



## **“Dear Santa”**

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EVERY YEAR, MY CHRISTMAS WISH LIST would read, “*Dear Santa, all I want for Christmas is a baby brother.*” At age nine, I knew Santa *had* to be real because, one day, my mom announced that she was pregnant. After ten years of being an only child, I could not have anticipated how much my life would change because of a little brother. I received the honor of naming him, and I chose Jason. In retrospect, I should have named my brother “Ivan the Terrible.”

Jason followed me *everywhere* like an irritating shadow. My grievances to my mom were countless, especially after Jason drew all over my bedroom walls and murdered my pet fish, Goldie. My mom’s typical response was, “Well, isn’t this what you’ve always wished for?”

Jason’s mischief reached a new height one morning when I became the victim of a five year old with scissors. I stared into the bathroom mirror and dunked my head under cold water to make sure I was not dreaming. What I saw enraged me! In the middle of the night, Michael had cut off five inches of my long, black hair from one side of my head. I stood in horror, and stormed to the kitchen where I found the rest of my family calmly eating breakfast. I flashed a menacing stare at my brother, who snickered across the table. “You’re going to pay for this!” I screamed. Furious beyond words, I could not even begin to describe my rage. Instead, I ran back to the bathroom and huddled on the floor.

“What am I going to do?” I was irate and panicked at the same time. As a freshman in high school, I was very sensitive about my appearance. I had been hesitant to cut my hair past the “tips to take away the split-ends” trim, because my hair had been the same length for seven years. I agonized over the situation and concocted my swift counter-attack. Instead of chopping off his hair, I found inspiration to appease my anger in the pages of *Teen* magazine and considered trendy hairstyles. My brother was stunned because I did not retaliate. Victory was mine.

Because of experiences such as this, I have learned to adapt, to keep my focus, and to solve problems with little or no resources. I approach tough situations with objectivity and determination. Like many other experiences with my brother and at school, I have dealt with difficult



situations and turned them into positive opportunities for change. I am flexible with the circumstances given to me, and I strive for the best outcome. Despite the craziness Santa's gift brings, Jason's continuous surprises provide laughter to my life. As for my hair, I did cut off the five inches from the other side, and I actually cherished the new look better. Thanks, Santa.

### ANALYSIS

The author's wit shines through in this punchy, concise essay. In fact, her humor is immediately evident in the first paragraph when shining expectations for a long-wished-for baby brother are thwarted by the blunt sentence, "In retrospect, I should have named my brother 'Ivan the Terrible.'" She uses italics and exclamation points effectively in her writing to punctuate key words and to express her mood. For instance, from the statement "Jason followed me *everywhere* like an irritating shadow," the exaggeration of "everywhere" heightens our understanding of the intensity of her irritation. The exclamation point at the end of "What I saw enraged me!" underscores the author's anger. Excessive use of word-stylization and punctuation can be distracting in an essay, but *thoughtful* use can enhance writing. In her case, these were particularly appropriate because her essay conveyed a more casual, informal tone.

Stylistically, the author also varies her sentence length to excellent dramatic effect. In particular, the contrast between longer descriptions of what was going on and short remarks such as "You're going to pay for this," the thought of "What am I going to do?," and the proud conclusion, "Victory was mine" draw us into the immediacy of the story. She chose to illustrate one very specific event from her many "grievances" (from bedroom wall vandalism to goldfish murder)—her brother cutting off her hair. This specific anecdote demonstrates how it is possible to write an essay that doesn't describe a transformation of years or even a weeklong summer camp. Though the event the author describes in this essay probably transpired in a matter of hours, she still made this a meaningful topic for her paper. This shows us that there's really no "best" timeframe or topic for writing a personal essay. The author's essay takes a specific topic of a very short timeframe, relates it to a longer timeframe (we know she has had long hair for seven years and is sensitive about her appearance as many high school freshmen are) and shows more generalized, almost "timeless" if you will, aspects of her overall character. We can contrast this to Jason Y. Shah's approach in "Hurricane Transformations" (Chapter 15), in which he tells a story of change that occurs over many months.