**THE "DEAD BIRD" EXAMPLE COLLEGE ESSAY EXAMPLE**

**This was written for a Common App college application essay prompt that no longer exists, which read: Evaluate a significant experience, risk, achievement, ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.**

*Smeared blood, shredded feathers. Clearly, the bird was dead. But wait, the slight fluctuation of its chest, the slow blinking of its shiny black eyes. No, it was alive.*

*I had been typing an English essay when I heard my cat's loud meows and the flutter of wings. I had turned slightly at the noise and had found the barely breathing bird in front of me.*

*The shock came first. Mind racing, heart beating faster, blood draining from my face. I instinctively reached out my hand to hold it, like a long-lost keepsake from my youth. But then I remembered that birds had life, flesh, blood.*

*Death. Dare I say it out loud? Here, in my own home?*

*Within seconds, my reflexes kicked in. Get over the shock. Gloves, napkins, towels. Band-aid? How does one heal a bird? I rummaged through the house, keeping a wary eye on my cat. Donning yellow rubber gloves, I tentatively picked up the bird. Never mind the cat's hissing and protesting scratches, you need to save the bird. You need to ease its pain.*

*But my mind was blank. I stroked the bird with a paper towel to clear away the blood, see the wound. The wings were crumpled, the feet mangled. A large gash extended close to its jugular rendering its breathing shallow, unsteady. The rising and falling of its small breast slowed. Was the bird dying? No, please, not yet.*

*Why was this feeling so familiar, so tangible?*

*Oh. Yes. The long drive, the green hills, the white church, the funeral. The Chinese mass, the resounding amens, the flower arrangements. Me, crying silently, huddled in the corner. The Hsieh family huddled around the casket. Apologies. So many apologies. Finally, the body  lowered to rest. The body. Kari Hsieh. Still familiar, still tangible.*

*Hugging Mrs. Hsieh, I was a ghost, a statue. My brain and my body competed. Emotion wrestled with fact. Kari Hsieh, aged 17, my friend of four years, had died in the Chatsworth Metrolink Crash on Sep. 12, 2008. Kari was dead, I thought. Dead.*

*But I could still save the bird.*

*My frantic actions heightened my senses, mobilized my spirit. Cupping the bird, I ran outside, hoping the cool air outdoors would suture every wound, cause the bird to miraculously fly away. Yet there lay the bird in my hands, still gasping, still dying. Bird, human, human, bird. What was the difference? Both were the same. Mortal.*

*But couldn't I do something? Hold the bird longer, de-claw the cat? I wanted to go to my bedroom, confine myself to tears, replay my memories, never come out.*

*The bird's warmth faded away. Its heartbeat slowed along with its breath. For a long time, I stared thoughtlessly at it, so still in my hands.*

*Slowly, I dug a small hole in the black earth. As it disappeared under handfuls of dirt, my own heart grew stronger, my own breath more steady.*

*The wind, the sky, the dampness of the soil on my hands whispered to me, “The bird is dead. Kari has passed. But you are alive.” My breath, my heartbeat, my sweat sighed back, “I am alive. I am alive. I am alive.”*