Allison East is a graduate of Naperville North High School, where she was active in Orchesis, several choirs, and color guard. At NIU, she continues her passion for dance and also majors in special education, with hopes of becoming a teacher and one day pursuing an advanced degree. Allison says this essay was very challenging, but important to write. She hopes that readers can share her experience and take strength and solace from knowing they, too, are not alone.

Allison wrote this response paper in Dustin Marquis’s English 103 course.
Unseen Tears

MLA Format

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Anorexia nervosa. Two words that sound like poetry. However, together they represent a disease that affects many individuals in society. Some seek help, while others hide behind lies. I was one of those girls who knew which lie to tell, so I could keep the disease alive. I now realize I am not alone. Superchick composed a song entitled “Courage,” which spoke to me and related the difficulties of anorexia to individuals who knew nothing of it.

It was difficult going to junior high when I had a few extra pounds. In my head, all of my friends were “stick” skinny, and I just wanted to be like them—like everybody else. I started cutting down on what I ate. I would skip breakfast, have a protein bar for lunch, and maybe eat a small piece of chicken at dinner. Eventually, it became harder to keep my secret. Everyone asked why I wasn’t eating, and I had to come up with different lies. The lies I told were the same ones found in “Courage.” It is clear when you hear the introduction that the song isn’t cheerful. Several minor chords are played by a piano, which conveys the sad, painful tone of the song. Superchick’s breathy voice is filled with agony, which causes the listener to understand the severity of her pain when she reveals her secrets:

I told another lie today
And I got through this day.
I know the right words to say
Like “I don’t feel well,” “I ate before I came.” (1-5)

The broken girl in the song had to come up with different excuses to hide what she was doing, much like I did; and similar to her, my pain wasn’t just from the lies I told, but the isolation I felt.

I would come home from school and act like I was fine—like everything was okay—but inside, I was broken and bleeding. I hated who I was. I couldn’t stand to look in the mirror. My self-image was distorted; I felt ugly. When the lights turned off, the tears turned on. In line eight of the song, Superchick sings, “But when I’m alone, no one hears me cry.” This line finishes with a single minor chord, symbolizing how difficult it is to be
alone. The slow tempo also dramatizes the lyrics similarly to the way my mind dramatized my thoughts. I felt like no one was there, or that no one would understand. It was so overwhelming that I would cry myself to sleep.

When I would wake up in the mornings, I would see the changes in my appearance. Once it felt like I was almost at my goal, I stopped eating entirely. It was hard at first, but as I continued, I began to think that food was the enemy. It got easier not to eat but harder to cover up the lies and to make up excuses. But it was all worth it when someone would tell me I looked amazing or whistled at me in the hallway. Superchick sings, “Then someone tells me how good I look / And for a moment I am happy” (6-7). I connected to this line immediately. When Superchick sings, her voice breaks, like she can feel that split second of happiness, like all the hard work has paid off, and she can relax; however, as she continues, her voice drops because she knows it is not true. This part of the song mirrored my fear that I would never be perfect; 120 would never be good enough, and neither would 110. There would always be a lower, more perfect number. I was deaf. I wouldn’t listen to those who expressed concern. I didn’t care. I couldn’t listen. I felt so close to being perfect, so stopping wasn’t the answer.

Then, one day, my body stopped for me. Everything went black. When I woke up, I realized I had fainted, and I tried to play it off like it was an accident, but Lindsey, my best friend, knew it wasn’t. She forced me to try to understand that what I was doing was hurting me. She wouldn’t take no for an answer. And that was my wake up call.

I had a long road in front of me. My first step, the hardest step, was admitting that I had a problem and that I needed help. I knew I wouldn’t get better overnight. Superchick expresses that too, when she sings the chorus of her song:

I need you to know
I’m not through the night
Some days I’m still fighting to walk towards the light
I need you to know
That we’ll be OK
Together we can make it through another day (9-14).

Superchick knew there were going to be rough patches, but with the help of others, she could hold on and keep going. Melodically, Superchick brightens and raises the pitch of her voice to illustrate that she is trying to get through this time. She knows it won’t be easy, but “together,” she will be able to get through it (14). I knew I was going to have my ups and downs, but as long as I had my support system, I would be able to push through.
It took me a long time to force myself to feel pretty—to arrive at a point where I could be happy with who I was. I tried to share what I had gone through with others, so they could understand they weren't alone. Superchick does the same at the end of her song when a sweet, sorrowful violin is interrupted by a cymbal crash. The cymbal is a representation of a new beginning. The fading cymbal crash clears the negative atmosphere the song created and allows Superchick to start anew when she sings, “You should know you’re not on your own / These secrets are walls that keep us alone / I don’t know when but I know now / Together we’ll make it through somehow” (30-33). Paired with these lyrics are major chords, which create an uplifting tone and give a sense of a new beginning. When Superchick first sings these lyrics, the intensity of her voice increases, causing me to listen more closely. I was able to hear another singer accompany her to reiterate the importance of the lyrics. This section of the song demonstrates the path to recovery. Superchick had to break down walls like I did. I had to remove myself from the negativity in my life—to remove all the secrets I held—so I could be healthy again. Superchick and I both had to clear the way to recovery. In the song, it is cleared musically; in my life, I had to clear it emotionally. I had to get through my “walls.” I had to make amends with who I was and with the people I hurt. It wasn’t an easy road to recovery, but I made it through with the help of people I loved.

Years have passed by since the first day I decided not to eat. I still have those days when I can’t look in the mirror because I don’t feel pretty; but then, I have days when I feel like myself again, and I can just have a good time. I know my road to recovery is ongoing, but with each passing day, I am one step closer. Superchick’s song, “Courage,” was inspiring to me. I learned that I had control of who I was, and that I should be proud of who I am. I no longer base my appearance on what society dictates but rather on my personality. I learned to trust my friends. I know it is okay to ask for help, and I will not be considered weak for it. And now, I don’t have to suppress my unseen tears anymore.

Works Cited