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Self-Designed Honors Experience Reflection

For my fourth Honors Experience, I attended The School of Nashville Ballet's Summer Intensive program, which ran from June 18, 2017 to July 20, 2017. This was a five-week training camp for Ballet, and I originally attended with the intention of securing a job contract with Nashville Ballet's Second (i.e. Junior) company. Unfortunately, these aspirations were halted immediately whereupon I sprained a knee that had been badly injured in the same way at an audition in the early months of 2016. The timing could not have been worse, and it metamorphosed what should have been a tiring, but engaging and opportune few weeks into a real struggle for me. It was certainly unintentional, but this drastic change in my plans for this experience certainly distinguished it from my previous honors experience at the Washington Ballet Summer Intensive. While difficult in practice, I am grateful for the lessons I will take away from this experience.

To begin at the true beginning of this experience is to describe the audition process which began in February of 2017. Taking place in Columbus at the Ballet Met Rehearsal studios, and after another, similar audition for Atlanta Ballet's intensive, I took class with about 45 other young dancers aged about 14 to 23. A full-time faculty member at the school, Nicole Koenig, was both the proctor and teacher. I could go into more explicit detail, but the audition was as stereotypical as you would imagine: pin on a number and try not to mess up at all for two hours. Obviously, I was successful in this process and was accepted into the program.

After driving south from Cincinnati and arriving in the dorms in Nashville on the Sunday before classes were to begin, I was more than ready to get started. However,

during petit allegro (small jumps) in the first technique class on Monday, My knee popped out of it's socket, damaging the ligaments on the medial side of my knee. So instead of spending five weeks in an extended audition for the ballet company, I spent 5 weeks on crutches and in physical therapy. To be perfectly honest, I was devastated. The loss of the thousands of dollars in non-refundable tuition and rent only compounded the emotional turmoil I went through, especially that first week. Since the injury was one I had experienced before, I had no misconceptions about the long and difficult recovery process I would need to go through, and I dreaded it. I didn't know If I was strong enough to watch my friends and roommates get contracts while I couldn't even walk and was in constant pain.

So, with my original goals and expectations thoroughly pulverized, I needed to find new ones – something that I could use to stay motivated. I settled on busying myself with the most efficient recovery possible. I got a month-long membership to Vanderbilt University's gym and swam laps three or four times a week in the evenings. During the day, I observed all the dance classes and took copious notes. I went to physical therapy twice a week and did all my prescribed exercises religiously.

Needless to say, the packed schedule was exhausting, but it still gave me plenty of time to consider the choices that I had made leading up to the injury what I would do going forward. There is a joke often thrown around among dancers, that we wonder why we do this to ourselves. There is a great contradiction in considering this when injured as that does not appear when one is able to dance. The physical pain of an injury is usually far less than the pain of not being able to dance, as if the absence is a gaping hole in the soul itself. It's maddening. And yet, it was dance that caused all the pain and

sorrow in the first place. I wondered if the effort it was taking to recover as a dancer was worth it even as I *needed* to recover, *needed* to be able to move my body freely once again. If I learned anything about myself over the course of this experience, it was that the pain is worth it. I'm still dancing because I am convinced it will always be worth it, and as of the end of this experience, I have an awareness of this conviction within myself.

At the risk of appearing falsely philosophical, I think that this moral is important outside the realm of a ballet career as well as within it. The understanding that fulfillment is worth depression, that joy is worth sorrow, is important when confronting any kind of personal or professional obstacle.