**The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?**

At the beginning of last academic year, I took part in my school’s three-day secondary orientation as a Runner and organised an upscaled version of battleship. The scaled-up battleship game was unlike anything I had ever had the chance to organise and plan, raffia string used to map out the grid on grass and a large tarp and poles used to separate and block the view of the opposing teams. The participating members were chatting rowdily, refusing to settle down, and an eighth grader was kicking up the raffia string, messing up the battleship grid.

Situations like these were commonplace during the orientation games, and it became increasingly frustrating to deal with them as the number of occurrences kept rising. These situations were also quite high-pressure, as when something went wrong, they all turned to me, and to be completely honest, throughout my life, my people skills were never the best, and though it’s improved significantly these past few years, I still sometimes struggle with intense social situations where expectations are high, so my experience as a Runner was definitely challenging, and at times I felt like I wouldn’t be able to resolve the issues I came across. But through stressing out over it with my partner, and putting our heads together to think of a way to solve it, we were able to solve any issue that came our way. This experience really helped me to develop my problem-solving and leadership skills, as well as help me to stay calm under pressure and be able to think of solutions to problems quickly and on the spot.

I initially signed up for the role of Runner because recently I’ve been trying more to step outside of my comfort zone, because leading up to around last year I never really did that, and I only stuck to things that I was used to and never pushed myself to try new experiences and try new things. Once I realised that, I started to push myself, signing up for more competitions, volunteering for more roles at my school, as well as spending time with people that I previously wasn’t really close to. I think that trying these things has made me more open to new perspectives, and made me realise that staying in a closed off bubble hinders self-growth and keeps me the way I am forever.

As a side note, I harbour no ill will towards those who made the games I was in charge of a tad bit chaotic, it was , after all, in the spirit of our school’s orientation to be chaotic and have fun with your friends, and I am grateful for the lessons that I was able to learn from the experience, and will continue to make use of what I learned moving forward.

**Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.**

A while ago, someone I know told me to write my college application essay about my dad, and at first, I didn’t want to because I thought it would be exploitative and wrong to take his passing and use it to my advantage as a sob story. But to me, his passing is really so much more than a sob story, and I think that without first knowing about him, you wouldn’t really be able to know me.

I was 14 when he passed away, my family and I were on vacation in Bali when the tides got stronger and stronger and eventually he was swept away with my youngest brother. My brother lived, thanks to my father, and it was on that day I lost one of the people that I love most. However, this essay won’t be focusing on how he died, but rather on how he lived his life every day, and how he loved me and my family so much and was willing to give us the world, this is his story.

My father was a kind person, everyone he came across and got to know loved him, and he never failed to make a friend anywhere he went. I realised this at the funeral home, when hundreds of people showed up over the three days we were there, and it made me realise how many people’s lives he had impacted and what kind of person he really was.

From him, I learned what it truly meant to help others, and what it meant to love your family. Every day, I look back at my time spent with him and learn new things. He helped to shape the person that I am today, and without him I doubt that I would have been able to achieve and do the things that I have. I learned important life lessons from him, including working hard for not only the good of yourself, but to help those around you as well.

Without him now, I’ve had to take up additional responsibilities around the house. My mom is now the primary provider, and as such her schedule has become a lot busier. I’ve had to help her take care of my two brothers, as well as my grandfather and grandmother, and I’ve had to learn how to do things on my own, without any external assistance. Doing this has taught me a lot about responsibility, as well as independence, both of which would help me greatly when I eventually move out of my house and live on my own.

Dear Jonathan,

Your essays are quite good starts. Both have the potential to be quite unique, memorable stories. I have a few notes on how you can improve them further, as laid out below.

First – for both essays, I suggest adding more **description** to your stories. Don’t just summarize your experiences, take us **through them**. Tell us about your time as a Runner. For example, how you left your comfort zone to sign up for the position; what problems you faced and how you solved them; and what values you’ve learned and practiced along the way. Walk the reader through it, **scene by scene**, so we can see firsthand what you went through (and how you felt).

Second – for your first essay, since you need to showcase your personal growth through your story, you should begin your essay with a “**starting point**” – in other words, how you were *before* your growth. What were your views and values like back then? What prevented you from growing as a person? (For instance, your reluctance to step out of your comfort zone?) Once you’ve established a starting point, your growth will be clearer to the reader.

Finally – for your second essay, as difficult it may be to recount, the key to telling a story of loss is to tell the reader how that loss has **impacted** you, and how you’ve **grown from it**. What were your experiences like following your father’s passing? How and in what situations did you learn to implement the lessons that your father has taught you growing up? Did grief play a part in any of it?

With these points in mind, your essays are already on the right track. Keep it up!

All the best,

Arianne

ALL-in Essay Editor