

I GOT SLUSHIED

By John Jacobson

Occasionally, when the choir kids walk through the hallways of William McKinley High School on the television show GLEE, bullies come along and for no apparent reason douse them with freezing cold Slushies. It makes the bullies feel powerful and the Glee club kid feel sad and embarrassed. But the other choir kids help their “slushied” friend clean up the mess and move on with a song in their heart and a dance in their feet.

This week I got “slushied.”

I was convinced to appear on a television show called *America’s Got Talent*. It did not go well. First of all, a little advice — never go on a TV show you’ve never watched. Well, okay, I had seen about five minutes of the final episode of the 2010 season. What I saw was a beautiful little blonde girl who sang like an angel and a kind of edgy looking young man who actually won the competition giving her a big hug. Everybody seemed so excited and happy. I thought the show was about edgy tenors hugging singing angels — show that truly celebrated the remarkable and diverse talents of our great country. My bad.

The week the producers of *America’s Got Talent* called to ask if I would come on the show and lead the audience in a flash mob of sorts using my Double Dream Hands Dance, I had also received an e-mail from some Los Angeles area music teachers, informing me that 40 percent of the music teachers in LA had just received their pink slips. This action was going to essentially wipe out music education in the Los Angeles public schools. They were asking me if I could help raise the profile of their plight and try to save the music programs of my adopted hometown. I knew this was a familiar scenario across the country. School music programs are where I spend my life.

At the same time, teachers of music and every other discipline were protesting draconian cuts in school budgets, especially in arts programs. I was again getting e-mails from friends all across the country asking me if I could help.

Finally, the recent news reports blaring the shocking statistic that one in three children in our country are overweight or obese did not escape my attention. Kids' fitness has long been a passion of mine. Another opportunity to bring this important topic to the attention of adults who are charged with leading our children toward habits of healthy living seemed a worthy goal.

When *America's Got Talent* approached me about the show, I hesitated. So, they included three important points that convinced me to participate.

1.) AGT would prepare the audience so that they would be co-operative to our Double Dream Hands fun and games. In the words of the AGT producer, "We realize it would not be good television to have an uncooperative audience."

2) They assured me that I would have a chance to teach the judges and the audience the dance so that they would be in on the fun with me. I knew this would not be my usual audience of music teachers and their students, but I felt with adequate time, I could convince them to embrace the fun.

3) They told me the judges would interview me on television so that I could explain to the viewers what I do and why I do it. This would be my chance to champion the arts, kids' fitness and my life's work trying to create a more harmonious world through music.

For those of you who suffered through my performance with me, obviously the above things did not happen. I got "slushied."

Now, if any of you were embarrassed for me regarding my appearance on *America's Got Talent*, me too. Forget about it. I've been "slushied" before. I believe in taking risks for things you believe in. Sometimes you win; sometimes you get triple "X'd." But I've got a dream — okay a Double Dream — that we *can* create a world of harmony in a land of many voices, and tomorrow I'll have a brand new dance to do.

Here's the thing. Bullying, in the halls of a high school or on national television, is not okay. Yes, it was naive of me to appear on such a show. *America's Got Talent* just wasn't the place to make my case or help the causes that I care so deeply about. But don't worry about me. I have plenty of friends and lots of family to help me clean up that mess and move on.

Focus instead on the kids who are getting “slushied” by bullies every day and feel they have no one to stand up for them.

Focus on the children who need adults to lead them toward a healthier lifestyle involving good eating habits and exercise.

Focus on the fact that a well-rounded education must include music as well as the other arts taught by expert educators trained in that field. This is what makes American children grow into adults that will continue to lead the world in creative problem solving. It is in the arts where they will learn the important lessons of team building and leadership, independence and cooperation. It is also where they will learn to become decent human beings filled with passion, compassion, courage, honesty, tolerance and so much more that, I believe, can be taught more effectively through the arts than through any other discipline.

What is embarrassing is not my two minute flop on national TV, but rather a nation that has lost its sense of priorities to the point where it even considers denying their children the very elements of a complete education that have made this country great.

Thanks for listening, now let's dance.