes confidence and success. To me this stage is hope. To me this stage is potential. I don't know if I'll ever get to perform on this stage again, but I know that if I do, I will be even better than I was last year and that's because I won't ever give up, I'll conquer all of my fears, and I will never forget that I am capable of reaching my potential.