

Ashley Helfinstein

Ms. Harris

Humanities Period 5

2 November 2015

Narratives 1-3

SuperGeek!

UC Prompt: Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?

Word Count: 578 words

Max Word Count: around 500 words

Staring at the options before me, I selected the pink starburst wrappers as my nerdiest earrings. My outfit complete, I felt ready to attend the She's Geeky conference with my mom. Upon our arrival at the Computer History Museum, I thought back to 7th grade Entrepreneurial night in the same location, presenting my company to venture capitalists. As a high school freshman, I felt removed from the girl I was when I attended The Girls' Middle School. Returning to the museum grounded me in familiarity.

Entering the room and seeing all the smart women socializing together, I was awestruck. Computer programmers, rocket scientists, gardening aficionados and more types of geeks than I could imagine all crowded the same room, yet somehow mingled together and created meaningful connections and experiences.

I breezed through the beginning of the day in sessions like "Geek Chic" fashions, and Balloon Animals taught by a professional fairy. I even mustered the confidence to lead my own

session about books, which resulted in a great turnout and plenty of fantastic book discussions and suggestions.

Later in the day, my mom and I arrived at the specialized coding session she wanted to attend. I had some programming experience, so I thought the session would be interesting. However, I rapidly discovered that the material was far beyond my knowledge. I was lost. For a few minutes, I perched hopefully on the chair with my notebook and pen at the ready. Eventually I gave up, and tentatively pulled my book out of my bag. As I was about to open it, I caught a glimpse of the hand-written sign on the wall, and remembered one of the only rules of She's Geeky. The Law of Two Feet states that if you are not learning or contributing, it is your responsibility to respectfully find someplace that you are. This rule simmered in my head, and I realized in frustration that I was breaking it. In a gesture of strength, I slipped my book into my bag. I breathed through the apprehension collecting in my stomach and separated myself from my mother and comfortable predictability. I felt a glimmer of doubt as I wandered conspicuously across the empty space over to the social media session.

I sat down and immediately immersed myself in the advice of a savvy woman about how to use social media to your advantage. I listened raptly to the examples she gave of people sharing only the best or worst things about their lives, rather than the whole story. My pencil began to fly across my notebook page as I soaked in fascinating information.

Escaping from my comfort zone led me to discover the elation of challenging myself. I don't gain anything from wallowing in the easy. I have the responsibility to take action on my own behalf in order to grow. This is the Law of Two Feet, and it applies to all situations. It is not

always appropriate to get up and leave if something is not intellectually stimulating, but I can find another way to be engaged and challenge myself.

Going into She's Geeky, I was proud of being nerdy, which is still true. However, now I have a better sense of what that means to me. I am proud that I get excited about learning, and that my favorite subject is all of them. Being enthusiastic about challenging myself is something to be valued. I am a geek. I accept the responsibility.

A Month to Grow Up

Common App Prompt: Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community or family.

Word Count: 620 words

Max Word Count: 650 words

The lost feeling dropped in my stomach and ballooned out of control, taking up all the space until I thought I would throw up. Panic buzzed through my entire body. On my own for real now, I had no clue what to do.

On that first day of the UC San Diego Academic Connections program, I was completely out of my element, floundering for a space in this new world. I attached myself to the group of girls that paraded by me and trailed behind the beautiful RA as she chatted comfortably with the crowd. I fretted over my insecurities, wrapping them around me like a cape.

Later that week, curled in the corner of the giant, empty common room, I sat alone with a book, awaiting the beginning of Board Game Night. Two people entered with the games and began to set one up to play together. I glanced around at the emptiness of the room, unsure what

to do with myself. My anxiety increased as people trickled in and began to play games with their friends. I didn't have anyone to play with. My suitemates were all tucked away in their rooms. I had the thought to flee and read by myself, but then I saw people getting out cards to play poker.

Unable to resist the temptation of the game, I joined in surprisingly easily. After a few hands, I settled into the rhythm. Over the course of the evening I began to feel comfortable with the group as we transitioned to other card games. As we played BS, I found myself joking with the boy next to me and chatting like I would with my friends at home. I was pleased to discover that even on my own, in a new situation, I had my identity.

I began to define myself in the differences between people. Playing Capitalism, Egyptian War, Spoons with my suitemates from China, Texas, Southern California, I discovered our different styles. Shiwen was musical, introspective and sweet. Elizabeth was competitive, dryly humorous, and intellectual. Mariana was quiet, generous and passionate about biology. And I was me - enthusiastic, kind, nerdily excited to connect my learning to real life. As I discovered my own traits, I felt my confidence growing.

It was refreshing to walk on my own. My terror about going to college receded as I realized that I could be independent. I bounded along the path to the Cognitive Science building. I took in the trees and sculptures in John Muir College and marveled at the Geisel Library as I entered the unfamiliar classroom. I felt at peace, as if I had found my place among my class. The mind-blowing concepts of Cognitive Science captivated me. The meta experience of using my brain to learn about how human brains learn, or practicing words on my tongue as we studied Linguistics was thrilling. I spent time with passionate classmates, expanding the volume of my knowledge as I pushed the boundaries of my independence.

For me, adulthood did not come at my Bat Mitzvah, when I was surrounded by people I knew, who supported me. It came over four years later, when I was surrounded by no one that I knew, forced to become familiar with myself instead. I discovered the dynamic of being with people, alone. I took complete responsibility for my well-being. I learned how to learn in a new environment with ample distractions and free time. Now, I continue to feel like an adult. My identity manifests in the confidence with which I interact with people, and the way I handle myself. This transition was a long time coming, but the catalyst of Academic Connections nudged me over the brink into adulthood.

The Solipsist's Nightmare

UC Prompt: Describe the world you come from—for example, your family, community or school—and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.

Word Count: 401 words

Max Word Count: around 500 words

The world I come from may not exist.

I sank into my bed as tears streamed down my cheeks. Gripping *1984* tightly against me, I brooded about the problem again. When I came upon the concept of solipsism in the book, I asked my mom the meaning. Her explanation caused my world to come crashing down around my ears, with no way to refute it. "But I see the world; I see you! I know it exists. It has to."

I heard the futility of my logic, and it frustrated me beyond belief. The idea that I could be alone in the world alarmed me. Even having the conversation with another person is like a living paradox.

No one that I talked to could relieve my distress over this issue, and it consumed my thoughts until I had a realization. While this possibility could be true, there would be no way to know. Maybe if the world feels real to me for my entire existence, it is real. Regardless of whether the world is completely manufactured by my senses and all that exists in the universe is my mind floating in space, the experiences that I perceive, and the people that I interact with are real to me. Until I find out otherwise, I will proceed as if my world is intact.

In my world, such a philosophical crisis of identity and being is as consuming and pertinent as any other crisis. This has led me to some stressful moments in school, where learning a concept as mind blowing as this leads to an intense emotional response, and a need to understand fully. However, in the end I am happy that my experience has shaped me to be this way, because it creates the most enthralling moments and conversations. Such as having an argument with your class about what a chair is, that continues after class ends. Or learning about the Singularity and wanting to understand all aspects to be prepared.

In my life, learning is not only fun, but also central. Where my mom will discuss philosophy with me late into the night, or my dad will elaborate on my queries about inflation. We get excited about the workings of the world and revel in the experience of unanswered questions.

The world I come from may not exist, but I can still take part in it and enjoy the ride.