Common App Essay

Prompt: The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. **How did it affect you**, and what did you learn from the experience?

It was a casual Sunday evening; I was relaxing in my chair, painting my Warhammer figurines. Suddenly, my mother knocked on my door, and to my shock—there were tears in her eyes.

"Grandmother had been diagnosed with cancer."

I was scared, and I didn't know how to react. I was left speechless. Cancer has just appeared to a close family member of mine.

Several weeks later, my grandmother was brought back from Surabaya. I finally got to meet her, but she was in a vegetative state. I was immensely devastated.

When I last saw her, she was full of life, and as always, was very talkative. However, when I saw her in that state, I couldn't believe my own eyes. I cried for a while. I realized that I hadn't talked to her at all in a very long time. While I was looking at her, all the memories came back to me. Every time she visited our home, we would always play card games and watch movies with her. None of that is going to happen now.

Not long after that, the doctor told my family that she only had three months to live. Being busy with school is one thing, but having to handle this is another. Every night, I would always visit my grandmother to chat with her; I would always caress her hand and calm her down. I reminisced the past with her as we talked about our overseas trips and our time together when I was a child. I would always stay beside her side until she fell asleep.

Having gone through this, I realized the value of time. I want to make more quality memories with my family, and I want to live a fulfilling life with my loved ones. One of the ways to do that is to live life in a much healthier way; I have been determined to change my lifestyle. I learned how to exercise more, eat healthier food, and have much more self-control.

Since then, cycling every night had become a habit. I hated every moment of my exercise session, but I knew it was for the best. Slowly but surely, I started to embrace and enjoy it. I have also tried several other changes to my life, such as sleeping early, and making sure I wake up rested and full of energy the next day.

Through these small changes, I am gaining more control over myself. I balanced between my hobbies and schoolwork and managed my relationships with friends and family members well. Apparently, improving my lifestyle has also positively impacted how I interact with others. I learned that any tragedy or adversity in life could also propel me to be better, and eventually, build my character.

Hello. My condolences for your loss, it was brave of you to discuss something so personal in the essay.

Overall, your language is quite good and I understood the points you were trying to make. I know what it’s like to lose a grandparents as well, which is why I feel like you could articulate your emotions better. Currently, the second half of the essay feels almost nonchalant and the tone of the essay felt more flat compared to the first half.

I understood the reflective, “I want to live healthy and spend more time with my parents” but I don’t know if this is enough to describe your self and personality. I would like to hear more about your thoughts, motivations, how this shifted your sense of value for time, love, family. The part about cycling definitely ties into your dedication to living a healthier live, but while it tells me you grew to like cycling, I can’t tell “how the lessons from obstacles you encounter affected you.” There’s a lot of “I” statements, so many of the things I read is a ‘tell’ not much of a ‘show.’

I believe the common app essay allows up to 650 words, so you definitely could write a bit more, elaborate a little on the effect of your grandmother on who you are as a person now, and how you view the world and how you spend your time. Good luck.