

WORD COUNT: 624/650

A Perfect Mess

I never would have guessed that my family's Easter dinner could be so tied to my growing confidence as a dancer... especially a meal called Easter Garbage Plate.

Every Easter my Grandma serves her traditional Easter dinner of ham, gravy, green peas, tomato sauce, and mashed potatoes. When my Dad and Uncle were kids, they swirled the sauce into their potatoes and were amazed to see them turn into white and pink spirals. The tradition continued, and my cousins and I also joined the fun. Although my family still eagerly awaits Easter so they can participate, I've discovered that the Easter Garbage Plate doesn't sit well with me. It brings me closer to my family, but it's just not in my nature to mix my food into messy combinations. Easter Garbage Plate challenges my need for order and perfection. Just like my family now encourages me to participate on my terms, my dance teammates and coaches have also shown me that recognizing, then overcoming, perfectionism is the key to building true confidence, especially when it feels like everything is unexpectedly swirling together.

For example, last competition season, I hurried from school to the most challenging competition of the year to compete in my duet. I felt like my entire team depended on me. We are like a family. My teammates and coaches know my pet peeves and favorite songs; my Starbucks order and that I'm not a morning person. Most importantly, they know about the pressure to balance school, competitive dance, and our personal lives. My dance family has helped me in so many unexpected situations. Especially this time. Everything was rushed, from my makeup and hair to finding the dressing room and stage. I was so rushed, I'm surprised I could get my costume on. And that's when it hit me: the spotlight was about to be on me. I had performed hundreds of times before, and it was never really an issue. Yet, fear consumed me and I didn't know if I could get up on the stage. I just wanted everything to go perfectly.

I paced backstage and practiced what I could of my duet: "Spiral." I kept messing up and losing my balance. I tried so hard to keep the contents of the dance separate and orderly, but they just spiraled together. Just like when mashed potatoes and tomato sauce mix together on Easter, I was also spiraling—a mess. My dance partner tried to calm me, but all I wanted was to disappear. I couldn't get the four judges out of my mind. I heard our duet announced, and we walked on stage. I couldn't even see the judges because of the tears I was trying to hold back. As the music played, I felt myself coming out of my own spiral. But when I reached the part in the duet I was struggling with, I stumbled and all I could think about was what a mess I'd made. My perfect duet had turned into an Easter Garbage Plate.

Looking back on it now, my performance wasn't as perfect as I had hoped for, but just like my family's Easter Garbage Plate, it didn't matter if it looked perfect. What mattered was that I'd performed and didn't let down my dance family. I found a way to overcome my perfectionism and perform anyway. Having those families to lean on during harder moments in life is the source of my confidence and has shown me how to overcome perfectionism. This Easter, I will participate in the Garbage Plate tradition because not everything is going to be perfect. Few things in life are. In fact, some things are better when they aren't perfect at all when they are a perfect mess.