

Tyler Patrick
TPatrick84@yahoo.com

About 1,000 words

How to Turn a Wallflower into a Rockstar in Five Minutes.

It is November of 1998 in Kissimmee, FL and I find myself, at fourteen years old, crammed into a room with several other kids of various ages. The town is still rebuilding after the Night of Tornadoes that completely tore apart the area in February. I'm dealing with my own personal storm though. A cloud of anxiety looms over me as I snap open my instrument case and gaze upon my black and white Washburn guitar. It shines in the glow of the old fluorescent lighting that beams down from the water damaged ceiling. Much like my playing ability, it is sheltered and has not been in front of a crowd. I gently remove the guitar and feel it's smooth neck and the strings hum as I strum them. Looking around the white walled room as I tune my guitar, I see the other students going through the same routine as I am. We're sitting on the dull gray carpet awaiting our names to be called. Each of us trying our best to hype ourselves up to what we are about to do. The air is thick with the smell of industrial cleaning products that do little to mask the musk of this old building. A glance at the yellow pamphlet in my hand, labeled Jammers Music Center Christmas Recital, shows that I am third on the bill. I'm a shy kid so, I'm nervously picking the chipped paint of the black trim molding that runs along the walls when I hear my name called. It is time, now or never. My anxiety reaches a boiling point and as much I'd prefer the never option, I stand and walk towards the door to the conference room.

As I walk through the door into the dimly lit conference room, I'm followed by three other students that will be joining me on stage. We are all clutching our guitars, our knuckles turning pale, as we make our way toward the front of the crowd. Our families, my parents and grandparents among them, give nods and last minute words of encouragement in this sea of

strangers. Our guitar teacher, Omar Blanco, is already on the raised stage and is about to change my life. He smiles as we timidly approach and points us to our seats. I take my position in an uncomfortable metal folding chair that is next to him and the others file in on my right side. We plug in our guitars with shaky hands as my pulse doubles in tempo. My heart beats a rhythm against my chest that I must ignore to get through this ordeal. The crowd gives a polite applause that fades out quickly, signaling that it is time to play. The butterflies in my stomach take this opportunity to start flying frantically around inside me.

Omar counts us off and starts playing the chord parts to his rendition of Mike Oldfield's "Tubular Bells", a song made popular by its inclusion on the soundtrack for *The Exorcist*. The crowd is silent and I start to play the main melody of the song with shaky fingers. A couple of my fellow students stumble for a second on their harmony parts but we lock in quickly. We are laser focused on our hands as we play, none of us look up at the crowd. The song mounts in tension with every measure we go through. Every note we play intensifies. Suddenly, my fellow students stop playing. It's my time to slay the anxiety dragon with my solo. My guitar becomes my shield and the notes I'm about to play are my sword. Omar hits the chord I know is my cue to start and my fingers slip. I'm missing the notes and my anxiety grows. My mouth dries up and I'm left with the metallic taste of defeat. I've practiced too much for this to happen, what is going on with me? I have to calm down. The first note I actually hit finally comes through and I'm able to calm myself. This cloud above me, the dragon that has haunted me, slowly fades away. I'm conquering it! I blast through the rest of the solo without a hitch and my fellow students join back in to finish off the song. As the last note rings through the conference room, a smile creeps across my face. I've went through hell to get here but I finally did it. I've completed

my task for the day. The audience erupts in applause that is far louder than their welcoming and is punctuated by a loud “Yeah” screamed by my father, I’ve made him proud.

I unplug my guitar and shake my teacher’s hand. I see the pride in his eyes over what we just accomplished and I walk back through the crowd with my shoulders squared and my head held high. I notice something that I’ve never felt before, confidence. My anxiety is gone and I’m feeling like a little rockstar as I walk through the doors leading to the “backstage” area. I walk to my guitar case that is leaning in the corner and open it up. As I lay my guitar back into its resting place, I can see the change in it. It is sweat stained and full of fingerprints, signs of a hard time successfully conquered. Much like my shyness, the guitar has taken on a new life. It is more beautiful now than when it was polished and shining. It’s been through the ringer but gleams with progress. It, and I, are now totally different. From this day forward, I am no longer a shy child needing protection from the world. I am now a confident and outspoken young man. All because of five minutes on stage.