

## “First-Year Writing Seminar: The Podcast,” Season 1

### Episode Transcript: Elsa Yeager on “Striving for Excellence”

Host (Opening): Hello everyone and welcome to This I Believe. On this new phase of the show, we will be discussing the Association of American Colleges and University, or better known as AAC&U's, 5 dimensions on personal and social responsibility. This week we will have Elsa Yeager talking about her experience with dimension number 1, Striving for Excellence.

I believe everyone should strive for excellence. I continue to strive for excellence in every situation of life. Because I've learned that my life will never be perfect, but if you continue to strive for excellence and self-satisfaction, you'll find that it is way more enjoyable.

Life is funny and full of unexpected lessons. For me, learning to continue to work towards excellence has been one of those funny, unexpected lessons. When looking back I'm glad I continued to look forward and continued the pursuit, but it's hard and feels like someday perfection and excellence are never going to be insight.

My high schools marching band has a saying that I continue to remind myself constantly, “Pride. Excellence. Tradition.” That activity more than any taught me that excellence is achievable, but sometimes not how we'd expect. Marching band was the most popular activity in my high school and consistently receives high praise from the state and local community. I joined as a little freshman knowing we had a legacy to carry on, but not realizing the stress that that thought would cause me and my friends.

My freshman year was the hardest year of schooling for me, my parents had gotten divorced the year before and my brother was graduating that incoming spring. My life was changing in ways I had no control over and the only way for me to cope was to become a perfectionist on the things I did have control of.

Marching band was the first activity of the year, so it become my main focus that fall and every one after that. I worked so hard to be the best and I wasn't, and I was aware of it. I pushed myself to the point of injury constantly and never took the time to recover. I worried about letting down the legacy or disappointing my coaches. To me, band came first because we had this excellent tradition that we couldn't let down. We were always reminded by veteran members that we needed to have pride for the program, excellence in everything we did and to respect the tradition in order to survive.

It wasn't until I got removed for a consistent dislocated shoulder injury my sophomore year that I was able to look back and realize what I had been doing to myself. I was talking with my director one day during this injury and he told me, “You are never going to be excellent or perfect. You can continue to work towards it, but there is no way for anyone to be 100% perfect, 100% of the time.”

These words have stuck with me. It put into perspective that excellence is hard to achieve, there is no finish line or pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. It is ongoing, never ending work and that takes a while to realize. After that conversation I reminded myself that I am not a robot, I'm not perfect at

everything I do. I am not the best and that's okay, but I am who I am and can continue the pursuit of excellence but have learned never to expect it right away.

The following fall my outlook on the program was different. I focused more on the actual experience and being in the moment, than hurting myself to be perfect. I was working towards excellence, instead of beating myself for not instantly being the perfect performer I had imagined.

We continued on the tradition to reach the 40-year mark and started our own by getting first at a new competition that fall. It was a good reminder for me that although I don't think I'm fitting the idea of excellent or am good enough, doing the best that you can will always be enough and will make others proud. I also learned the ability to strive for excellence is not possible if you can't perform the activity at all, keeping your body and mind healthy is also a huge part of being excellent.

I believe we should all strive for excellence. Life isn't a straight story, it comes with ups and downs, but having a continuing goal of excellence in anything you do provides a reason to keep going, keep pushing. It is a never-ending journey, but in so many ways worthwhile. This I believe.

Thank you so much for listening to my story. Huge shoutout to Anchor for letting me produce this episode and providing all of the incredible music and sounds heard in the background! Thank you for tuning in and see you next week on, This I believe.

### **Attributions**

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The pieces I used were:

Attn (first sound & before final paragraph)

Jupiter (after opening, before body paragraph)

Come as you were, located in the Melancholy genre (during body paragraph)

Skyway, located in the cheerful genre (during final paragraph)