

# IN THE MARGINS: Idiot

*By Tony Martin*

*Editor*

I was called an idiot in the ninth grade by a man I had tons of respect for.

Today I would be known as a “band geek.” Back then, if it wasn’t band or church youth group stuff, I didn’t have a whole lot to do with it.

At Elba High School – home of the Marching Tigers! – band was actually considered cool. On Friday nights during football season, virtually the whole population of Elba, Alabama, could be found at the stadium. We were blessed with both a fine football team and band – champions all.

My band director back then was Bill Hickman. I swear, I would’ve taken a bullet for that man. He was a fine musician and master motivator. I had crazy respect for him. He seldom raised his voice – he just had that undefinable way of coaxing the best out of us.

We all loved marching season. Concert season, not so much. To transition from Friday nights under the lights to practice in the band room for concerts was tough.

I just enjoyed playing my horn (trombone, FYI). Note that I wasn’t great, or even all that good. Maybe I could have been if I’d practiced like I should’ve.

Still, I was competent enough. And, I wanted to please Mr. Hickman.

One afternoon we were rehearsing for our upcoming Christmas concert. We were practicing a sweet chorale arrangement of “Silent Night.” It was one of those occasions when the music flowed like gentle waters. You could look at Mr. Hickman as he

was conducting and tell that he was enraptured by the sounds he drew from us.

Until I messed up.

In a moment of silence in between bars, when the whole arrangement called for a rest, I held over into that moment, dragging whatever note I was playing a beat too long. I was the only one playing my instrument ... in a moment when I shouldn't have been. It was as obvious as if I'd set off a cherry bomb.

Without missing a beat, and while still conducting, Mr. Hickman looked at me and said "idiot." It came out like this: ID-eee-ut. He continued on, looking back at his score.

No big deal, right? For some reason, though, that little three-second incident is as fresh in my mind as if it'd happened yesterday. Of course, I'm over whatever wound I received, but I still remember it. (Maybe I'm not completely over it or I wouldn't be bringing it up.)

What's your "idiot" moment? Can you think of a time when you messed up and beat yourself senseless because of your failure? Of course you can.

So. How does one move on past failure – specifically, how can you not be so hard on yourself?

- Rather than be so self-critical, admit you blew it. Call it out. Writing it down might help get it out of your head and get it on paper so you can deal more effectively with it.
- Acknowledge that, in that moment, you were weak. Not helpless.
- Focus on the excellence that you DO have. Again, write this down (I'm the king of journaling. It simply works.) If you don't think you aren't excellent at anything, I'm

here to tell you you're so, so wrong. You are unique, one of a kind, which means you bring something to the world's table that no one else has. You aren't an idiot, at least most of the time.

- Remember no one of any consequence loves you any less because you fell short.
- Ask yourself: "What in my life is causing me to focus on what I think is wrong with me instead of what is right?" One awful byproduct of living in our broken world is that we gravitate toward the negative. Guess what: You are blessed. Say that aloud: "I am blessed." Because you ARE, and don't let anyone or anything tell you differently.
- Etch this in mental stone: "You become what you think about."
- Etch this in mental stone: "You become what you think about." (I just wanted that to be clear.)
- I say this all the time, because it's true: "Failure is an event, not a person."
- Here's the ringer. You can have hope. You aren't an idiot. Because ...
- *"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things."* That's some ancient script from Philippians 4:8, and that's a good word. Because – drum roll – you become what you think about.

Hope this encouraged you. And I don't think Mr. Hickman really thought I was an idiot. Well ... maybe for one beat or so. I'm sure he never gave it another thought. Nor should I.