

BEFORE

Unfinished Masterpiece

Analogies. What used to burden so many high school students before me, analogies have lost their importance in the college application process. However, when it came time to write this essay, I found myself to be completely ensnared by one: Duke is to Blue Devils as Mary Regan is to...blank. I found my answer to that question in one of life's most delectable treats: red velvet cupcakes.

Throughout my high school career, red velvet cupcakes have become my symbol and represent me on so many levels. This phenomenon started when a fellow fencing friend asked me to make him red velvet cupcakes for his birthday. I had never baked them before, so I was surprised when all my fencing friends loved them and asked me to make them for their birthdays. The word spread to my high school as well, for I found myself baking these cupcakes on holidays, friend's birthdays, and school celebrations as well. For the first time in my life, I had been given an identity, which was confirmed when the president of the PTA called me asking if I was the "red velvet cupcake girl" and if I could make them for the upcoming teacher's banquet.

Besides being my counterpart in my high school community, I am linked to red velvet cupcakes on a much deeper level because our "recipes" are the same. In other words, just like how red velvet cupcakes possess certain ingredients that make them distinctive, I too possess unique qualities and experiences that make me stand apart from the crowd. My life has been an ongoing recipe that remains unfinished. Just like how some foods work better in certain recipes than others, I have added and replaced certain ingredients in my life that just weren't working. At the start of 8th grade, I realized that my current school wasn't the right fit for me, so I opted to go to a private school for high school. Little did I know at the time how many lessons Hopkins would teach me. Of course it forced me to learn necessary life skills like time management and coping with an over-burdensome workload, but above everything else it taught me to be satisfied with doing my best, and not being the best. My peers are some of the most intelligent and competitive children in the country, competing in international science Olympiads and such. I used to feel very insecure about myself, but then I realized that even though I may not be the smartest kid in my class, I have done some things that no one

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She rushed to the dessert tables overflowing with tarts, homemade brownies, chocolate chip cookies, lemon squares, pies, and Rice Krispies treats and ignored them all. Glancing around to see if anyone spied her intent, she grabbed her third helping of my delicacy, and sneaked back to her seat. "Oh, so my math teacher has a dark side," I laughed to myself. Less than two minutes later, I saw the spot reserved for my seventy-two iced and decorated red velvet cupcakes completely bare.

One week before the annual Parent Teacher Association's end-of-the-year banquet, the president of the organization left an urgent message on the family answering machine. "Hello. This is Mrs. Berkowitz, and I need to find the cupcake girl. Do I have the right number?" (Yup, that's me, the red velvet cupcake girl.) "Would I," she wondered, "be so kind as to bake six dozen cupcakes for the PTA dinner?" Bursting with pride, I returned her call and agreed to her request.

I owed my first batch to my favorite sparring partner at my fencing club. Just before he turned fifteen, he asked whether I would bake cupcakes for his birthday. "Make them red velvet," he ordered from an invisible menu. And so began a hobby that set me apart from anyone in the fencing club and from anyone else on my high school campus, for whenever a friend had a birthday, I would bake my specialty and bring my gift to school. Before I knew it, people began to link my cupcakes to my identity.

Until word of my talent spread, my peers at school rarely talked to me. No one mentioned my fencing skills, my two undefeated seasons, or that I was a Junior Olympic medalist. Instead, wherever I went, I heard accolades for my cupcakes. Some say that with my red hair and porcelain-white skin, I look like my white-frosted creations; however, I believe they and I share uniqueness because of our special mix of ingredients.

For my cupcakes to rise and maintain their perfect consistency, they need a precise combination of flour, baking soda, and eggs with just the right amount of vinegar and vanilla to create their unusual taste. Recipes that stand the test of time often become favorites because they have unusual combinations of ingredients.

else has in my entire school, like my fencing accomplishments.

Fencing was not always the main ingredient in my life, basketball was. However, in the winter of 8th grade, upon realizing that my WNBA career had run its course I replaced my basketball for a sabre and since I have never put it down. Before I started fencing, I had a misplaced confidence and was unsure of my own abilities. However, with the help of my coach and my parents, I have finally begun to realize my true potential and consequently have found my own niche in the competitive fencing world. The road to success has not been an easy one, for I have had to miss out on a lot of high school experiences that I know will never happen again. I realize now that the path I have chosen for myself is not the path of an average teenager, but because I made this difficult decision I have found myself in the making.

My goal in life is to bring happiness to others and bring it to myself at the same time. I have learned that in order to do this I have to find the things that work best for me and eliminate those that don't. As of now, my recipe can be summed up as having a dash of self-knowledge, a pinch of trust, a splash of judgment, and a spoonful of patience, but what it will look like when I go to college I cannot say because my recipe is always changing. However, what I do know is regardless of how I frost my red velvet cupcakes, whether I pipe or just slab the frosting on, they still taste the same. Whether or not I presented myself in the best of light in this essay, it does not change who I really am at my core. I am Mary, a girl loves to bake and wishes to be remembered not by how she is decorated, but instead for what her "cake" tastes like.

Such is the case with my recipe for red velvet cupcakes.

As for me, a huge measure of fencing sets me apart. This recipe has fencing as its primary ingredient mixed with a dash of self-knowledge, a pinch of trust, an increasing splash of judgment, and a spoonful of patience. Not only do I appreciate my potential as a person but, in my pursuit to find my inner champion, I also have begun to secure my place in the competitive fencing world.

When I join Northwestern University's Class of 2015, the ingredients that form the future college graduate may require adjustment, but somehow I know they will blend into an absolutely perfect, timeless recipe—the best version of me.