

My Home Away From Home

Early in the morning - before the sun even rises - I walk out of my house clad in my workout clothes and head to practice. Every day of my high school career I have been out of my house before 6:45 in the morning. At that time, my little silver car is only faintly lit up by the early morning glow. As my engine sputters to life, I stroke the steering wheel in an attempt to warm it up. I leave my house, not to return until school ends later that day.

I drive to the front of the high school - my home away from home - and pull into my favorite parking spot. My thoughts consist of dread and anticipation for the upcoming practice. At this time, most of the town is not yet awake. My walk from the parking lot to the school is my only time of silence and I cherish it.

The orange doors of the high school welcome me with open arms. My tired eyes drink in the sight of the empty lobby that will later be filled with students. Still, the silence has not been broken. The first noise comes with my feet slapping on the tile floor outside of the gym and echoing off of the walls and the overflowing trophy cases. Without the lights on, the hallways are eery and vacant. I try not to spend too long alone in the empty hall.

The gym lights are on, bathing the 4,200 square foot room in fluorescent light. My two tall, blonde coaches are standing by the folded bleachers figuring out today's agenda. Other girls that arrived before me are sitting on the floor eagerly putting on their dancing shoes. All 23 girls slowly trickle in through the cold, metal doors. As we all take our spots on the north side of the gym, the music starts playing and doesn't stop for the remainder of the practice. We get lost in the beat and our bodies move accordingly.

I forge a close relationship with the rest of the girls within the walls, and I create a relationship with the gym itself. The floor has seen many bruises and scrapes from my fellow teammates and I, along with the rest of the athletes that become accustomed to the way the polished floor feels on their bare knees. As we get closer to the floor, we notice the ceiling with heightened interest. All of the lights have lit up countless practices, games, and performances. The gym has seldom been completely dark. The walls have felt many hands caressing the cracks and bumps in the bricks. Posters supporting the home team have left sticky residue in spots above the bleachers.

Many teams have played on the same court as me, and many supportive crowds have filled the bleachers. At home games, they fill with orange-and-black-clad fans who are all willing to scream their voices away to encourage the athletes. The crowd bounces and moves continuously by command of the cheerleaders. The movement and screaming fills the gym with an energy that's almost electrifying. No matter the circumstances, the gymnasium will always be teeming with life.

I know that when I'm gone, I will miss my gym at MHS. All of the memories will be nothing but distant, and the familiar sights, smells and sounds will once again become strange. When I come back to visit the place that is so dear to my heart, I hope that walking through those bright orange doors will help me to reminisce about the "good ole' days."