

The essay demonstrates your ability to write clearly and concisely on a selected topic and helps you distinguish yourself in your own voice. What do you want the readers of your application to know about you apart from courses, grades, and test scores? Choose the option that best helps you answer that question and write an essay of no more than 650 words, using the prompt to inspire and structure your response. Remember: 650 words is your limit, not your goal. Use the full range if you need it, but don't feel obligated to do so. (The application won't accept a response shorter than 250 words.)

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

I grew up in a night club. From birth until the age of four, I spent just about every day of my life at Lounge Ax, the legendary Chicago bar run by my mother, Sue Miller, and her partner, Julia Adams. While my mom would work, I would play: the regulars were my extended family, and the disgusting, cigarette-littered floor, my playground. My earliest memories are of Lounge Ax's old-school photobooth, the soda gun behind the counter, and its sweaty basement office. The bar's serendipitously named doorman, Dan Orman, was my babysitter and my best friend, keeping me safe in a not-so-childproof environment.

In those four years, I watched bands like Pavement, The White Stripes, Yo La Tengo, and Cat Power play some of their first shows. I was surrounded by rock music, if not at Lounge Ax, then at home; alongside the usual childhood trainsets and action figures, my favorite toys were a Les Paul Jr. guitar and amplifier. I would sit in front of the TV and watch the same 90s music videos over and over and over again, emulating my favorite singers and strumming (unintelligibly) along. My guitar was taller than I was.

Things stayed this way until 2000, when Lounge Ax was forced to close due to a change of building ownership. It was extremely sad to see the venue go—it was both my mother's livelihood and the "second home" of hundreds of music-loving Chicagoans, including my toddler self. Lounge Ax's closing changed my life, but music remained. On the car ride to preschool every morning, my dad would introduce me to classic records, like Captain Beefheart's *Safe as Milk* and Guided By Voice's *Do The Collapse*. At age six, we would record demos together in my bedroom, him on guitar and me on drums. Around the same time, I formed a band with friends, called The Blisters (eleven years later, we would release our first album).

Today, music is just as much a part of my life as it ever was. In the past year, I have had the incredible privilege of performing on three albums: Mavis Staples' *One True Vine*, The Blisters' *Finally Bored*, and a yet-to-be-released solo album by my dad, all recorded at the Wilco Loft. After so many years of dreaming about making records, getting to spend lots of time in the studio has been hugely gratifying. It's helped me to grow as a musician, and it's been fun; there's nothing quite like playing music with your own family. My dad and I recorded *One True Vine* and his solo album almost entirely on our own, just like the home demos we made when I was six. I'm lucky to be able to express myself through music, and I'm especially lucky to share

it with my dad.

But without Lounge Ax, I might have had nothing at all—I might not have been born. It was there that my parents first (really) met, after my dad played a show there with his band at the time, Uncle Tupelo. In the ensuing years, my mom booked my dad—in Uncle Tupelo, and then in Wilco—countless times, probably not knowing that one day in December of 1995, they would stop by Lounge Ax “to say hi” on their way to the hospital as she went into labor.

I’ve had a very extraordinarily life because of my parents’ careers. I feel so incredibly lucky not only because of all the opportunities that my dad’s success in Wilco has afforded me, but also because our family has remained so close. My parents have instilled in my brother and me an intrinsic value of creativity, individuality, and empathy. I think that of all the things in my life, that is most important.