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Topic: How has Optimism Paved My Way to Success

Word Count: 800

Every athlete undergoes a time in their career that dramatically transforms them, and ballet dancers are not exempt from this principle. From not making the team to sustaining severe injuries, these experiences often take great courage and perseverance to overcome. In my case, the trial that I faced was that my knee needed surgery, and I found myself faced with the potential reality of not participating in my spring recital. I was left feeling overwhelmed and discouraged. I had a choice to make: Give up and become discouraged or choose to work hard, be optimistic, and let God manage it.

The recital was set for the last weekend of May. I had just transferred to a new studio and was going to be able to dance *en pointe* for the very first time. It had been a long road to get to this point, and I couldn't have been more excited. I started the process of acquiring the skill and strength to dance *en pointe* in eighth grade. This journey had included an entire year of building necessary strength and muscle in my feet before I was allowed to own a pair of shoes, followed by months filled with relearning the basic steps. Who knew such a small distance from the floor created so many challenges! Dancing required a large serving of patience and grace. However, the accomplishment of dancing *En Pointe* was worth it all. I was ecstatic about this opportunity; however, that all disappeared with the "pop" of my knee.

I tore my knee at a party in October my junior year. I'd like to say I was doing something grand like exploring an unknown cave. In reality, I was just playing a competitive game of "capture the flag" and had an unfortunate run-in with a tennis ball. Don't worry, the tennis ball

survived. My knee, unfortunately, did not. Being the stubborn person that I am, I attempted to just walk it off and hoped that it would heal itself. In December, when it still was not better, I finally went to the doctor. (Lesson number one: Don't wait two months to go to the doctor.) An MRI confirmed that I had blown my ACL and both the menisci in my right knee. The estimated recovery time was six months; my recital was in four. I loved ballet too much to just give up though, so I pressed on.

The first few weeks after my surgery were incredibly rough. I went from dancing across the room to not being able to lift my leg off the couch. I had to wear a brace on my knee that locked it straight. My friends affectionately called me "the pirate," and stairs became equal to scaling a mountain. It was easy to become discouraged. But rather than focusing on all the things I couldn't do; I chose to be optimistic instead. I fought a daily battle to choose joy and not give up. In this process I learned valuable lessons like patience and courage.

I was blessed to have people in my life who exemplified joy and optimism in those grim times. A well-loved teacher showed me how to face each day with laughter and smiles. Instead of seeing doctor appointments as a chore, they walked in with joy and touched lives wherever they went. Each day was an opportunity to reach out and impact others. A wise person once said the most dangerous four-letter word is spelled F-E-A-R. They refused to let me wallow in self-pity, instead teaching me to view my injury not as a catastrophe, but as an opportunity to joyfully impact others.

With these people as an example, I chose to be optimistic and daily thank God for his many blessings. My surgeon was incredible. He paid attention to what kind of mobility I needed restored, thus speeding up my recovery process. My physical therapist was another huge influence. She always met me with a smile and brainstormed lots of ways to help me get back to

normal. I refused to let discouragement stop me. I continued to show up to dance classes and to participate in what I could. I refused to be a couch potato (unless it meant I could watch the *How to Train your Dragon* trilogy in one day!) Each day as I improved, I chose to see the glass as half-full and filling!

While some of the events in my recovery are a blur, one stands crystal clear: the moment I was finally able to step on stage in my pointe shoes after months of recovery. The cheer of the crowd when we finished roared in my ears. It had indeed been an arduous journey filled with unforgettable lessons. Only because of optimism and God's unending grace was I able to dance.