



essays not only relate events but also one's feelings and thoughts regarding the activity. Jean notes that she was "terrified" before the musical but shows her open-minded spirit when she "willingly embraced" the new art form. She refers back to the mentions of horse and freedom when she writes, "I was a horse freely cantering around an open meadow." The specific examples that follow demonstrate the diversity of new activities to which Jean is introduced and the eagerness with which she embraces each one. Jean does a wonderful job of explaining the horse-in-meadow simile with concrete, real-life examples such as these: showing her parents dance steps, drawing costume designs, and experimenting with new hairstyles.

In her concluding paragraph, Jean ties together the many examples she used in her essay to show us how her "comfort zone is expanding." She illustrates some of the contours of this comfort zone, which she calls the "grand scope" of her interests: "from singing and dancing to throwing a sales pitch in front of judges; from learning how to execute precision front-flips to building my favorite piano repertoire; from designing a webpage to arranging chamber music, or developing optics technologies." Illustrations like these can sometimes feel like long lists. Jean might have chosen to list fewer activities so that what she did choose to include could stand out more. The first line, which contrasts singing and dancing with throwing a sales pitch, is most directly relevant to the essay since singing and dancing were new experiences from the musical and throwing a sales pitch may have been part of the leadership conference in New York City that she mentioned briefly. In general, it is most compelling to use examples that are directly relevant to the essay to maintain a sense of focus. Bringing in too many outside references—for instance, Jean's comment on "developing optics technologies"—can seem incongruous and confuse readers. Overall, however, Jean's essay does a nice job of showing the breadth of her interests as well as the depth of energy she is willing to pour into creative pursuits such as the "Anything Goes" musical.

### **"Strength from Family Struggles"**

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EVERY FAMILY HAS THEIR STORY, ALL with aspects that brings them together or drive them apart. I come from a Mexican family, where family is the only thing we know. We share each other's pain and misery and we rejoice for our miracles. We learn and grow through each other.



Even through the darkest days we survive as one. I witnessed those dark days, but I also saw the bright and through it all I evolved into who I am today.

I encountered one of my biggest obstructions when I was a child. I was born into a family that had immigrated to America from Mexico. Although my parents had been in the country for quite some time, they never adapted to the American lifestyle. All I knew was Spanish and my first year of school would soon come. I would sit at the end of my driveway and listen to the variety of sounds that slowly crept into my ear, triggered a reaction and sent confusion running through my mind. Day after day, I would sit there trying to decode this puzzle word by word and the day came when I'd be shipped off to school where I was expected to know English. Kindergarten was one of the hardest years in my life. I struggled tremendously. I was the last one to know my address, I was the last one to know my phone number, and I was the one who almost failed his first year of school. If it wasn't for my father not allowing the school to hold me back, I could have become a completely different person. I struggled throughout my years in elementary school. I went to resource and received help with my schoolwork until fourth grade. I was given a big push forward and since then I have come to realize that I may not be the only one in need. Others will need help and I will be there with a helping hand.

Through the years, my family has undergone a variety of obstacles. I saw my brother completely stumble and fall when he impregnated his girlfriend at the age of sixteen. At the blink of an eye he became a father to be and a husband. Everything came to a halt and he needed to support another person. He worked during the night and finished high school during the day. He struggled even while living at home. As if one example in my house wasn't enough, my sister was expecting a child during her senior year. I remember the day when she told my parents, I was in the room next door crying in pain because she fell into the same trap my brother did. That was the end for her. She graduated from high school and began to work. Now she has two daughters and is trying to make a living. It is hard to see the people you love make mistakes. It is so hard, that it brings tears to my eyes, to know that you wish you could say everything will be ok. They are stuck in a rut and I am putting my best foot forward to give myself the future they don't have.



When my mother was a child she had suffered a great amount. She had become deaf in her teenage years. She lost complete ability to hear in her right ear and partially in the left and to add to all the confusion she was bound by a language. She was living in America with 4 of 5 senses and a tongue that many could not speak. Many would see this as a huge dent in her life, but she managed to start a family. I could not be any more proud of her and thankful for what she has given me. Her “disability” placed a tremendous amount of pressure on my shoulders. She was not able to go to the deli or to place phone calls when she needed to. All of a sudden, all of this had become my responsibility. My father was too busy breaking his back in order to support our family. My mother’s personal translator, doesn’t sound too shabby? Standing in the middle of the store, making hand jesters, mouthing out words, or even yelling, does attract attention. In those moments I would feel a surge of heat rush from head to toe, goose bumps in every possible crevice of my body, and to top it all off I’d be seven shades darker than a ripe tomato. Shame and embarrassment, how could I feel this way? All this had become routine and the pain and embarrassment finally started to subside, a whole new feeling started to emerge, pride. My mother made me strong. She allowed me to become the man I am today. And after all the pain there are still countless nights that I lie in bed, crying due to the burden that was placed on her and the tremendous lesson I learned. Every sound, every beat, every photon, every little everything has been absorbed into me one way or another, yet these experiences, although insignificant to others, mean to world to me. All these events run through my veins and pump through my heart. I am the passion that is rarely seen. I am the walking story of struggle.

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### ANALYSIS

This student’s essay conveys his devotion to his family as well as his independence from it. He shares honestly about the story of his parents and siblings so that as readers we can catch a glimpse of the “pain and misery” and the “miracles” that he has experienced. This student recounts many adversities, beginning with his memories of being a kindergartener who did not know English. He notes, “I struggled throughout my years in elementary school. I went to resource and received help with my schoolwork until fourth grade.” Here, the essay would be clearer had he described what “resource” was and related specific ways in which it gave him that “big push forward.” It is impor-