



Mooseheart Reflections
Marco Namowicz

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About a month ago on an early Saturday morning, I stepped outside on my porch to get ready for the day and without knowing it, reflecting on my time at Mooseheart. Outside the sun was just high enough to illuminate the fresh green grass, striking the morning dew with such clarity that it seemed to light the world. The birds sang their melodious song and the trees danced in the light breeze, whispering to me words of comfort and encouragement. Only I could hear this music, this symphony. And as I drew a breath and sighed, so did the world. Spring had truly started, and it was at that time, that I realized that this was the final stretch before leaving the beautiful campus that I had called home. I looked around myself and laughed, thinking to

myself, “This is a great way to finish”.

That was a month ago, and as you know yesterday, I experienced stepping on the stage to receive my diploma. I’m nervous and uncertain of the things to come, yet at the same time, excited to know that the 1.2 million men and women I call family are with me at all times. It is an honor to be here tonight speaking to you, sharing my life, a life that you have all been a part of. You are givers of hope, a piece of the solution to the broken lives that misfortune preys upon. For that, I thank you.

As a citizen of Mooseheart for twelve years, I have been fortunate to grow up in a stable environment full of opportunities. My father left before I was born in March of 1991. To make things worse, later that year in December, my grandmother passed away. All this time my mother and I were living with her parents in Chicago, and after my grandfather died somewhere around 1997, the burdens of death, financial struggle, and environmental instability, led to an old door of the past, being knocked upon. It was the door to the city where my mother grew up, the door of Mooseheart. The beautiful campus had been my mother’s home for eight years, and in 1989 she stood on the same stage, and felt the same rush of emotions that I felt yesterday. My mother, Rose Namowicz, never intended

for me to come to Mooseheart, but in the face of struggle and uncertainty, I would find myself traveling on a road very similar to hers, approaching the crossroads of life, and experiencing the feelings that connect us all.

On May 1st of 1997 at the age of six, I entered the gates of Mooseheart, not fully understanding the conditions of where and why I was coming to live here. I remember crying on the train ride, as my mother tried to explain to me that I would be in a wonderful place, surrounded by other children my age. I don't remember how I adjusted; I guess I just went along with the things I had to do. I was happy here and though I missed my mom, I accepted Mooseheart as my home. In time I grew to understand how everything fit together, like a five thousand piece puzzle. I fit in, having friends and adults, teaching me lessons in life. It wasn't until 4th grade that I made the decision to pick up the clarinet. What proved to be an ordinary decision ultimately foreshadowed my future.

I had joined band because it had interested me, and I thought it would be fun. Soon I found comfort in playing the clarinet, and Mr. Schmidt, the band director, nurtured my musical curiosity, encouraging and teaching me. During my years in middle school, I participated in solo ensemble competitions. Outside of music, I played boys basketball my 7th grade year, and football in 8th grade. During this time I did not look up to anyone

specifically, but rather followed my internal compass and took important qualities and morals that matched my beliefs, from adults and ideas. I was about to embark on the last four years of my experience at Mooseheart. Four years, that were filled with the best experiences and hardest challenges that I've faced so far.

Freshman year came, and I went out for high school football and track. I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life after graduation. A little soon it seemed, but I wanted to get a head start. I had thought about being a chef, a photographer, a painter, or a musician. I was still involved in music. I played whenever I could, and experimented with composing and improvising. I leaned more to wanting to be a musician than anything. Sophomore year I didn't go back out for football, for I feared of breaking a finger or hand! Music meant more than anything and I didn't want to injure myself, leaving me unable to play. So I continued with track. Mr. Schmidt at this time informed me about Interlochen. For those who do not know, Interlochen is an arts academy and a summer arts program, located near Traverse City Michigan. Here, artists from the U.S., along with 40 other countries worldwide, come for training with professors to master their art. From dancers, painters, sculptors, creative writers, to actors, film producers, and musicians, a fiery passion for the arts burn within each

individual. I had been working on a piece and Mr. Schmidt wanted me, along with some other students, to audition in hopes of attending Interlochen in the summer. It sounded like an amazing experience and I longed to improve. I was told this was where the best went, and that I had the slimmest chance in the world to make it. I worked all fall and winter that year on my audition piece. In February 2007 we recorded in the House of God our music and sent in the CD's. All I could do was wait. Spring break approached and I stayed on campus. I spent most of the break in Maryland/ Delaware home, due to the fact that my home closed. When I walked back into Antoinette Marinello on March 31st, it wasn't any ordinary day. It was my 16th birthday. As I glanced around the house my eyes fell upon a packaged envelope from Interlochen. Immediately anxiety and nervousness filled me and I stared for a long time at the mail, as if it were a ticking time bomb, ready to go off at any moment. I slowly opened the envelope, every second took a lifetime and when I saw the word "Congratulations", I jumped and yelled like a child, splashing in the water on a bright summer day. I closed my eyes and thanked God over and over. Looking back I don't know how I made it, I had such a small chance, yet it was all made possible by God and the encouragement that surrounded me. This day marked the beginning of rapid changes and growth as a musician and person. Changes that were made possible by the

men and women of the Moose.

Interlochen was a different and out of this world experience. It was the longest time I had ever been away from Mooseheart, and it taught me a lot about being independent. For six weeks I was alone, making decisions for myself. I was thrown into a completely new environment. Interlochen was far away from the hectic and busy life that we are used to. Here I could focus on music for six weeks straight. I was unbelievably surprised at how amazing other musicians were, and I realized that I knew very little of a new world so vast and intricate. I was far from being the best, but it didn't matter to me. I had made it and I was learning and improving so much. The experience touched every part of my soul, rejuvenating me and it was that first summer at Interlochen that I knew without a doubt I wanted to be a professional musician.

Since the beginning of high school and the summer at Interlochen, I've participated in the Fox Valley Youth Symphony Orchestra, played at the Fox Valley Music Festival, and this year I was 1st chair in the orchestra. I was also in the Illinois IMEA District Festival Honor Band. It was my senior year that was filled with even more experiences.

This year I've been given the rare opportunity to attend Batavia High School half day. I played 1st chair in their top band, and was a winner in their

concerto competition. I've been able to perform at University of Illinois and Illinois State University. Aside from playing in the band at Batavia, I've taken courses in Music Theory, AP Music Theory, Music History and Applied music, in which I've given four recitals. Outside of music, I've been an alter Server in Catholic Mass at the House of God for eight years, volunteered my time at a local retirement home, and helped decorate the campus for Homecoming in 2007 and 2008. I attended Interlochen for the second summer in 2008, and progressed even further.

Even though my stay at Mooseheart has come to a close, I will be here in the city, where the next chapter of my life will bring new challenges and rewards. I'm happy to announce that I am going back to Interlochen this summer for the last possible time. It has been another home for me, and I'm excited to return. I will be attending DePaul University here in Chicago, majoring in Clarinet Performance. DePaul awarded me a total of \$33,000 in scholarships and grants. This combined with my \$36,000 over four-year scholarship, covers the cost of tuition and room and board, which is approximately \$40,000. I plan to also major in Music Education, and after my undergraduate studies, I will go to a conservatory for graduate work. I'm striving to play in a major symphony orchestra and teach music on a university level.

I would not have known the successes that I've had, if it were not for all of you. Coming to Mooseheart has been a blessing in itself and I have learned so much throughout my time there. What you give and do is amazing. You have given me a bright and promising future. Through you I have learned independence, perseverance, and have found friends and support from around the world. You have let me chase my dreams, encouraging me and providing the means to progress in life. I truly thank you for all you have done for me and all the children at Mooseheart. May God bless you with good health and watch over you always. I am proud and honored to call you family.