

Common App Essay

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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?

I was three miles away from camp. The day was young and my crew was striding with exuberance. Then, suddenly, a grey monster appeared in the sky. Crashes of thunder and bright lightning in the distance overwhelmed my senses. The firm narrow dirt path became muddy and impassable. My boots stuck to the mud and every step became a chore. One thought lingered in the front of my mind “will I make it to the end before it is too late?”

I wished desperately for the storm to pass. I naively thought that a desert couldn’t possibly have rain for more than a few minutes. Then I remembered my scoutmaster casually mentioning that someone had drowned in a dry riverbed during one of Philmont’s rare storms. I panicked. The storm intensified, and the rain started blowing directly onto my face. I hiked a few more miles in these conditions. Then my guide made an announcement to the group “We have to take an alternative route.”

My crew proceeded through dense tree cover which blocked out the sky. I led the group, watching ahead for dangers and features to line up with the map. Eventually I came across the final and greatest challenge of the day’s journey: a quarter mile long steep decline to camp. The conditions of the decline varied throughout. There were some points where I had to commit an immense effort to dig my feet out of the heavy mud; at other times I had to stabilize myself so as to not rush down the decline as if it were a slip & slide.

While I was doing this delicate dance down the hillside the rain continued to intensify. Grey storm clouds totally blocked the sky, separating the unlucky hikers down below from the beautiful blue sky which was clearly visible just a few hours earlier. Thunder came down with a violent crash and lightning illuminated the landscape. My crew began to lose morale and their determination to continue. Nevertheless we continued to charge down the decline.

Once I had conquered the decline I proceeded into camp. I set down my large pack and took shelter under a gathering area in camp. I removed my soaking wet boots from my aching feet. Under an awning I and my crew desperately awaited the passing of the storm. The storm refused to stop. It was as if the storm was taunting me, lightening up to a light drizzle then resuming its previous intensity. The only thing to keep my spirits up was the hope that we could participate in camp activities.

The activities at camp proved anticlimactic. The normal activities at the camp were closed due to the conditions, so we were instead told to pick weeds. The day seemed to last forever. I

awaited the moment when I could finally set up camp and go to sleep, but it seemed as distant as the sun which had once graced the sky. I looked around at the people who I was hiking with. They all looked hopeless and lost, remembering the warmth and coziness of home.

While I was surrounded by misery and despair, a term that my friend had once told me entered my mind. This term: "Secondhand fun" perfectly describes the events of that day. While I at the time wished to go home and abandon my trip, I now look at these memories with fondness and positivity, wishing to return to that day to experience the accomplishment and adventure that I at the time found miserable.