

## PROFILES

**Editor's Note**

*Aimee Ware's profile assignment directed her to write about a group, culture, ethnicity, or place. In "This One Time at Band Camp . . ." she has chosen to profile a group close to her heart, the Mustang Marching Band, with a focus on examining band member stereotypes. Utilizing insider information, a strong interest in the subject, and a personal connection allows Ware's passion to shine in her writing. Adding humor and relevance to the academic community makes her piece accessible to a larger audience. In addition, her interview with the assistant director of Cal Poly's Mustang Marching Band brings credibility to her position. After reading this essay, does your perception of a band member change? What more might you want to know?*

**This One Time at Band Camp . . .**

**Aimee Ware**

It is the heat of the day, on Saturday, November 18, 2006. It is half time at a sold-out homecoming game for the Cal Poly football team. The score is 35–0, and Cal Poly is winning. The crowd is going crazy as the clock is ticking quickly to 0.00. As the football team is running off the field, another group is "running on" the field. This is the marching band. As the cadence begins, the band members bring up their left feet and begin to high step on the field, not only stepping together, but to the beat of the music as well. While the run on is short, (48 counts, less than one minute) and fast, it is also very physically demanding and the band members immediately begin playing at the end of the "run-on." While they are still out of breath, they must find the air to support the sounds of their instruments. As they are playing, they are also moving around to make different formations on the field. After the intense show, the members are sweaty and hot. After all, it is 90 degree weather, not to mention that the uniforms are 100% polyester and don't breathe. But this is just a small fraction of what the members of the band have done that day.

While other students slept in on Saturday, the band members had to be up at seven in the morning to finish perfecting the show. The members maybe have an hour for lunch, and then they have to be back to get into uniform and warm-up. After they warm-up they have to go to the college president's house to play for him and then off to the barbecue for all the parents and friends who gave money to athletics. The songs that are played at these two performances are picked out during warm-up from the library of 160 songs. The members are required to be prepared for this, with either the music memorized or in their music holder. By the time the band arrives at the stadium, they have already played two performances. The band performs a pre-game show that consists of three songs and then plays in the stands during the first two quar-

PROFILES

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ters. Then it is finally the half-time show. Amazingly, the members find enough energy to perform a show that is to the best of their abilities. Then they go back and sit in the stands and play the last two quarters. After the game is the post-game show, where the members go back onto the field and play more songs as the crowd leaves. The band members are usually the last ones out of the stadium after games. Then they march up the hill to the music building while maintaining the same level of high-energy and are finally dismissed for the day. With all the work that they put in, one may think that band members would have a high level of recognition. But this is not true.

The general population perceives the band to be dorky, socially inept, sex-obsessed and odd. In movies such as the *American Pie* series, the moviemakers show the extreme stereotypes of a marching band. In *American Pie Presents Band Camp* the saxophone player is awkward in all social situations at the beginning of the movie. Also, the band members are perceived to never have any fun, as is shown when Stifler (the main character) spikes the drinks and most of them had never had alcohol before. In *American Pie*, the flute player, Michelle, likes to say “This one time at band camp . . . ” and finish the sentence with a dirty phrase. When I was a freshman in high school, I was obsessed with band and would tell band stories non-stop. I would say, “This one time at band camp . . . ” and proceed to tell a story about band that was clean. Because I played the flute and liked to talk about band camp, people put me in the stereotype of Michelle, even though it was the opposite of how I act. (You can imagine the day when they found out that my middle name is Michelle.)

Movies such as the *American Pie* series, have just taken the easy way out, and stretched the truth on something that they don’t understand. As Len Kawamoto, the assistant director of the Cal Poly Marching Band said, “People fear what they don’t understand, and they don’t understand band.” Non-band people don’t understand that it takes a great amount of work, time, and commitment in order to be in the band. Not only does it take an immense amount of dedication and scheduling, but also it is a work out, both physically and mentally. The students must march synchronized with the beat and each other while playing their instruments. This requires a strong lung capacity. Members also must memorize their music and positioning so they don’t hit one another on the field. At any given time, the brain of a marching band member may be thinking about eight different things at once (notes, rhythm, dynamics, articulation, positioning, foot, tempo, and horn angle). After years of training, most of this comes to be second nature. Sometimes while marching shows, band members will be thinking about completely random, non-band related things. Band members have to be intelligent to be able to execute eight things or more at once.

## PROFILES

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As Len and I discussed, band, like any other class on campus, attracts many different types of students; for example, there are the popular kids, the jocks (yes, in band there are jocks!), the engineers and the Goths. These students come together for one common good. At the beginning of the year they spend so much of their time together rehearsing and such, that they become good friends. After band season, they still spend approximately 99% of their free time together. I am currently living with a girl that I met in band and I will be living with four other girls in band next year. This is not because band is one big huge clique, but because we want to be courteous to the other people around us. If we are gone all day or need to fulfill our practice hours, we are around people that understand our needs. We are all different people, with different backgrounds, but we understand one another and our love and dedication for music is what binds us together.

A person off the street cannot be given a horn and thrown in the band. It takes so many years of proficiency on an instrument and an understanding of music that not all people contain, or have the willingness to learn. The average American family does not go out on the weekend to pretend like they are in the band. (Well, I do. I once asked my dad to chalk the lawn in our backyard so that I could practice my marching.) The average family goes to play football. The stereotypes have come from people not understanding what band is about, and just choosing to make fun of band members. In reality, band is a group of hard working students that deserve not to be made fun of as in the movies, but given respect for all that they do. A football game without the band is just a game, when the band is there it is a performance and event. Next time you see the band, don't think *American Pie*, but take a moment to watch and appreciate the band's school spirit and energy.

### Works Cited

*American Pie*. Dir. Paul Weitz. Perf. Jason Biggs, Chris Klein, Thomas Ian Nicholas, Alyson Hannigan and Shannon Elizabeth. Universal Pictures, 1999.

*American Pie Presents Band Camp*. Dir. Steve Rash. Perf. Eugene Levy, Tad Hilgenbrink, Arielle Kebbel, Jason Earls and Crystle Lightning. Universal Pictures, 2005.

Kawamoto, Len. Personal Interview. 17 April 2007.

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