

Pride & Guts

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I may be alone in thinking that the 2002 film *Drumline* is one of the cinematic masterpieces of the past 20 years. If you're unfamiliar, the intriguing description on the DVD jacket explains, "Halftime is party time in this high-stepping, high-energy comedy that 'shakes, rattles and rolls the house'...with a pulsating soundtrack and electrifying dance moves. Nick Cannon stars as Devon Miles, a gifted street drummer who snares the top spot in a Southern university marching band—but quickly discovers that it takes more than talent to make it on the DRUMLINE."

I'm sure you caught the pun there—the "gifted street drummer who *snares* the top spot...." That pun may legitimately be the cleverest thing about this movie. Which is to say, it's not terribly clever. Although, as a side note, the movie's star, Nick Cannon, ended up married to multi-platinum recording artist Mariah Carey, so he's got that going for him.

The film was released in theaters on December 13, 2002, and on December 13, 2002, I saw it with 50 of my best friends—that is, my fellow members of the Hilo High School Marching Band. Seeing a marching band celebrated on the big screen felt like a victory for every band kid in history; as Richard Roeper wrote a few days after the film's release, "I love that we get into this world of marching bands. We barely see any football players—we see the top of their helmets as they're getting out of the way."¹

The film follows protagonist Devon Miles as he graduates from his Harlem high school and heads south to begin his collegiate career at the fictional Atlanta A&T University. The movie then makes love to the concept of a "show-style" marching band—a band popular at traditionally black, Southern colleges. The collective, dominated by brass and drums, plays popular tunes, occasionally setting down their instruments to shake their hips with surprising acrobatic ability considering they're wearing head-to-toe wool uniforms in autumnal Georgia.

The movie's tension centers on Devon's talent and on his ego. The former earns him a starting spot on the drumline—a coveted and unusual achievement for a freshman—and the latter earns him the ire of the drumline captain, who would rather maintain his own supremacy as the line's top drummer than hand the reins over to a hotshot freshman. The A&T band's director, portrayed by Orlando Jones, has a soft spot for Devon—but he has a slogan for the band: "One band, one sound." Every member is expected to fall in line. So despite Devon's outstanding skills, he must learn to work as part of the team—and to put the line before himself. (A brand of selflessness that, let's admit, would be a challenge for any 18 year old.)

This movie is squarely in the B to C category. It's formulaic, over acted, and not particularly well written. It grossed just \$56 million at the box office. (As a comparison, the newest *Star Wars* movie pulled in \$248 million in its opening weekend alone.) But I will bet you an amount equal to that *Star Wars* opening weekend that the entire box office income came from the pockets of high school and collegiate marching band members. This niche group of musicians is something of a cult. We have developed our own entire culture and vocabulary. And in this film, the band took the center stage for the first time since *The Music Man*.

¹ http://apps.tvplex.go.com/ebertandthemovies/audioplayer.cgi?file=021216_drumline

I contend that this poor quantitative representation in popular culture does not do justice to the marching band. Marching bands are a different breed of organization. Put two marching band members or alumni next to each other, and they'll find many points of commonality. Long, strenuous rehearsals in the heat—followed the next day by long, strenuous rehearsals in freezing rain. Let's see a show of hands; has anyone here marched in a band? We have much to discuss later.

So why have marching bands become such a big deal? Who ever thought it would be a good idea to stuff musicians into military-style uniforms and set them amarch around a football field?

To answer this question, we must travel back in time. For centuries, musicians would travel together and perform at festivals, celebrations, weddings, or any other event where someone would pay them or at least feed them. The armies of early city-states helped to formalize the need for such musicians to fall in formation as military bands. Indeed, much of the modern vernacular of the marching band hails from military tradition—calling musicians to attention, organization of musicians by rank, commands such as "about face" and "forward march," even the uniforms. Marching band members often wear spats—relics of a bygone era in which such protective foot gear was worn by the military. Outside of military organizations, marching band is most often associated with American football—which is where our story really begins.

Much of the development of marching bands in the United States can be attributed to four men: John Philip Sousa, Albert Austin Harding, Glenn Cliffe Bainum, and John P. Paynter. Sousa, of course, is one of the most famed composers of band music who ever lived. After serving as conductor of the President's Own U.S. Marine Band for 12 years under 5 presidents, Sousa started his own civilian band in 1892. The Sousa Band toured the United States and internationally for almost 40 years, until 1931. His band toured everywhere from New York to the Canary Islands to South Africa, introducing audiences all over the world to the concept of a full wind ensemble—woodwinds, brass, and drums. Prior to Sousa's band, most audiences were only familiar with orchestras and choruses. To see such a large group of musicians playing in concert together was nothing short of revolutionary. Sousa was also one of the most prolific band composers in history, claiming 70 songs, 15 operettas, and 136 marches—including "Stars and Stripes Forever," the national march of the United States. For his efforts, Sousa justly may be given the title of the grandfather of all marching bands.

As Sousa toured the world, band instrumentation and repertoire was expanding rapidly and there was for the first time a real need for music education in American colleges and universities. The formal study of music had traditionally been regarded as unrespectable and unstable, not fit for the serious-minded—and definitely not for men. Income was unsteady; most band jobs were limited to vaudeville, circus bands, and traveling bands. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra had only just started in 1890. As such, band music was regarded more as a hobby than as a profession. But Albert Austin Harding helped to change that.

Harding was a protégé of John Philip Sousa and served as the director of bands at the University of Illinois for 43 years. He had started at the university as a student intending to pursue a career in engineering. He played music gigs to help cover expenses, and as a junior, he was offered a part-time job directing the school's band. He quickly assumed all responsibility for the band, finishing off his studies while transitioning to the faculty. In 1906, a year into his faculty duties at Illinois, Harding met Sousa at a dinner and struck up a friendship that lasted the rest of Sousa's life—a friendship that no doubt influenced Harding's leadership of the University of Illinois band program.

Harding helped to put Illinois at the cutting edge of American university music education. His purchase of \$7,000 worth of instruments in 1906 included a sousaphone—the first of any college band in the country. Sousaphones are marching tubas; they weigh 40 pounds or more, so if you've ever had one on

your shoulder, you probably still have residual shoulder pain. Harding was also a particularly endearing character, a showman; his trademark move came during performances of Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever." Harding would conduct the piece, and just before the famous piccolo solo, he'd pull a piccolo from his pocket, turn to the audience, and play it himself.

Harding was also possibly the first to put a band on the football field, in 1907 during halftime in a game against the University of Chicago. Some sources will contend that Purdue University put the first formation on the field—a "block P" under the direction of Paul Spotts Emrick. Either way, we can all agree that it was right around 1907 that band directors first recognized the potential of marrying football games with marching bands. Harding was also the first to organize a high school band day, a practice that is now common but at the time was extraordinary, and it helped to build the funnel of high school students to collegiate band programs. Needless to say, Harding was an innovator of marching bands and one of its strongest proponents.

The line of familiarity continues with the third of the marching band grandfathers, Glenn Cliffe Bainum. Bainum entered the University of Illinois as an English major in 1906, during Harding's first year on the faculty. He played bass drum in the band and was known as Rusty for his red hair. As a senior, he led the Senior Hobo Band, an Illinois homecoming ritual, described by the university's yearbook as such:

A German band, dressed in braided costumes of white, came first in the procession to the field. Rusty Bainum led them in a stately march around the gridiron, and finally to some seats directly in front of the bleachers. Then, while the throng of costumed nondescripts scattered to perform their diverse comicovagant duties, Rusty rendered a succession of crushing numbers after the manners of the famous bandmasters of the world. As the dapper Sousa he led his pliant musicians through several swinging, vigorous pieces. As Creatore he contorted himself most creditably, flinging his suppliant arms aloft, and disarranging most amusingly his streaming, jet-black locks.²

Needless to say, Bainum had found his passion in band. After graduating and teaching one year of high school English, Bainum took the post of director of music at Southern Illinois Normal University, where he was highly regarded for his training under Harding. And his own penchant for showmanship followed him to his new post. Here's an excerpt from the Southern Illinois Normal University yearbook of 1922:

The Band is one of our most popular organizations. We are justly proud of it this year, because it has risen both in point of numbers and in quality to a place far above any band of previous years. The first triumph scored by the band was in the Hallowe'en Mardi Gras parade, in which they appeared in clown costumes. The success was so complete that at the next football game they again appeared in clown costumes and were greeted with shouts and roars of approval as they marched out upon the field. Seeing the effects of the uniforms and not wishing to have a clown band always, Mr. Bainum scratched his head and pondered and as a result at the next football game the band came out in white trousers, maroon sweaters, and maroon and white caps.³

Eventually Bainum went back to Illinois as Harding's assistant director and to earn a bachelor's degree in music. He moved from Illinois to be the supervisor of music in the Grand Rapids schools, then was asked to join the music faculty at Northwestern University. Bainum arrived in 1926 as the school's first director of bands. His influence was felt immediately; the band's ranks increased from 17 to 90 between the first

² Illio, University of Illinois, 1913, p. 69.

³ The Obelisk, Southern Illinois Normal University, 1922, p. 11.

day of classes and the first performance in October. On the football field during halftime, Bainum had the band spell "HELLO," and the crowd went wild.

Prior to Bainum's arrival, the band program at Northwestern had floundered. The earliest band was the University Cornet Band, founded in 1887, but anything resembling a marching band was student-run and inconsistent. In 1911, the *Daily Northwestern* ran a series of five articles that described the founding of a student-led marching band. The football team had started doing well, and a flurry of school spirit overran campus. On October 10, 1911, just three days after the team's first win of the season, a *Daily Northwestern* author wrote that "too long" had "the band" been considered "a joke," and he called on the student body to establish a band that would "be a credit to the university, enthuse the student body to greater activity in supporting the teams, encourage the teams to stronger and more determined efforts upon the field, and fittingly represent the spirit of Northwestern." He continued:

Every college throughout the country large enough to be called a college has a band. No other one element in college life so inspires enthusiasm in athletics or other contests as a good, live, healthy band. If the feeble cheering at last Saturday's game could have been augmented by a vigorous band how much more enthusiasm could have been aroused.

Sixteen days later, on October 26, 2011, the *Daily* proudly cooed, "Northwestern has a band." It's 20-piece instrumentation included "two drums, three clarinets, one alto, one tuba, three trombones, ten cornets," and pleaded with readers that "There is a great need of altos." The band grew to 27 members, and the *Daily's* final article on the band that season was wrapped in pure joy: "...to enthusiastic cheers and applause, the band—our band—swept down the road and up the steps in military order. After due appreciation was given the players, the women and the band (again aided by the men) practiced 'The Purple Parade' with great success...Then...the band struck up and led the way down to University Hall, where, to everybody's regret, it dispersed."

Unfortunately, the football team's success that year did not live up to expectations—a theme all too common to Northwestern football fans, I'm afraid. But the band was born. The following year, on a bus ride home from an away game in Indiana, band member Theodore Van Etten composed the words to "Go, U Northwestern," which remains the school's fight song to this day.

So the band program at Northwestern was arguably primed and ready for Bainum to arrive and flourish—and flourish he did. Bainum took Harding's innovation of putting designs on the field and he animated them. So while other marching bands might create the picture of a wildcat on the field, Bainum would design drill that would make the cat lunge and jump. The man hours to conceive of his wildly creative and innovative shows became legend; Bainum allegedly claimed that each minute of field show required 40 hours of work to prepare. To make it all possible, Bainum designed the 8-to-5 step, which requires a band member take eight equal steps of 22 and a half inches per five yards on the field. According to Betsy Gutstein, an alumna who wrote her thesis on the Northwestern Marching Band, "Each player received a standardized chart of his movement on the field, a diagram of the completed formation, and notations about how the music corresponded to the movement on the field. The charts, often more than 15 pages per halftime show, were designed to be clear and easy to learn quickly...Assigning players to line up on yard lines marked for the football game further simplified the process of locating formations on the field." This process of charting revolutionized marching band movement and esteem. Bainum served as Northwestern's director of bands until 1953, when he reached the mandatory retirement age of 65.

The fourth and arguably not final man to revolutionize marching bands was John P. Paynter, who served as the second director of bands at Northwestern University. But before taking over for Bainum, he was yet another lowly freshman in search of his path. Paynter arrived at Northwestern in 1946. He played

clarinet in Bainum's band and served as band staff manager. He was a member of the band when the football team traveled to Pasadena for its first ever Rose Bowl after the 1948 season. After finishing his undergraduate degree, Paynter became assistant director of bands and Bainum fully became his mentor.

Upon Bainum's death in 1974, Paynter eulogized the man who had taught him so much:

Everyone who knew Mr. Bainum liked him. He made them feel that way because he never held a grudge; he was never purposefully unkind; he was not envious. He never looked back. He didn't have time to listen to recordings of concerts he had conducted. He was too busy preparing for the next one. He ignored his unopened mail, often dictating replies to an immense stack in one day, or sweeping it all from his desk to the waste basket while he picked up the phone instead. His procedure for handling Christmas mail was slightly more original and a great deal more efficient. He would simply turn over the greeting card and write the words, 'same to you' before mailing it back to the sender. Somehow, from Glenn Cliffe Bainum, it made a very personal message..."⁴

Paynter inherited a band that was already being looked at by the rest of the country as cutting edge. Like his predecessor, Paynter was a showman; he liked to take risks. Especially given the glow of the 1949 Rose Bowl, the band was seen as an extension of the football team. Paynter had a terrific rapport with Ara Parseghian, who was head coach from 1956 to 1963. Paynter was very involved in the football game itself; during tense moments of close measurements, he would walk to the sideline to see what the measurement was, then walk back to the band and hold his fingers up to show the band how far the ball had to go to get the first down. His excitement transmitted to the band members. He could make them feel like the 10 minutes of pregame were the most important thing in their lives. He spoke to the band like a football coach, and he created an environment in which every individual yearned for his respect. He knew every person's name, regardless of whether they'd been there four years or four minutes.

And moreover, he built on what Bainum had established. His drills were complex, and the footwork tricky; the band members would do full spins while marching down the field. They'd march backward for extended periods of time. They'd flip and do bows by ranks. The electric feeling of being part of such an organization still stands up the hair on the necks of those who were in the band under Paynter.

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I started playing trombone at the age of 10, after a random skills test revealed that I could get sound by buzzing my lips into a low brass mouthpiece but *not* when blowing across a flute or into a reed. I grew up listening to Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington, so when I reached high school, I was more interested in jazz band than marching band. But our school was small, and our arts program was even smaller, so marching was basically compulsory if you wanted to participate at all. By the time the movie *Drumline* came out, my entire social circle already revolved around hanging out in the band room during class breaks. And even though I served as high school drum major for two years, I had always seen marching band as a temporary endeavor.

When I began preparing for college, marching band was the furthest thing from my mind. But after I was accepted to Northwestern University, it didn't take long for the marching band to come calling.

And frankly, I wasn't all that hard to convince. I was eager to get to know people on campus as soon as possible, and I figured I could march one season and then make my way into the jazz band scene.

⁴ John P. Paynter, Eulogy at Bainum Memorial Service, November 10, 1974.

Perhaps subconsciously, I knew that the band would provide a home for me while I figured out who I wanted to be at college.

Boy, did I underestimate the Northwestern Marching Band.

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When I arrived on campus as a wide-eyed freshman in 2005, almost a hundred years after Theodore Van Etten composed "Go, U Northwestern," the first person to greet me was dressed as a pirate. He informed me that his name was Joe and he would be my Spirit Leader. The rest of the day is both blurry and crystal clear: My grandparents, who had dropped me off, wished me a tearful goodbye. An upperclassman showed me to the dorm where we would be staying for the week of band camp. All the freshman sat down in the music room and began warming up with the band's director. We had sat down and played a few scales when the doors to either side of the room were thrown open, and the sophomores, juniors, and seniors of the band came rushing in, their hands up in the Wildcat "growl" and their knees up in the marching band fast-entry step. They flooded the room, surrounding us; half the freshmen were terrified, the other half on the edge of their seats. What was this place, and who were these people?

What I remember clearest about that first day was the trombone sectional. After the upperclassmen had scared the sufficient bejesus out of us, each musical section broke apart and flung itself about campus to begin practicing the music that we'd need to play that Saturday at the first home football game. The trombones, in typical fashion, did not follow those orders. Instead, the freshmen were informed that the trombone section was actually known as the boneheads—an affectionate nickname, they assured us—and that the upperclassmen would be looking deep into our souls to discover our true identities. If this sounds a bit like hazing, let me assure you that no boneheads were harmed. Bewildered is more accurate. To distract us from this important work of integrating us into the section, a grad student took us through the music while the upperclassmen deliberated a few yards away. When they returned just ten minutes later, they had apparently peered deep into our souls, as promised, and we learned that we were to be given nicknames, and that these would be our true names while in band.

There were six of us freshmen. One, a small Asian male, was named Manosaurus—apparently simply because the boneheads wanted to name someone Manosaurus, and he was the shortest of the group and therefore seemed most appropriate for an intimidating, dinosaur-based nickname. The second nickname went to the only other freshman girl besides myself. She was dubbed Sarah Connor, after the Terminator's mother, for the sole purpose of the other members of the section being able to say the phrase made famous by Arnold Schwarzenegger—"I am a friend of Sarah Connor." As for me? Given the fact that I was from Hawaii, the older boneheads had peered deep into my soul and seen the inherent contradiction living in my heart, so they named me Juneau, after the capital of Alaska. This name became a part of me. Throughout my four years in the Northwestern Marching Band, more people knew me as Juneau than knew my birth name of Brittany.

And so began my collegiate marching band career. I learned the 8-to-5 step, first pioneered by Glenn Cliffe Bainum, although of course I didn't know that at the time. I received packs of drill charts that told me where to start, where to end, and how to get there—again, an innovation of a band director long past. I learned the flip turns and the roll step and the chair step, and I managed not to whack anyone in the face with my trombone while doing so, which felt like an accomplishment in itself. I learned the 100-year-old *Alma Mater*—a song that most Northwestern students vaguely recognize but never learn the words to during their four years at Northwestern. I learned the words within four days.

It's hard to describe the exact moment when I was hooked, but I know it happened that first week. I looked around and saw 150 other people—college students all, musicians all. As a member of this group,

I realized I was part of something. I immediately felt welcome, cared for, and part of something bigger. It had nothing to do with football; I hadn't really cared for the sport before I arrived. But somehow I became one of the team's most rabid fans.

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My first experience on a collegiate football field was the pregame show—a staple that doesn't change much from game to game or year to year. Pregame always starts with drums. "GOCK GOCK GOCK GOCK," from the drumhead of the lead snare. He and his line of 16 men and women set a leisurely pace as they play the well-worn bars of "Salsation," their entrance music. They march on the field from the south end zone, their plumes bobbing in sync, their spats hitting the ground in time with the beat. From the top of the stadium, you can see who's in step based on those flimsy white spats.

The sound builds as the drumline advances onto the field, watched by the rest of the marching band from the sidelines. On the last two beats of the short cadence, all the drummers raise their drums into the air—DUGGA DUGGA DAH—and wait. Another four chucks—GOCK GOCK GOCK GOCK—faster this time, cues the rest of the marching band, who begin entering the field on a fast high step. Each member holds an instrument in one hand and extends the other hand in front of them as a savage, blood-curdling yell emanates from their lips—a cry of excitement, of school pride, and quickly of exhaustion. This is the Wildcat growl.

After the drumline plays the band on the field with 21 four-count measures of cadence—which takes approximately 30 seconds—the band members plant their feet, yell "Wildcat band fire up!" and lift their instruments to their faces. They have four beats to gasp for air before launching into the opening notes of Fanfare, thematically led by the trombones and, of course, the trumpets. This short piece is mercifully performed in place as the color guard advances to the front line, with Northwestern's flag on the home side and the opponent's flag on the visitor side bookending the rest of the Big 10 flags. (Back in my day, there were only 11 schools in the Big 10; today there are 14.)

As the flags reach their positions and the horns pause to gasp some more, the band's drum majors remove their giant hats, place them on the ground, wedge their batons in the ground at an angle, and lean backward to touch the tops of their heads to the grass of Ryan Field. It is a feat I've seen performed many times and have never been able to master, not even after a few drinks. The crowd cheers, the drum captain gives another GOCK GOCK GOCK GOCK, and the band marches forward in a chair step, meaning each step sees their thighs hitting a sharp 45-degree angle. As they march, they serenade the audience with a song called "Downfield," the words to which are only known to the band members themselves:

Push on Northwestern and go in to win!

Push on Northwestern, fight!

May word or deed keep you in the lead,

Push on Northwestern with all your might

Loyal to you, we will always be true

Push when the game gets hard

From east to west we know you're the best,

Push on victory-ry dah dah dah dah dah dah, dah

Rise, Northwestern—

And now, just two minutes since the drumline played its first notes, we've reached the third musical number of pregame: the "dah dah dah dah dah dah" is a transition into the school's secondary fight song, Push On. As the music continues unabated, the chair step takes on a new level of sophistication with turns. After all, in marching band, a simple right turn is just too easy—so to go right, we turn left 270 degrees, on a dime, on a beat—and then do it again. 540 degrees of turning in two beats, wool capes flying in the wind, hoping you don't smack the person next to you in the face with your body or your instrument. The band finishes up the Push On drill by forming a simple "N" in the center of the field—standing, of course, for Northwestern. In front of the band, the drum majors and the featured twirler toss their batons in the air, adding visual interest for an audience who sees this same show before each game—that is, if they've torn themselves away from their parking lot tailgating and made it into the stadium more than 15 minutes before kickoff.

The band takes a short breather before playing "God Bless America," forming stars and waving flags, and then it's on to the grand finale: "Go U Northwestern." The band huddles in tight lines between two yard markers, arranging themselves for the roll-out of a sculpted N, the school's logo. The N unfurls as if a scroll is being unraveled, each band member's step perfectly timed and choreographed to create hard angles and straight lines. After the break strain, the members follow the leader around the edges of the N, looking somewhat like lights along a marquee, before shrinking the N from 35 yards wide to 20 yards wide. After a fast-entry step to form a tunnel for the football team to run through onto the field, the band plays the Star-Spangled Banner, directed by the third Northwestern Director of Bands Mallory Thompson, a NUMBALUM herself. Then the band high-steps it off the field, grateful the boos are directed not at them but at the opposing team.

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As proud as I am of the shows I performed with the band, it's what happened off the field that cemented my loyalty to the group. Northwestern, as you may know, is not a college football powerhouse. After the 1948 season, which resulted in our first trip to and win at the Rose Bowl, it would be 47 years before Northwestern even made it to another post-season game. From 1978 to 1981, we only won three games. From 1982 to 1994, we never had a winning record. These years were formative for the band; it was a captive audience, forced to attend every home game and at least one away game. And not only did the band have to attend, but it had to cheer; it had to support the team. With a lackluster team performance to watch, the band learned to entertain itself. This transformation is embodied by the 1960s and 70s rise of the band's SpiriTeam™.

In an organic evolution of outward displays of school spirit, a few vocal individuals began leading the band in cheers during games, cheers such as "Northwestern them, Northwestern them; make them pay heavily every quarter." Outside of game days, they rallied morale among the troops. The duties and responsibilities of these individuals slowly evolved and were codified; from early on, the leaders were identified by silly hats they wore, festooned with buttons. By the time I became a member of the band in 2005, the SpiriTeam™ was essentially a comedic duo; we held events called "spirit sessions" every Thursday night after rehearsal, during which the SpiriTeam™ would perform entire skits designed to poke fun at that week's football opponent and celebrate our own dedication to Northwestern and its football program. During my junior and senior years, I was honored to be elected by my peers as the Spirit Leader of the band; I put on a funny hat, wrote skits—I even wrote poetry that was performed as a call-and-response every Thursday night. In fact, I'd like to demonstrate that right now.

[snap along with the audience]

Hear ye, hear ye

This band's in session

Here comes the band

The Wildcat band

This rhyme would be our start to every spirit session. The list of silly antics goes on and on; a favorite tradition was the composition and passing out of "spirit sheets" on game days. The two-sided sheets were covered in hand-written and photocopied cheers, jokes about the other team, and alternative lyrics to their fight songs.

One of my favorite band-written songs actually pokes fun at my home state of Iowa. You may recognize the tune, as the song is set to "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the shucking of the corn
They have outlawed education where the black and gold are worn
And when the game is over Hawkeye fans will surely mourn
The 'Cats are marching on!

Although your homes are mobile your team isn't on the go
We'll be out in Pasadena while you're sitting home in snow
You'll be nodding off at halftime while your band does park and blow
The 'Cats are marching on!

Sorry, sorry little Hawkeyes
When if ever will you realize
There's more to life than watching corn rise
The 'Cats are marching on!

In addition to songs, the band had its own language; if you called out, "Hey band!" every member would answer back in unison, "Hey what?" That's how the band director would get our attention during rehearsals. And when something good happened, you always punctuated with "Go 'Cats!" As in, "The team scored! Go 'Cats! I memorized the halftime show! Go 'Cats! I got an A on my organic chemistry midterm! Go 'Cats!" As I spent more time in the band, I learned each of these quirks; I learned the words, the calls and responses, the traditions, and it made up for the rainy rehearsals, the losing seasons, the sore muscles. It was comforting, and it gave us a sense of unity. Like I said, I was hooked.

And all of it—the steps, the animated formations, even the spirit of fun and camaraderie—all of it, I would come to learn, stemmed from the work of Bainum and Paynter. We cared about the football games themselves because John Paynter made clear that the band existed to support the football team. Even more important, we were taught a respect for musicality, for wearing the colors of our school and representing it proudly, balanced with the playfulness and banter of young adults. The band has certainly grown wackier in recent years, but it has never wavered from the motto set forth by John P. Paynter for the band: pride and guts. Pride and guts was our rallying cry. We took pride in our alma mater, ourselves, the band, the team—and we had the guts to stick it out no matter the conditions, from the "heavy dew" (which most people just call rain) to the losing football season to the difficult halftime drill paired with tricky music. I think this lesson was most critical in those times of losing football seasons; lesser bands would have given up on their team, would have shouted insults or simply turned away to discuss other matters. But the band was always there, cheering loudly, until the last moment. We could be down two touchdowns, with two minutes to go, but the band still believed. (And we're right to; as a freshman in the marching band, I witnessed just such a comeback—two touchdowns within the last two minutes of the game to come back from behind and beat Wisconsin. Needless to say, my voice was hoarse for days afterward.) So to embody pride and guts is to remember that no matter

what happens on the football field, in band rehearsal, in class, or in life, we were proud to be students at Northwestern University and members of the finest band in the whole damn land.

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Malcolm Gladwell once wrote: "We divide [groups] into cults and clubs, and dismiss the former for their insularity and the latter for their banality. The cult is the place where, cut off from your peers, you become crazy. The club is the place where, surrounded by your peers, you become boring. Yet if you can combine the best of those two—the right kind of insularity with the right kind of homogeneity—you create an environment both safe enough and stimulating enough to make great thoughts possible."⁵

The Northwestern University Marching Band, affectionately known as NUMB, was my home for four years—and even now. Each year at Homecoming, band alumni—known as NUMBALUMS—are invited back to march a pregame show and play with the band in the stands and during halftime. I haven't missed a Homecoming. I have also served on the board of the NUMBALUMS since just a few months after graduation; this October, I will be the club's president. This September, I'm marrying a man I met after college, so he hasn't experienced the joy of being a marching band member—but two of my bridesmaids are women I met in NUMB. I still sing a cappella with a group of girls who all met in NUMB. Half of my wardrobe is purple, and every year I have season tickets to Northwestern football. I must add that I'm fortunate to have been in band when the team started doing better. I got to attend two bowl games as an undergraduate in the band—and that is where my final story of the evening takes place.

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It was the last game of my collegiate marching career, and there were three seconds left on the clock. We were at the 2008 Alamo Bowl, and Missouri placekicker Jeff Wolfert stepped onto the field to attempt a field goal that would break the tie between his Tigers and my Northwestern Wildcats, giving Missouri the win. As the 12 and a half-point underdogs, Northwestern hadn't been expected to do even this well, to have kept the game this close.

Few people, that is, except the members of the Northwestern University Marching Band.

As the band's spirit leader, I'd witnessed the highs and lows of four seasons, and this had been by far the best. But it was about to be over. Wolfert was one of the most accurate kickers in college football, and looking around at the fallen faces of my fellow band members, it was clear that we'd lost this game.

It was a 44-yard field goal attempt. Wolfert had already made three field goals that evening, including a 43-yarder. I stood on my ladder in front of NUMB, unable to look away from the field. I wanted to comfort the band, to say something that would inspire them to believe that we could still win. But the words didn't come, and I couldn't turn around because I knew as well as they did that we were about to lose.

Both teams were lined up and ready for the kick. Wolfert took three and half steps straight back and three steps to the left. The ball was snapped and he kicked. It had the distance. The last three seconds of the game ticked down as the ball sailed through the air.

The ball flew barely to the right of the goal posts, and the band erupted. Wolfert had missed. He missed, and we were headed into overtime. The roar of the purple-clad crowd was deafening, and the Missouri fans were stone-faced and silent. The drum major somehow managed to shout over the crowd and we ripped into the most rousing rendition of "Go U Northwestern" I'd ever heard.

⁵ <http://gladwell.com/group-think/>

Northwestern went on to lose in overtime, but that's not what band members remember most about the game, or at least not what I remember most. It was the feeling of being granted a miracle, of caring about this team so much, of being given another chance where we didn't think one existed.

Northwestern didn't win the game, but in that moment, for the first time since 1949, we felt like it was possible.

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Epilogue: Four years later, we won our first bowl game in more than 60 years. It was the Gator Bowl in Jacksonville, Florida—and you'd better believe that I was there to see it in person with 50 of my best friends from marching band. Thank you, and go 'Cats!

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