Source: https://threesixty.stthomas.edu/college-essay-discovering-myself/

I’ve always cared a little too much about things. To be able to make people smile, to make them laugh has always seemed like the right thing for me to do. As someone who has always wanted to do good in the world, I’ve struggled with the choice between taking care of myself and worrying about other people. I’ve come a long way, both regressing and progressing at different points, but throughout it all I’ve learned so many different lessons. At least in my story, I can candidly say that my experience and other people’s experiences are the best teachers of self-exploration.

In the third grade, my troubles with caring got big. Before, I was happy with the way I was, despite the occasional bout of loneliness. My sister was by my side and with the friends I had made it seemed almost impossible for the social self-consciousness to linger longer than a day or two. Day care was a little different. I loved the sweet snacks they served, most of which I had never tried before. I found myself a little more comfortable in the company of the Spanish teacher, who was always excited to talk to students, or in the pottery class that happened in the evenings. Even so, I found myself on the outside. The few friends I had attended only part time, leaving me alone on the schooldays between Monday and Friday. Without my sister, everything was overwhelming. Unlike the daycare I had gone to before I moved, I had no real group of friends. Eventually, I decided I wouldn’t go.

My parents didn’t like that, of course. I remember them asking me so many times to “just give it a chance” or “remember that one girl you like there?” I refused to listen. I’ve always thought that my willfulness comes from the determination of both my parents, but whatever its source, it was strong enough even then to allow me to win that argument. The path it set me on, however, was one that I couldn’t go back from as soon as I started to learn its rules.

I was never bullied in school, despite all the doubts I’ve had about myself. The experiences that I went through were a bit more quiet. Because of my desperate want to be liked, I flitted between social groups, changing myself a little for each one. The more I did it, the easier it seemed to go deeper and deeper behind the facades. By sixth grade I had built up a nearly impenetrable floodgate to keep back everything that I was sure people would find strange or unappealing; the shallow person that I showed was free of everything the status quo would reject. As much as I’ve tried to break down those walls, it’s still one of the most difficult tasks I’m facing in my life.

Over the past years, I’ve tried to unearth who I really am. Between helping people, taking care of myself and finding joy in my life, the dust of my own doubts has obscured my vision. Thankfully, quarantine has given me more time to discover that. I’ve realized that more than anything, I want the strength to stand on my own, as an individual. Even when I’m faced with pressure or judgement, I want to be able to be myself authentically. Though I’m just starting now, I’ve had a lot of time to understand my own needs. If I’m able to show that to the world, I believe that I’ll truly find myself in the place I want to be.

GPT-improved sample

From a young age, I’ve always had a strong desire to make people happy. The thought of bringing a smile to someone’s face has always felt like the right thing to do. But as I got older, I found myself struggling to balance my own needs with my desire to help others.

In third grade, my difficulties with caring for others became more pronounced. Up until that point, I had been content with my social life. My sister was my constant companion and I had a few good friends at school. But when I started attending day care, everything changed. While I loved the snacks and enjoyed some of the classes, I found myself feeling lonely and left out on the days when my friends didn't attend.

In an attempt to assert my independence, I decided to stop going to day care altogether. My parents weren't thrilled, but I was determined to do what I felt was best for myself. Little did I know that this decision would set me on a path of self-discovery that I couldn't turn back from.

In the years that followed, I found myself struggling to fit in with different social groups. In an effort to be liked, I would change myself to fit in with each new crowd. Eventually, I built up walls around myself to protect the parts of me that I thought people wouldn't like. It wasn't until much later that I realized how exhausting it was to constantly maintain this facade.

With the extra time provided by quarantine, I've been able to do some much-needed self-reflection. I've come to realize that what I truly want is the strength to be myself, unapologetically. I want to be able to stand up for myself and my beliefs, even in the face of pressure or judgement.

Although I'm still in the early stages of this journey, I've already learned a lot about my own needs and desires. I believe that by staying true to myself, I'll eventually find the happiness and fulfillment that I've been seeking all along. The road ahead may be long and challenging, but I'm ready to face it with authenticity and determination.