



Car Talks

Their voices stung our ears, and their words already embedded themselves into our brain. We sat there as stiff as a board; our heart was pounding out of our chest. What else were we supposed to do? There we were, in front of the people whose input we craved the most, hearing that we had disappointed them. How do you handle rejection from the only ones you seek approval from?

Hopping into the back of our mom's SUV, we got comfortable for the long drive home; we had already begun preparing ourselves for the usual post-game talk that we have with our parents. We shivered as they closed their doors, thus shutting out the bitter winter air. As our dad got the car going, we became aware of their eyes gazing at us through the rearview mirror.

"How do you think you did?"

It was a simple question, yet every time we were hit with it, we weren't sure how to respond to such a thing. We never had the ability to speak what our parents actually wanted to hear.

"We believe we did okay." Our voice was hesitant, diffident. These particular talks were the ones we found the most difficult.

"Yes, well... We don't think that was a particularly good game for you." Surprisingly, since having already equipped ourself for their criticism, we only felt a pinch of distress in hearing those words.

"We feel like you wasted this whole season. You haven't been starting in games, you're always hesitating to dribble the ball, and you don't look like you're having fun." Their words struck us. The flash of despondency displayed on their face had clearly been deceptive. Having never heard words this harsh from our dad before, we shrunk back, queasy and unsure of what we had gotten ourselves into.

We could not speak; our jaw dropped in shock. But it didn't stop there.

“You used to be better than this. Basketball used to be your favorite thing in the world; it was evident when you were out there. If you aren’t serious about the game, as you used to be, then why even play?”

As those words escaped their mouth, a rush of heat overwhelmed our face. Our fingers began to tingle, and we discreetly let out a sob. Quickly, we wiped away any tears that had spilled down our face. As difficult as this is, there’s no way we want to show fear; we are tougher than this. We felt our mom’s eyes on us, but we purposefully evaded the contact by staring out the window. The night sky was black and the world blurred past us.

“Hey,” Dad’s stern voice compelled us to glance up, “we know you can be better. We’ve tried to tell you over and over. If you don’t improve your game, there’s no way you’re going to make it onto any high school basketball team in the near future. We’re sorry to be tough, but it’s true.”

The trail of tears burned our cheeks, and the tense mood in the air suffocated us. We had let our unruly emotions control us yet again. With the inability to move, and our low, blank stares, we allowed their painful feedback to break us down. We were dumbfounded. This time, we were the ones who looked to Mom for any possible way to circumvent this nightmare. They avoided our silent cries for a way out. “We promise to be better.” Our voice trembled, along with the rest of our being; but we stood by our word.

Although the ride had been uneasy and rather tedious, we were able to make it home in one piece—distraught, yes, but loosely held together nonetheless. Rushing out of the car, we sprinted into the bathroom and isolated ourselves. We stood, frozen, in front of the mirror. Our reflection revealed a weary girl, their eyes red and swollen; they seemed foreign. As we continued to stand there, we allowed all the time in the world to pass, taking in this unfamiliar reflection and letting our dad’s words ring in our head.

That anxious girl is not me. I am not background noise, or a filler, or anything less than great. I will be better because I know I can be better. My dad was right; I had been slacking, but that isn’t who I am. I

was lost and had become complacent. I have to work harder, not just for my parents and their approval, but for myself. I want to find my passion for basketball again.

The night of my last eighth grade basketball game is where my perspective shifted. I was able to pull myself together from something that—at the time—had hurt me. Looking back, I now realize how unhappy I was. In those fragments of time, I couldn't believe it was possible to face so much fear and failure all at once. I began to discover more about myself and see that I was worth much more. Without the hard work and effort I had put in in the last ten months of my life, I don't think I would have fared well as a high school player. But I exceeded my expectations and others expectations of me and made it onto my high school's basketball team. By overcoming the challenges I faced, I have been able to open up new beginnings for myself. It took quite a bit of time, but I can honestly say that I have rediscovered my love for basketball.