

The Pearls that Cost Me Gold
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Personal Narrative 7th Grade

I rolled over and squinted at the clock. It read 5:00 am. Already? The bed was soft- a little too soft for my liking yet it was not that which troubled me. The evanescent stars, dim with the drawing day, twinkled in farewell as I heaved myself out of bed. I had been so excited for this day, but now that it was here, dread sat deep in my stomach like a great beast jeering and taunting me. Even though I had already been to several karate tournaments, I, a tiny fourth-grader, was extremely nervous. What's more, I had won 1st place in every tournament which had taken place that year. But this was different. This wasn't just a state-wide tournament, no, this was the Nationals. THE Nationals. I stiffened as I heard footsteps and voices from just beyond the corridor. So my parents are already awake, I realized. I got up and walked across the room. It is wonted that hotel rooms aren't claustrophobic but this one seemed as small as a walking-closet. Be that as it may, I preferred to stay within the hotel room much rather than the lower levels. Well, to be honest, it wasn't a hotel, so to speak. It was a casino. The casino was attached to the convention center hosting the tournament. As my parents entered the room with breakfast, the rubescent sky cast eerie red streaks of sunlight across the room. I crouched to unzip a suitcase to find my karate gi. This was going to be one long day.

About two hours later, I found myself practicing my kata in the posh carpeted hallway which connected the casino to the building where the tournament was taking place. The occasional judge or two trotted past me as I kicked and punched the air. The hallway was much like an enclosed bridge between the two buildings; it was supported by tall pillars and there were windows on each side of the corridor. The tournament was going to start in about an hour, at 8:00, and before long, crowds of people, young and old, were streaming past me. Catching sight of some familiar faces, I joined the hurried mob.

To be quite honest, I don't know where that one hour went. It felt as if in a matter of moments, my staging group and I were marching out into the open. Rows and rows of bleachers lined the far-reaching walls on either side of me. I was used to this though. The judges lined us up along the edge of the ring and began walking along the row to inspect each of us. They were going at a steady pace until they stopped at me. I was stricken. What have I done wrong? The judge's eyes were cold, and I could see no emotion in them as she glared at me with a face set in stone.

The judge spoke in a soft but dangerous voice, "Can you take off your pearl-earrings?"

By that time, the other judges had clustered around me. "N-No, I can't. They're... like, um, knotted, they are permanent kinda." I pressed my hands hard into my sides as all my many competitors' eyes bore into me.

The judge clenched her jaw and leaned close to me asking sweetly if I could see my parents. I pointed to my left where I saw my parents' two worried faces poke out of the crowd. The judge strode toward them as I closed my eyes and let the world wash around me. This wasn't supposed to happen. When I opened my eyes, I saw the judge walking away from my parents to join the other judges. They began to discuss softly and I only could catch a few words.

"She can't participate with those pearl-earrings! She'll be disqualified." The lady judge's voice was strong like there was nothing that would change her thoughts.

Another judge with bright red hair cut in, "But I know that type of earrings. They won't, can't fall off. I don't see why she has to be disqualified."

Soon, the judges seemed to settle an agreement, but I shivered when I heard the final word spoken. Chance. The lady judge turned around and smiled at me. It was then that I felt the sleeping beast within me wake from its slumbers.

The judges then continued with the tournament as normal. By the time the judges called my name to compete with another girl, I felt numb- not with fear, but with rage. I strode onto the mat, blood roaring in my ears. I bowed slowly and began my kata. The ire pooling within me fueled the body I could no longer feel. When I finished, I bowed again and assumed my stance. Silence. For a moment the judges hesitated. And then they raised their blue flags. ALL of them raised their blue flags. Impossible. I was red. Was it a mere trick? Simply an act? So it seemed. Had they wanted to give me a chance just to kick me out anyway? I bowed once more, but not with the same conviction I had felt moments before. Meekly, I backed out of the ring. It was over. The first time I had ever lost, and so miserably.

I was so hurt after that incident, it took me days to recover from the shock. I had worked for months and all my hard work was gone. I learned something invaluable though, something that changed my life; I learned that accepting defeat is harder than winning and that the number of gold medals hanging on my wall doesn't define me. I define myself, and no one else. But most importantly, I learned to be indifferent to both winning and losing. Now, not only do I respect the winners, but also those who lose with grace.