1. **Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.**

Every Saturday morning, my father would guide me past the *Petai* treesin our garden.

He would hurl me up to reach for the beans and smile when I caught them in my hands; the same when he beamed when I’d complete my homework and give vitamins to my brothers like a good big sister. Saturdays are different now. Watching the empty chair at our dinner table left an aftertaste different from the usual- bitter. This peculiar taste took me aback, but I've grown stronger since. For every bitter memory and hardships unspoken, I began to see myself and the world in a new light.

Semarang, Indonesia. The city where everybody knows everybody and rumors will surely spread. Upon the news of my mother taking the lead in the company, I soon found myself facing societal judgment and bitter looks. At school, one parent approached me to ask, “is mom doing well? Is business going smoothly, dear? I hope you and your brothers are eating well.” I smirked. Although well-intentioned, such comments forged my inner quick-witted Hermione Granger to reply, “we’re doing well auntie.” Despite the occasional comments, I never shy away from a conversation and answered with honesty in my words- because we were truly doing well. One thing came clear to me at an early age: we are undeniably products conditioned to think that women are incapable of being breadwinners in the family. I choose to think otherwise.

When I look at my mother, I envision a woman I aspire to become. She is a woman who drives to the office to undergo the complex challenges of the industry in hopes of seeking greater opportunities for her four children. Coming home with tired eyes, she would lay in a mattress squeezed with my brothers and me; in a tender voice she whispered, “*Terima Kasih Tuhan*.” Ten-year-old me saw a warrior princess, unseen in movies, but are necessary heroines in life. For every hurdle she encounters, she embodies a woman capable of accomplishing many facets unbounded to the walls of our home.

Throughout my childhood, the reality of my father’s passing became the “new normal” that I struggled to comprehend. Being accustomed to my mother’s regular absence, my brothers and I learned to look after one another. *Jie Jie* they would call me: big sister. With each call for responsibility, I begin to radiate superhero energy. From washing dishes to lifting heavy tables, I speeded every accomplished task with my signature hair flip. During lunchtime, my brothers and I would have wild conversations about electric vehicles in Indonesia, accompanied by my occasional rant about women’s rights- a topic rather controversial at school- but they would nod and listen anyways. As a fan of Ted-Talks, I would make my brothers watch every video, even though they much preferred to watch Netflix. For every moment spent with them, a sense of understanding blossomed in our relationship; a time when we lived in the present moment, exchanging thoughts about how we saw the world, not as what it is, but what it could be.

I was appalled by my motherly nature, though I knew by heart that this newfound enthusiasm stems from my initiative to support my mother, by fostering growth in myself and those around me.

These bitter memories led me to ponder over what truly matters most: I am not defined by my circumstances, nor do I wish to fall victim to the stereotypes in my community. But in the face of adversity, I’ve explored strengths in myself previously unknown, leaving me to feel more content than ever. Today, I am a sister and a daughter seeking parts of myself yet to discover; a warrior who continues to defy gender roles while still being respectful to those around me. In my pursuit of becoming, I am not afraid to taste everything that life has to offer- bitter beans and all.

**650 Words**

*Hey Nicole!*

*This is such a heartwarming (although bittersweet) story to read. There’s a very strong sense of nostalgia here.*

*Right now, however, there is a sense that your writing can be focused further to really highlight your warrior princess/big sis brand.*

*While I can see that you are a caring big sis, I’d like to see how you act in the face of even greater emotional adversity. This is not to discount the emotional hurdle you had to go through with the passing of your father. I can’t imagine the difficulty you went through processing through all that, and I’m so amazed by your resilience.*

*Yet, I wonder if we can turn the dial further. You’re already taking on the responsibilities many of your peers wouldn’t even think about. Still, were there instances when your brothers were being difficult and ungrateful? What did your relationship dynamic look like when you were at your lowest point, and they exhibited the worst kind of attitude? How did you deal with those situations? I think that’s what will show your warrior princess/big sis character more clearly.*

*Here’s a rough idea of how you can structure this essay:*

* *Life as a big sis with dad around*
* *The empty chair*
* *Having to appear bulletproof in front of others*
* *Life as a big sis without dad around*
* *Conflict with your bros? Maybe someone said something hurtful? What was the fallout from this?*
* *Inspired by your mom, the warrior princess. The attitude of gratitude, the whispered prayer in the night.*
* *Made up with bros. Your life as big sis with your bros now.*
* *The lesson you learned. Might not be a perfect family (no such thing), might not be a perfect sister (no one is), but you’ve learned that…*

*Hope this helps! Please feel free to consult with your mentor and ask us questions if anything’s unclear. Thanks!*

*Anushka & Paul  
ALL-in Essay Editors*