

## High School Essay Second Place

### Pointe Shoe Graveyard

By Grace McGuire, Walt Whitman High School

There are three things in my bedroom that stick out: my unmade bed, my 2-foot-wide drone, and my large pile of “dead” pointe shoes. I keep every pair as a shrine to my years of ballet dancing. Each pale pink shoe is battle worn with dirt and scuff marks and carries the wonderful faint stench of foot sweat. And each also holds different memories and parts of me.

When I dig to the bottom of the pile, I find my first pair of pointe shoes, my Grishko 2007s. It’s easy for me to tell they’re my first from the uneven loose stitches where I hand-sewed in the ribbons and elastic. I desperately wanted pointe shoes when I was 12. To prove to my teachers I was ready, I worked vigorously to strengthen my ankles and feet. When I was brushing my teeth or setting the table, I also was doing leg lifts or pliés. I also had to work hard to break in these shoes, so I didn’t look like an elephant on stilts as I danced. Despite the pain that my first pair of shoes brought me, dancing in them gracefully was an amazing reward, especially because I had earned it through my own motivation and initiative.

On top of my Grishko 2007s, you would see my Russian Pros. These were the shoes I wore in my 11th production of *The Nutcracker* where I danced the heretofore unknown part of the Golden Songbird. These shoes were no friend of mine due to the many blisters and calluses they caused: They turned my *échappés* into *échapains*, and forced me to rely on the medical miracle known as Advil. However, the worst thing these shoes did was make me slip after I *renverséd* during one of my performances, causing me to land flat on my face in front of a large audience. Despite how embarrassing it was to fall, I chose to laugh not cry because to be fair it was pretty funny.

And when I look at the very top of the pile, I see a shiny purple box with my newest pair—my Russian Rubins. I like running my hands along these shoes’ smooth unbroken exteriors—a blank canvas full of opportunities and failures for my future self. They could be the shoes in which I break an ankle, or they could be the shoes in which I finally land a quadruple pirouette.

To anyone who walks in my room, my pile of pointe shoes may just seem like an early sign of a hoarder. But to me, each shoe is valuable and important. Eventually, I will have to find a way to get rid of my unused pointe shoes. I like to think that the raccoons who regularly go through our trash could put them to good use. But for now they can stay in my room, as a tribute to how much ballet has shaped me as a person.