Common App Alt. 1:

I sat on the bus and I was scared. Not without reason, I saw a man similar to whom I saw on TV when I was just 6-years-old; the man I know as him who assaulted the woman. Seeing the black leather jacket triggered flashbacks not only of the TV clips, but to the constant news reporting the negativity surrounding the bus. Suddenly, he came to me and said a cold “Hello”. I had been dreading this moment since I was six. .

My guard was up, as I hugged my bag as tight as I could. For years, my mom and the news told me to stay away from this situation. Without any warnings, he continued with a story. However, to my surprise, he rambled on about his hard knock life; how his family was in such a tight rope; and most significantly how the bus helped him in getting his life together. Growing interested, I started listening at this point, as my initial label for him as a criminal started to fade. He ended with inspiring and encouraging stories about his bus encounters. My eyes were opened when he told me he meets a six-year old kid every morning. I was in shock as when I was six, the bus was responsible for my trauma of riding it. I had mixed feelings: that shaming feeling of being corrected but also a glimmer of hope that the bias I had developed from the media turned out to be false .

Hearing this man's story had me reassess my prejudice of him as a criminal. My shallow judgement based on media bias was slammed to the ground after I heard his genuine voice. I could sense the amount of passion he had towards taking care of his family. It pains me to realize how the media and stigmas surrounding the bus painted hard working men like him as a criminal and it pains me even more that I judged him before seeing his true colors. Prior to the encounter, I had a habit of judging people by the way they look, talk, and even move. Though it is hard to completely overturn that routine, this encounter made me promise to look deeper into a person’s heart before judging them. I jumped off the bus with a new feeling of excitement and curiosity .

A few days later, in the classroom, as the only muslim, I was really nervous to ask my teacher for permission to do my Friday prayers. The memory of feeling hesitant before I rode the bus the other day came back to me. I was really nervous to ask, but learning from the bus encounter, I brushed off my fears and lunged myself to do it. To my surprise, before I got to raise my hand, the teacher asked me if I had to go. Stunned, my mind immediately went back to the times my family discouraged me of moving to a catholic school; to the bad things they said would happen to me as the only muslim. In reality, they had accepted me as their own. The bus ride kept going to my mind reminding me how I shouldn’t let others write my story and be the author of my own book.

The bus quickly became my primary transport option. Twenty bus rides later, the bus was no longer just a place to meet new people. It has become a reminder for me to not let stigmas and other's thoughts define how I see others; to not let underlying perceptions and stereotypes about them influence my potential experience with them. To instead see the world from my own lens and be the author of my own story.

Common App Alt. 2:

The TV played a security footage of a girl assaulted by a man in an empty bus, pinned to a corner, struggling to break free. Her squeals rang in my head a thousand times. I was 6 at the time.

A decade later, I found myself standing at a bus station for the first time. The bus arrived, the doors slid open. I anxiously gazed to a corner, still haunted by the footage. I hesitantly stepped in and made my way to a single seat in the bus, trying to avoid any form of contact. I began settling down, until I noticed a man approaching my way. His appearance reminded me of the man from the footage. I noticed both his hands in his pockets. Wild imaginations came into mind; was he holding a knife, looking to rob? I put my guard up. “Hello.” His voice reminded me of a villain I saw in a movie. Sharp and dark. He continued, asking very personal questions of where I lived and where I was going. I answered obscurely, hoping to disinterest him. His next question stunned me. “So, what do you think about the bus? Fun?” I froze up. Why did he say “fun”? Was he looking to loosen me up to catch me off guard? I kept silent.

He continued with a story. He told me the hard work he went through juggling family life with three kids and having to go a long distance to work daily. He told me about the tough choices, especially regarding transport options since he only had a Yamaha, he had to make, each one having its own brutal sacrifice. Following his story, I looked up at the people around me: teachers, workers, doctors. These were hardworking people, a huge contrast to what the media portrayed. Growing interested, I started listening at this point, my guard lowered. He ended with inspiring and encouraging stories about his bus encounters. My heart was touched and my eyes were opened up.

Hearing this man's story had me reassess my prejudice of him as a criminal. My shallow judgement based on media bias was slammed to the ground after I heard his genuine voice. I could sense the amount of passion he had towards taking care of his family. It pains me to realize how the media and stigmas surrounding the bus painted hard working men like him as a criminal and it pains me even more that I judged him before seeing his true colors.

A few days later, in the classroom, as the only muslim, I was really nervous to ask my teacher for permission to do my Friday prayers. The memory of feeling hesitant before I rode the bus the other day came back to me; how I felt terrified. I was really nervous to ask, but learning from the bus encounter, I brushed off my fears and lunged myself to do it; I said to myself that maybe I was scared because of the same stereotypes. To my surprise, before I got to raise my hand, the teacher asked me if I had to go. Stunned, my mind immediately went back to the times my family discouraged me of moving to a catholic school; to the bad things they said would happen to me as the only muslim. In reality, they had accepted me as their own. The bus ride kept going to my mind reminding me how I shouldn’t let others write my story and be the author of my own book.

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