

Dan Pritchett (Chaperone) – Valley Christian High School, San Jose, CA – November 17, 2013

I'm on the flight back from our performance at Bands of America championships in Indianapolis. This was the band's first trip to this competition, but it's the last trip for me as my youngest is a senior. The performance this season was called Arabian Odyssey which is fitting as marching band has been an odyssey that began 7 years ago when my oldest was a freshman.

I will be honest, marching band isn't my thing. I understand the challenge as I was in marching band in high school. I enjoyed the time with my friends, but it was just an activity. As an adult, I am impressed by the level that these students perform at, but it just doesn't grab me. And I was reminded of that last night as I watched the finals. I was transported back to the first year where we watched from the stands. It was important to be there for my daughter but I wasn't drawn to it otherwise.

The second year I became more involved but it was really the third year that it all changed. I became more involved in the transportation crew. For the next four years, I never saw our band from the stands again and my only regret is that it took me 2 years to get involved.

Being part of transportation is hard work and I spend less time on it than several others. You're the first there on performance days and the last to leave. You're often hot or cold or wet or sometimes all 3 on the same day. You push, pull, carry, and drag all manner of objects. You also get to solve puzzles provided by the directors as they try to deliver a show to impress the audience and judges.

Something happens though. You make friends. It becomes part of your life. It becomes part of you. The season begins with the new parents joining the crew as their children join the program and it ends with the realization that some of the parents won't be back because they have graduating seniors. Each of those have gotten harder for me because I knew that this was going to be me soon. And now I'm the one moving on.

For all the hard work there are rewards. People may think that the best view is from the stands where you can take in the performance as a whole. From a pure entertainment perspective they are probably right, but I wouldn't trade the best seat in the stands for my view from the field. The rush of getting the band on and off the field, being close enough to see their faces, watch the performance unfold at a personal level, that's the real show.

I've also been places that most will never be. I've been on field level in more stadiums than I can remember. I've been backstage at Disneyland. I've been in the service tunnels of Lucas Oil Stadium. I've walked the San Francisco Chinese New Years Parade route twice. I've helped move over 1,000 pounds of band equipment from San Jose, through the entire length of Cambodia and get it back in one piece. None of this happens from the stands.

From all of this comes one piece of advice to parents, get involved. It changes the entire perspective that you will have on your children's activities. As I said, my only regret is I waited. The past 7 years have been hard work but incredibly enriching. I do have to move on as my daughter graduates but this is certainly harder than I could have predicted on the first day of the season 7 years ago.

