

A Way Out of My Own Prison

The birds chirp pretty melodies as the balmy summer air blows against me, bringing the earthy scent of nature as it wraps around my sweaty body. Taking a deep breath as my hair flies back behind me, I take in the fact that the kickball I played earlier was the last game with the same group of friends. Even though I was walking out of school, nearly at the gate, I already missed everything. The ridiculous laughs throughout the year, and all the in-between moments that lingered in my head. As I transition into my final year of middle school, I look back at 7th grade as one of my favorite memories of school, and I'll always remember it that way.

I reach the sidewalk next to my school and turn around, glancing back at what feels like my second home. I continue to walk as so many memories flood my head, leaving me in awe.

If someone had told me at the start of 7th grade that I would be laughing through tears in my last week of school, I probably wouldn't have believed them. I just assumed the days would blur together like they always had- the assignments, bells, and ordinary routines combining into just one. However, what I didn't realize then was how much those silly yet intriguing in-between moments would make up the year, and how much I would grow thanks to them.

One vivid memory that I cherish is the last week of school, in first period science. I can still remember everything about it, the vibe, the smell of the classroom, where everything is organized. The lights were turned off, and we were supposed to be watching a movie on the screen, but that didn't last long, with the group of friends I had. Summer was so close I could almost feel the sun on my face, the scorching hot rays that blasted towards my face, and sweat tickling down my neck. Yet there was this quiet ache, too; the kind that comes when you know things are about to change. This was one of the times where I wanted to stop time and embrace the familiarity, because the following year wouldn't be the same. As a result, we made the most of what was left. Muffling our laughter and glancing at the teacher every time we got too loud, she knew. For the last time, though, she just smiled, the kind of smile that says, "Go ahead and have fun." At that moment, surrounded by friends and pure joy, I felt a sort of happiness I had longed for a prolonged time.

Even though I can barely remember the hardships, this year wasn't always like unicorns and rainbows.

For most of it, I was battling something invisible: myself. I struggled to trust myself and feel confident in my abilities, even as a gregarious person. Through the rough times, music influenced the perspective I think, and helped me win against my own battles.

Most importantly, music led me to making it into the All-Southern Band, one of the most famous band associations I had dreamed of getting into. I can still picture our concert and sound in my head, the deep, wooden sound of my clarinet echoing through the chocolate brown instrument, as my fingers knew where to go. The sound was so full and precise, wrapping me like a burrito, and I immediately felt hours rush by like lightning. With everyone else in the room so motivated, and talented, I learned that playing with people who pushed me to be better instead of feeling intimidated inspired me.

Thanks to my music journey, I learned that growth doesn't usually come in significant, dramatic ways. It comes like a leaf gently drifting in a calm lake, a quiet shift in the small parts of your life, and it truly influences how you begin to trust yourself again.

Now, summer break is coming to an end, and still the boiling sun is beaming against me. I can silently hear the sound of us cracking up at something silly and bursting out laughing, knowing that these were the kinds of memories we'd think about for years. Even though this year had its struggles, it also had moments of pure joy, laughter, and connection; the kind that reminds you life isn't just about surviving the complex parts, but celebrating the good ones too.

Thanks to the teachers who let us have our moment, the music that pulled me forward, I soon found the quiet strength in myself. *"Sometimes you will never know the value of a moment until it becomes a memory."* -Dr. Seuss-