

## I Am More

"We are exhausted, and sick, and stressed. Being done with all of it is the best solution. We can't handle it anymore: we hate gymnastics and we want to quit." Our throat tightened as the words stumbled out of our mouth.

"You are going to be fine," Our mom babbled, dismissing the idea in its entirety, with her words slurred and eyes tinted pink from crying. "We are so proud of you!" The feeling of the room getting smaller and closing in on us was paralyzing, as if the dark walls were shrinking, but we have no way out.

"Easy for you to say, you're not the one doing the sport! It feels like we're fine, then we get to practice and realize that we absolutely hate it with every ounce of our being, and we can't take any more of it," we hissed, with hot, crystal tears running down our face between short gasps of air.

Our irrational actions were tearing ourself and our family apart, and something needed to be done.

"I, get in the car, we are going to Bend to talk to Dan Hicks, Jill's husband." Our Mother blatantly stammered with a slight, crooked smile on their face as if she was apprehensive of what would come next.

"Why do we need to talk to our coach's husband?" We bitterly exclaimed.

"They are a sports psychiatrist. Talking to them will help you. The issues you're having at gymnastics will be solved!"

"How are they going to help us? They know nothing about us." A feeling of unease rushed over us like the sweep of a curtain.

"You need to get to know them so they can help you. You are having a mental break down almost daily; you are so tired that you don't even want to get up to go to school, and you keep getting sick. It's time to do something about it."

Four dull hours later, we arrived at the unfamiliar counselor's office on a luminous, snow covered day in Bend. Dan greeted us with a warm welcome and an inviting smile, but the dejected and hesitant feelings hung around inside our brain. Although we knew that our problems were more substantial than just being scared to throw a skill, admitting it audibly was mortifying, and someone else's irrelevant opinion wouldn't make matters

better - or so we thought. After contentedly chatting about the weather and getting a cup of steaming tea from the machine in the corner of the calm and cozy office, we sat down to talk.

The session began, and both of us introduced ourselves, and we explained that we were having a lot of trouble at gymnastics because of intense mental blocks. This feeling also followed us outside of practice, and this made it impossible to think rationally. It felt as if a gloomy storm cloud was directly above us everywhere we went, and precisely when we decided to forget it all and be happy, the cloud poured down with heavy, destructive rains. Additionally, our mother was concerned with all of the stress we have been putting on ourself to be perfect. Dan asked us to tell them about ourself. Our response was that we were a 13-year-old girl who does gymnastics at the Multnomah Athletic Club. They proceeded to address the question again, "So, who are you?"

In this moment, we were perplexed. We contemplated this, then came to the dreary conclusion that we had no idea what Dan was attempting to disclose. Because we thought we had already answered the question, again we explained, "We are a 13-year-old girl who goes to Twality Middle School and does gymnastics at the MAC."

Dan continued to respectfully respond, "Okay. So who are you *really*?"

The senseless thoughts running through our head made us feel flustered. *We're not even good enough for a therapist to understand. We can't even please the person whose job it is to fix people's problems.* We couldn't fathom what they were trying to convey, so we sat there in silence for a bit, staring at the dust bunnies tumbling around on the ground and taking shallow, sobbing breaths, still leftover from the car ride. Dan clarified their question.

"What do you like to do?"

*That's an easy one, finally, something I can answer,* we thought. "Um, we guess we enjoy, reading, drawing, playing the violin, doing gymnastics, listening to music, hanging out with friends, and going to school." After we revealed this, Dan's eyes lit up, yet we could not quite understand why.

"That's fantastic. Do you have any pets or siblings? Grandparents?"

"Yes, we have two younger sisters and a black Lab named Ella. We have three sets of grandparents and a 97-year-old great Grandmother, too. Why?" We replied, not understanding the importance of all of this.

“Well, your answer to me before was that you're a 13-year-old who does gymnastics and goes to school. Do you see what we are getting at? You are more than just a 13-year-old girl, and more than just a gymnast. You are a lot of things. Who do you think you are?”

Sitting in still silence, we pondered the loaded question, trying to understand what they were asking us. We thought they were being redundant, and then it hit us. In order to be successful, I didn't need to be perfect at the sport I do; I just need to understand that I am enough without mentally killing myself because I am not as exceptional as I am under the impression that I need to be. The thoughts that I need perfect grades or 10.0s in competitions in order to feel successful are delusional. I will stop living in the fear of never being worthy enough, and start realizing that this is my life and I am the only one who can change it. I cannot just rationalize my thoughts and pretend they are okay, because they are cataclysmic.

We are an ambitious student who sets goals, we are a sister, and an artist, we are a musician and a friend, we are a daughter, and a granddaughter; but, we are also a dedicated athlete, and nothing can change that.

I am ; and I am more than just a gymnast.