**Please raise your hand if you have ever been obsessed with a classical music concerto.**

***Raise your hand.  Wait*.**

**Oh, why, thank you for keeping me company!  OR Oh dear!  Well, it seems I have awkwardly singled myself out.  I ought to explain.**

**Since I was a baby, I’ve loved music.  I begged my parents for violin lessons.  Since they couldn’t find teachers who took young students, they gave me a cutout violin on cardboard, which I quickly mastered.  Getting lessons at age 5 only fuelled the fire.**

**Four years ago, in the majestic Herbst Theatre in SF, my violin teacher, Robin Sharp, performed the Beethoven violin concerto.  Normally I hate sitting through classical music concerts, but this was *different*.  After a grand orchestral introduction, the soloist at first enters diplomatically, and then within seconds crescendos to a brilliant, proud, lyrical melody.  “Wow!” I thought.  I fell in love with it.  It was at once lyrical and precise, intimate and expansive, devastating and hopeful.**

**Love quickly became obsession.  I *really* wanted to play it.  However, like watching a Varsity team play and wanting to join but knowing you don’t yet have the experience or skill, I sensed, and Robin told me, the concerto would be out of my reach for a few years.  I hoped that if I improved enough, I could someday do it.  I worked at violin, learning many fabulous pieces, but *nothing* fascinated me like THE concerto did.**

**In the middle of November last year, after a particularly good lesson, Robin exclaimed, “Wow Greer!  Excellent work!  You know that you’re at the level where you can play anything you want?”  Of course, the first thing I asked her was, “The Beethoven violin concerto?”  She probably thought, “oh no! what did I just get myself into!?”  She asked nervously if I really meant that.  I said yes.  She quickly gave me another piece to give me “cooling off time.”  Remember that I’d been obsessed for four years; 3 months had absolutely no effect on my desire!  By February, when I’d finally wore her down, she let me play it.  But she liberally warned me that it is difficult.  This was a monstrous, ambitious project, so I had to approach it through smaller, easily attainable goals.**

**Now, what follows are a series of gym metaphors, which is odd since “musician” and “athletic” are usually antonyms.  I’ve gone to the gym enough to pretend to know what I’m talking about, and not enough to actually be athletic.**

**Make what you will of that.**

**When you go to the gym, you go with an objective in mind, and either you or you in collaboration with a trainer create a workout plan to meet the goal.  Each workout component has a subgoal: ladder to improve agility, weights to build muscle, etc.  Similarly, I had to create subgoals.  For example, one day, I would focus on intonation on the first two pages, then the next day I would focus on phrasing for the first two pages.  In March, I was ready to play the beginning and very end for you lovely people in chapel.  I finished learning the entire piece in April.**

**I’d be remiss to gloss over my setbacks.  Yes, yes, it’s very sweet of you to think I did it perfectly.  Sometimes there were bad days or moments: days where I definitely didn’t want to practice, passages that I practiced to death but didn’t seem to improve, passages that I’d practiced lots but still messed up on in the lesson, and general intonation.  Even in these bad days, love for the piece and fear motivated me to practice.  Since I’d requested to play this piece that was hard, I had to demonstrate that I was making progress, or else she wouldn’t continue working on it with me.  It’s like when your parents will only give you candy if you’re on good behavior.**

**However, the most memorable setback was over the summer.  I was at a music camp, and every week, the violinists there had studio class where about 10 kids get to play for all the violinists.  I was desperate: I really wanted to play the concerto for SOMEBODY.  I suppose playing in studio class is comparable to wanting to play on the team when they compete, except you’re not guaranteed to play if you can’t prove you’re ready.  So one day, I practiced the piece for a long time, but I wasn’t diligent about my intonation, and played it out of tune in my lesson.  My teacher at the camp was not pleased.**

**Leaving the lesson, I was upset and discouraged.  Until the start of school, I only practiced the very end of the concerto.  I was thinking that I’d prove to Robin I could play the end well, and then we’d move on. But it actually started sounding alright.  Robin suggested that I try to brush up the entire piece, and then we’d see if I would be ready for her studio class in October.  I was elated.  I worked hard at it, because I knew at any moment Robin could revoke her decision.**

**Happily, I performed the concerto two weeks ago, and it went fairly well.  However, I made many mistakes, some which would be red flags to discerning audiences.  One of my favorite mistakes is when I was supposed to play this loud high note, and the piano accompanist has a big chord during the note.  Except I arrived to the high note a beat early, and left the wonderful pianist to pause and then awkwardly play the big chord.  Have you ever seen those cartoons where the hero runs off the cliff and doesn’t fall until he realizes he’s in midair?  That’s what it sounded like.  Overall, I put in my very best work, and I am so grateful to have been able to finally play it.  (As a side bonus, I think my obsession with the piece subsided).**

**I just told you about one of my dreams, and my road to achieving it.  However, I’d say that most of my dreams and ideas don’t actually happen.  Have you ever had dreams that you haven’t acted on?  And if this happens to you, have you ever asked yourself why you don’t act on your ideas?  Sometimes, I don’t get stuff done because of distractions.  I procrastinate, fill my time with stuff I don’t care about, so by the time I’m done with my work, I have no time left to do what I want.  Sometimes I cop out on something by telling myself “I’m not naturally good at it,” and thus let myself off the hook for improving.  Sometimes, I think my dream is a good idea, but it’s not important enough to me to put in the time and effort to achieve it.**

**Let’s be real here.  I know that everyone has different priorities.  Maybe investing in a long term project like learning a musical instrument, becoming an excellent sports-person, or learning a new language isn’t important to you.  Maybe you’re perfectly happy with yourself right now.  If you are already satisfied, then stay as you are.  But if you have something you wish you could do, feel unsatisfied, feel like your life lacks direction and meaning, or that you can achieve more, consider the following:**

**Imagine discovering a hobby or dream that, when doing it, the hours feel like minutes.**

**Imagine doing a hobby that matters so much to you that you’d be mad if someone made fun of you for it.**

**Imagine the satisfaction you got if you set an ambitious dream for yourself in the hobby, and then achieved it.**

**If you haven’t yet discovered this hobby or dream, I hope you do.  Because when you do, and set a goal for yourself, you’ll discover the thrill of accomplishment, and your life will be richer for it.**

**Thanks!**