

A long silence filled the room. The room grew tense with the antibacterial chemical smell lingering in the air. "May I have a word with you, Mr. Patterson?" the doctor said with a devastated look on his face, motioning past the door. I stared at my son, Troy. My hand let go of the grip on his as I walked into the hallway.

"I'm sorry," Dr. Greenfield addressed. "This isn't easy to say -- it really never is -- Troy needs immediate tonsil surgery. There are abnormal amounts of bleeding and swelling."

He silenced, giving me time to comprehend what had just happened. Although I was hanging on to my last straws of hope, we both knew that this would be the outcome. I rubbed my head and took a deep breath.

"This can't be! Troy is participating in the *Washington, D.C. Third Grade Public Speaking Competition* in three days! I just - we've been practicing for so long!" I yelled with my anger rising from a place I had it stored. Ever since my wife, Victoria, died, it was my lifelong goal to bring Troy to the top. I sat in a chair with a faded logo boasting *MedStar Georgetown University Hospital*.

"Don't worry. We have highly acclaimed surgeons who have dealt with surgeries much more complicated than this. There is an operating room spot available in two hours. For the first day or two, Troy will simply want to rest. After that, we recommend he stay in bed. By next week, he'll be back up and running. In post-surgery, a simple thing can become very tiring. There is a high chance that Troy will not withstand the energy used in this contest," Dr. Greenfield informed.

"Sign him up for the next slot," I muttered.

Dr. Greenfield walked into the hospital room, advising me that being there when he breaks the news to Troy would just upset me more. I was to come inside once he was done. It was hard to object, considering how nervous I had grown in just ten minutes. Besides, Troy was the toughest person that I ever knew. He could handle me not being there for a few minutes. Sitting alone in the hallway, I grew increasingly insane. Dr. Greenfield stepped out of the door and gave me the signal to walk in. I wasn't sure if I could bear to see Troy in such a fragile stage.

"Dad, I won't be able to participate," Troy whimpered. He indulged in a river of tears.

"Sir," a nurse interrupted. "It's time for Troy to go into his tonsillectomy. I will escort you to the waiting room."

I kissed Troy's blond hair and followed the nurse into the waiting room. Sitting there during surgery, the paranoia took over. I had millions of tabs open on how to handle a child post-tonsillectomy on my iPhone. Not one assured me that Troy would be able to enter the public speaking contest.

Dr. Greenfield walked up to my chair in the waiting room and sat down with me. "Mr. Patterson, the tonsillectomy is over. It went well, but due to the fact of how immediate Troy's surgery was, we will have to keep him in the hospital for at least three days. You may come visit him in Room 253."

Without thinking, I walked over to a door with an emboldened "Room 253" printed on it, under which a sign said, "Troy Patterson - Recovery Stages."

Troy was asleep when I walked in. His room smelled of bad breath. Rushing to his bed, I was just overjoyed to see my son again, even after only an hour. I rubbed his light blond hair. Nothing mattered anymore. The speaking contest was falling out of my grasp, and I let it.

My phone started vibrating in my pocket. Kissing Troy's forehead, I answered the call. "Hello."

"Hello, Mr. Patterson," a man's raspy voice said through the phone, "I am the head of the *Washington, D.C. Third Grade Public Speaking Competition*. We have been notified of your son's situation; because of the recently reported emergency tonsillectomy on Troy, we are afraid that it is unsafe to participate in this year's contest. However, we will send a representative to check in on your son in two days. If he has shown that eighty-five percent of his vocal *strength*, per se, is present, Troy will be permitted to participate."

"Sir, I appreciate your decision. Thank you for going out of your way for Troy. I'll be looking forward to the meeting," I gave him my information and ended the call. Yet, loud and clear, the man had said that it is unsafe for Troy to participate. This representative was going to be nothing but a decorated nuisance.

I stared back at my beautiful, sleeping son. "Troy," I whispered. "All hope is not lost!" Troy, though still in a less than conscious state, smirked.

Two days of sleeping alone in my two-person hotel room later, I was in the familiar Room 253 of MedStar. I walked down the same familiar hallway to the same familiar chair next to Troy's

bed. He was advancing as a normal young boy would, but we both sat, hoping to impress the representative due to arrive. Troy had already downed three cups of orange juice and had taken some Tylenol to relieve his throat. Fulfilling my duties as a stereotypical father, I tried giving my son the average cheesy pep talk. Maybe this contest was a blessing in disguise. Or maybe this was just false hope.

There was a knock on the door. A nurse came in with a man in a firmly pressed black blazer and a bold blue tie. "I will be watching Troy to assist if anything goes wrong," the nurse pointed out as she found herself a chair.

The man spoke up, "Hello, Troy. I will give you some basic vocal exercises, and, if you are prepared, a full-length speech. Mr. Patterson, may I ask you to step out for this?"

I grunted and walked out of the door. I was led to the same waiting room that I had been during the surgery, and, this time, I was just as worried. It was just for a different reason.

I fell asleep in my chair, as I had been up all night the night before, worried. The nurse that was in the room shook my shoulder. Half asleep, I looked up at the laughing nurse. "Sir," she chuckled. "It seems as though you've fell asleep." Her expression grew cold. "Unfortunately, your son did not pass the test. Follow me." I couldn't say that I wasn't surprised. I followed the nurse with a glum look into the hospital room. Troy was sitting in the room, next to the representative.

"Hello again," I said, disappointed. "Thank y-"

"Listen, we have a solution," he cut me off. "The board has approved that Troy can deliver his speech via webcam. There will be a mandatory ten point deduction. Are you interested?"

Troy smiled at me. I knew that he wanted to go through with the idea. "Of course. Thank you so much," I beamed and ran to hug Troy.

On the day of the contest, I helped carry a large screen into the hospital room, wheezing under pressure. All of the works were set up -- a screen showing the crowd, a webcam so the crowd could see Troy, and large speakers. Numerous men and women from the speaking contest board with bluetooth phones in their ears were standing behind the equipment. Troy stood in front of the screen next to a pedestal with a glass of water.

I ran over to hug Troy. "You are so strong. You can do this. Even if you come in last, it

doesn't matter. You are all I could ask for in a son.” “Thanks, Dad. Thank you so much for everything you've done,” Troy whispered, trying to save his voice. I stepped out of the camera's view and sat behind the large screen.

One of the officials signaled “3,2,1” on his fingers. A man clicked a switch, and the speakers blared. “Our next contestant is Troy Patterson. He will be reciting from a hospital room after recently recovering from an urgent tonsillectomy. It is his third day of recovery and his points will be deducted appropriately. Ladies and gentlemen, Troy Patterson!”

Troy's face appeared on the smaller screen below the webcam. Sudden roars of applause and whistles filled the theater. Troy started speaking. “Never let your obstacles get the upper hand... When I had a tonsillectomy three days before my big contest, I didn't know what would happen...”

After two hours, I was back with Troy in the hospital bed, just him and I in the room. The MC of the contest started speaking. I held my son's hand, both of us feeling pressure. The speakers, still in the setup of when Troy spoke, sounded once more.

“In seventh place out of one hundred speakers, and winning two hundred dollars . . .

*Troy Patterson!”*