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**Sample essays 2017**

**George Washington University**

# Why George Washington University Anonymous

## What most influenced you to apply to the George Washington University?

With my French books in hand and my camera slung across my shoulder, I stroll down the narrow street to photography class. Students relax in the alley next to the building, avoiding the scorching Parisian heat. I sit on the curb as we lunch on sandwiches and discuss the summer. We collectively decide that spending five weeks in Paris has been quite the experience, and nobody is anxious to return home. Our conversation shifts to college, and although some of us will not be attending for another two years, we discuss various schools and possible majors.

Someone remarks that he would like to attend college in Washington D.C. because it reminds him of Paris, and I speak up. George Washington University, I tell him, is in a perfect location. I first became interested in it after a junior class trip to DC, where I realized how magnificent the city was and how ideal the university's location is. As I studied GW more, I found out about the excellent arts and science curriculum through which I hope to broaden my perspectives, hone my analytical reading skills, and examine different cultures. I add that GW seems full of well-rounded students who are prepared for interaction with society, and that the possibility for exciting discussions seems ripe. GW also takes full advantage of its resources, employing well-trained teachers and presenting students with a wide array of classes and activities.

Finally, I tell the group, George Washington University also offers a myriad of high quality internships, which allows students to explore their interests and experience working before graduating from college. I can already picture myself training with a doctor at the University Hospital, learning new information and confirming my interest in becoming a physician.

As other colleges are discussed, we agree that study abroad is something we all plan to do in order to further immerse ourselves in various cultures. I also want to continue volunteering, and at GW there are many opportunities available to get involved. The proximity of the Allegheny Mountains excites those of us who live to ski. I begin to point out that George Washington University was the first school to admit women, but the door suddenly opens and our photography teacher welcomes us inside.

# Personal Statement ABC's Kristian Jokisch

## Please provide a personal statement.

(A)mbition, balance and commitment are the three qualities that I refer to as my "ABC's" for achieving "D", my dream. (B)eing successful depends on continual awareness of your ABC's. (C)arefully following this philosophy has guided me through times of success and adversity. (D)own in the developing country of El Salvador, I have grown up in a challenging environment, impacted by both my American influences and my Latin roots. (E)manating from this has been my steadfast focus on my life perspectives.

(F)or twelve years, a savage civil war left El Salvador bereft of an adequate educational system, as educators and professionals had fled the country during the conflict. (G)iven a chance for peace, the country now has the fastest-growing economy in the Central American region. (H)ere, my father's influence and invaluable example have profoundly shaped my personal philosophy. (I) have watched my father succeed because of his drive, responsibility, and dedication, and I believe that I share the same sense of ambition. (J)oining the force that is reshaping the infrastructure of the country that has given me so much is my true ambition.

(K)nowing one's balance is often thought of as an integral component of eastern philosophy. (L)uckily, I have come to understand how this balance affects my own life. (M)y mother is a prime example of this: she skillfully juggles her role as manager in her company, while taking care of her family. (N)ot only by following her model, I have been able to achieve balance between my life and the realities of the conditions in my country. (O)nly by maintaining balance in the many facets of my life can I hope to eventually attain my goals.

(P)erpetual commitment is the third and most important ingredient in achieving my dreams. (Q)uality of commitment to a project can decide how quickly a setback is to be overcome. (R)eality has its ups and downs, and throws each individual unforeseen challenges. (S)uccumbing to problems can cause a profound loss of self-confidence. (T)hus, I must remember my dream and philosophy, and continue on regardless of the adversities with which I am faced. (U)ndeniably, my hard work and dedication will ultimately pay off.

(V)igorous commitment to gain acceptance at your university and to become part of its world-class program is essential; later, I will be able to bring this knowledge and training to my career. (W)ith these ABC's in mind, I hope that you will afford me the opportunity to pursue my dream. (X)anadu was a place of idyllic beauty, and UC Berkeley is similar to this location in that it has a lot to offer me: extraordinary programs, high educational standards, and a diverse student population. (Y)outhful exuberance, strong convictions, dedication and a global perspective are what I have to offer the UC community in return. (Z)ealously, I hope that you share my ambition, and that we will be able to make a mutual commitment.

# A Message to a Terrorist Vetan Kapoor

## Topic of Choice This essay was written in response to the terrorist attacks in New Delhi, India, on Oct 31, 2005

Confusion and panic were clearly visible. People were running around frantically, shouting and screaming. Everyone was in a hurry. Nobody knew what was going to happen. We were all scared. Fall Fiesta was almost upon us.

The thirty or so students that were at school on that Saturday afternoon were responsible for the organization of Fall Fiesta, an annual event held to benefit our community and attended by people of all ages. At about 5:20 pm, just as the last of the preparations were completed, we all gathered around the stage. Mr. Caemmerer, the Student Council advisor, congratulated us on our hard work. "The most important thing today," he said, "is to make sure that nobody leaves feeling disappointed. Do whatever you can to make sure that people have a great time."

My first assignment at Fall Fiesta was to run an activity called the "Velcro Wall." My job was to dress participants up in a Velcro suit that would enable them to stick to a soft wall. Although business was slow at first, the activity quickly became popular among the smaller children. Parents clapped and cheered enthusiastically as the watched their offspring hanging upside down, screaming and giggling with excitement.

Just before my shift was over, a young girl (probably not more than six years old), ran over to the Velcro Wall and proudly handed me a "Play" coupon. "It's my turn now," she exclaimed, a huge grin lighting up her face. "I want to go upside down." My friend and I chuckled as we watched her shout with delight at the prospect of being suspended upside down in midair. The Velcro on the suits was a bit coarse, and an hour of lifting up little children had made our knuckles red and sore. We laughed with the little girl as we gave her a "Prize" coupon. As we traded places with two more volunteers, we decided to find some water. "These kids are definitely enjoying themselves, buddy," my friend said to me.

As I walked around exploring the other activities that had been set up by my peers, I couldn't help but feel a little proud. Our fear, it seemed, had been unnecessary. Everything was working out just fine. I watched children walking with their parents and heard the music of the school's jazz band. The scent of cotton candy hung in the warm air. Everyone was having a fantastic night.

As I approached the "Cookie Decorating" booth, Mrs. Fischer, our high school guidance counselor and the advisor for the Senior Class Government, came toward me with a strange look on her face. "Vetan, start cleaning up and go find Mr. Caemmerer," she said. Without another word she walked off, leaving me in a state of confusion. I stopped someone near me and asked, "What's going on?" The boy, someone whom I had seen playing soccer on the field earlier that day, replied, "Some places in Delhi just got blown up. They think the school might be next. Everyone is leaving."

The next forty-five minutes or so were surreal. It felt as though I had entered a dream world from which there was no waking up. Everyone was in a hurry. My thoughts turned to my 13-year-old sister, Mahika. I looked around, hoping to catch a glimpse of her or her friends. I had left my mobile phone at home. I borrowed somebody's phone and called my father. One ring. Two rings. Three rings. Nobody was picking up. I called my mother. One ring. Two rings. Three rings. Still nothing. Trepidation built up inside of me as I circled the area once, twice, three times. As I quickly navigated the crowd, I bumped into a small child. "Where do I go to get my prize?" he asked. Believing that nothing should tarnish a child's innocence, I determined to forget about my apprehension and led the child to the prize booth, where there was a line of kids waiting to collect their rewards. I gave him his toy, and he ran off.

As I headed towards the gates of our school, a parent approached me and asked me where the microphone was. "I need to find my daughter," she said. I directed her toward the microphone, and told other people to start making their way towards the exit. I borrowed another phone and called my mother. One ring. Two rings. "Hello?"

"Mama? It's me, Vetan. I can't find Mahika. Do you know where she is?"

"She went with her friend's parents. She is safe. Dad is at the Diwali party at the office, he will come to pick you up."

"Mama, the school is not safe. I'm going over to Gaurav's house. Tell Dad to pick me up there." With that, I hung up the phone and ran towards the exit, where I saw confused, scared people trying to reclaim their money.

As soon as I got out of the school, I ran to my friend's house. Panting, I arrived to find him watching the news. There had been several explosions in various markets. Sarojini, where my sister and I often shop for clothes. Govindpuri, the market behind my grandmother's house. Fire, terror, fear, chaos, anger, tears. A reporter, standing bravely in front of a camera, exposing the tragedy to the world.

My Dad returned from his party ten minutes later, and we left to pick up my sister from her friend's house. The ride home was uneasy, the silence punctuated only by the sound of my sister crying. I looked over at my father. Through his hardened exterior, I could see a side of him that he usually kept hidden. He was scared. How to console him? How to console my crying sister?

When I got home that night, I ran up the stairs and fell into my mother's arms, crying like I used to when I was a little boy. We stood in the kitchen for over twenty minutes. We didn't need words. I felt safe and relieved. For the first time in my life, I prayed to God. I asked Him to forgive me for not believing. I told him that I was forever grateful to Him for keeping my family safe.

I want to thank you, the terrorist who brought such destruction to my city. I want to thank you for reminding me about the importance of family. I want to thank you for teaching me about the importance of faith. I want to thank you for showing me just how strong humans can be. I want to thank you for showing me that the world is bigger than any one individual. Today, you have won, for today, my family, my city, and my people are frightened. But your victory will only make us stronger. Our community is resilient, and our resolve has never been stronger. Our student council will organize more Fall Fiestas in the years to come. Every death that you have caused will be avenged through acts of kindness and consideration. Unlike you, we are not alone in our struggle: all of humankind stands with us. May God be with you.

# Driven Vetan Kapoor

## Describe a significant experience in your life.

It was an exhilarating moment that set my heart aflutter. I had in my head an image of James Bond, speeding down a foreign highway in pursuit of justice, a dazzling femme-fatale steering the car ahead of him. As soon as the car stuttered to a start, however, the image in my mind was quickly shattered. I realized that like so many things, driving looked a lot easier in the movies.

My decision to learn how to drive came about after a conversation with one of my friends from America who had excitedly informed me of her new possession: a car. I asked my father to sign me up for driving lessons. At only 100 rupees a day (approximately $2), the lessons were at least financially plausible.

It was on my third day of driving lessons that I first saw him: a scrawny-looking boy with unkempt hair and a dirty white shirt who sat quietly in the back of the car. My instructor explained to me that he had just finished his driving lesson. I glanced at him through the rear-view mirror and smiled politely when his eyes made contact with mine.

Back at the instructor's office we began talking, and I soon learned that the boy was as old as I was. He explained to me that he was learning how to drive so that he could apply for a license. He would have to lie about his age, he said, but after receiving his license he would be able to start driving a taxi to help his father earn some extra money for the family. He proudly told me that he had saved money for a year to be able to afford half of the driving lessons, and that he hoped to learn enough to skip the other half.

My new-found friend, Rohan, presented an interesting contrast. While I hadn't thought twice about asking my father to spend money on me, he hadn't thought twice about pursuing this endeavor to help his father earn money. My fantasies of being able to speed down a freeway seemed shockingly immature in comparison to his dreams of being able to support his family.

A few months later, I was in the backseat of my car, when we abruptly halted at a red light. A small "Ambassador" car pulled up beside us. The black-and-green coloring gave away the identity of the vehicle as one of the many old taxis in the city. I looked across at the car, and was surprised to see Rohan looking back at me. When his eyes made contact with mine, my smile was one of warmth and respect. If my eyes had spoken that day, they would have thanked him for teaching me the importance of pursuing selfless goals. They would have thanked him for teaching me that sometimes it is necessary to sacrifice and take risks. They would have thanked him for teaching me that sometimes we have to learn to drive so that we can give others a ride.

# Willow Tree Anonymous

## Common Application - Free response question

June 4th 2006

5:50am

The volunteers in the red shirts direct us to enter our corrals. It's race time. Twenty-three thousand of us cram into our assigned areas and stand shoulder-to-shoulder, no room to move. I know what lies in wait—fifty-four thousand steps, or twenty-six and two tenths miles. It is surreal to think that among all these thousands of competitors, I am the youngest participant. How did I get here?

~ 1996

Every night around 8:15, my dad started running on the treadmill upstairs. The placement of our treadmill was that it was directly above the chandelier in our kitchen nook, near my bedroom. For forty-five minutes, five nights a week, our chandelier rattled as my dad ran, and as it was a comforting sound, it lulled me to sleep. Saturday afternoons my dad ran outside and my brothers and I tried to keep pace with him—an all but impossible task. The "Saturday Run" was three miles round trip, with a steep downhill for the last half-mile that needed to be climbed on the way back. My brothers and I were always instructed to wait under a particular willow tree just before the hill so we would not have to face the challenge.

One weekend, I decided it was time to bypass that willow tree, to "go the distance and run the hill. Though I had no problem all the way out and even down the hill, at the bottom, I did the one thing my dad had warned me never to do: I looked up at that monster hill facing me, and, exactly as he'd warned, I became afraid. But it was time to bypass the willow tree, I was determined to run up that intimidating hill, and step after step, I did. That was the day I became a runner. I was eight years old.

June 4th 2006

7:30am

Running down this closed highway is pretty amazing, but then so have many of the places I have been training over the past eighteen months. Running on soft sanded beaches of Costa Rica and Australia, weaving between people and vehicles along the city streets of Tel Aviv and Sydney – these are indelible memories of extraordinary, indescribable joy and liberation.

June 4th 2006

10:05am

The race is now almost over: I have only two-tenths of a mile left. For most of the twenty-six miles I focused my running gait. At mile twenty, however, I hit the proverbial "wall," the physical breakdown that everyone talks about. Though stunned that it happened to me, I somehow struggled through it by realizing that I am not just running for myself, but for my trainers, friends, relatives and family members who believe in me and have steadfastly urged me on. I am running for them.

Turning the corner at the Marine Corp Recruitment Depot, I see thousands of spectators crowding near the finish line. My knees are now buckling, my calf and quad muscles in spasm, my entire body trembling with glycogen depletion. I seriously wonder if I have two-tenths of a mile left in me. But I remind myself that I do not want to be sitting under that willow tree of my youth – instead, I want that feeling I had ten years ago when I finally ran up the enormous hill. I look squarely towards the finish line and refuse to be daunted by this last stretch. I shake off my pain, ignore the trembling and, step after step, keep on running. I cross the finish line. I lift my arms up. A sudden feeling of euphoria takes over and I no longer feel any pain in my legs, or any pain anywhere. I am a marathoner.

# My life defining moment Anonymous

## Personal Statement

My mother was diagnosed with cancer. It all started in April of my sophomore year when she complained of exhaustion, nausea, a back ache, and bad breath. I remember the day perfectly. It was Easter morning and my mom was scheduled for a procedure to examine what was predicted to be a blockage in her bile duct; it was also the Easter we found out that it wasn’t a blockage or build up, but rather a tumor. A tumor that would require four surgeries, three months in intensive care, and the rearranging of her whole digestive system. But out of those one hundred and twenty two days spent in ICU alone, the moment that sticks out in my mind was the day I walked in and no longer saw my mother.

The woman that was in front of me in no way physically, mentally, or emotionally resembled the strong female figure that raised me. Her once fiery red hair was now dulled. Her porcelain white skin looked grayish. I was scared to hug her or even touch her because her once sturdy body now looked so breakable. They barely fed her. All they gave her to eat were ice chips. The moment I walked in ready to tell her about my day at school, I could hear her begging, pleading for more ice chips. She had already sneaked in more than she should have, and when she thought no one was looking, she would drink the forbidden water that would melt into the bottom of the bowl. In that instance, a bitter sweet feeling overcame me: that was the woman I knew and loved; she saw what she wanted and went after it. That feeling soon disappeared. I heard her scream out in agony “It hurts, don’t do that, it hurts" as the nurses pierced her skin with a pain reliever. I've always disliked injections, but that made me loathe them. When it became too much to bear, my father ushered me out of the room.

That was the day of her first emergency surgery, and the day she almost didn’t come back alive. I remember feeling so helpless, as if I was a child again. I had to keep reminding myself that I wasn’t a child. My mother had raised me to become an intelligent, mature, and brave young woman. In that moment, I would have to act as the person my mother raised me to be; a person my mother would be proud of. In this difficult time, I learned a lot about myself. I learned I possessed as inner strength. I learned to be patient, and to ignore all the petty dilemmas I once deemed life altering. I learned how to deal with fear, frustration, injections, and surgeries. But most importantly, in seeing my mother's fierce bravery and independence, I learned that I was very much like her.

# The Impact of The West Wing On Me Anonymous

## Describe a character in fiction, a historical figure, or a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you, and explain that influence.

During a trip to the US, my father brought back a boxed set of The West Wing DVDs. While I planned to watch them during my school holiday as amusement, the show instead became an obsession and an education in itself.

My greatest passion has always been politics and global issues. I have a keen interest in joining the political process in my own country, India, and I see myself as a person concerned about the issues of the world at large as well. This zeal has existed in me for a long time, but it was in 2006 that I began to truly understand my passion. I attribute this to many things: reading books, newspapers, and magazines and talking to people who feel similarly (or radically differently!). But nothing has given me a better understanding of the deeper issues and the effects of politics than, strangely, The West Wing and its core characters.

The series deals with a Democratic administration led by an economist-President, and offers a glimpse into the workings of the White House. Delving into the relationships between the President, various senior staff members of the West Wing, Senators, lobbyists, foreign leaders and journalists, it is a political junkie’s delight. However, it offers me something more. It reflects my image of an ideal government. The show portrays committed individuals, idealistic and yet practical, who always have their country’s best interests in mind. Though this can be mocked at as a utopian dream, it realistically blends this fantasy with a very realistic world of discord and compromise. It embodies the notion that politicians can be intelligent, honest and honorable while at the same time remaining flawed human beings.

Another feature of The West Wing that appeals to me is the exploration of complex domestic and international issues from a liberal viewpoint very similar to mine. The show’s thorough dissection of global problems such as terrorism, nuclear proliferation and foreign policy has peaked my interest to the extent that I have carried on to learn more about these issues through other sources. I attach great importance to the sustainability of the environment, and the fictional administration’s ardor toward this issue indicates a welcome alternative, albeit fictional, to the environmental policies of modern governments. The West Wing engages me far more than the average television drama by actually involving debate about our pressing problems and positing pragmatic ways in which these problems might be tackled.

In the recent past, I have engaged myself in various tasks connected to politics. There is a terrible lack of accountability among politicians in my country, caused in large part by the paucity of accurate data pertaining to elected representatives. I work extensively with a non-governmental organization in my city, Bangalore, to find and make available accurate and verified data regarding the constituencies represented, the margins of victory and the assets of elected representatives in my state. Publishing the assets of a politician is especially satisfying, since the public in a country so riddled with political corruption like India ought to know the sources of their leaders’ wealth.

The West Wing itself inspired me to get actively involved with an election campaign. For two weeks in mid-2006, I volunteered to join the campaign of a maverick politician running for a seat in the legislative council of my state. Highly educated and possessing great integrity, he seemed to me a one-of-a-kind statesman, removed from the appalling political climate of my state. My task was to campaign over the telephone to numerous constituents. Despite the fact that the politician ultimately lost, the conversations I shared with these constituents truly inspired and encouraged me.

Though The West Wing is set in the United States (a developed country whose problems are fundamentally different from the problems of a developing country like my own), it still offers great lessons applicable to issues in India as well as the rest of the world. This American television series has not only bolstered my passion to join politics but also taught me an important life lesson. I have realized that while the world order necessitates pragmatism, idealism and vision must also be present. As The West Wing’s President says to one of his advisors, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful and committed citizens can change the world.” To which the advisor replies, “It’s the only thing that ever has.”

# The Power of Exposure Anonymous

## Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.

It’s 107 degrees and the sun’s hot rays are beating down on a family trekking through the busy streets of Dhaka. People, rickshaws, and goats alike are all rushing off to reach their respective destinations. As the parents of the family encourage their two daughters through the maze of bodies, the younger of the two whines for an ice cold mango lassee to alleviate the unbearable heat. They finally reach the car, breathing a sigh of relief as they enter the refreshingly cool vehicle, and as they begin to talk about their plans for the day, a traffic jam forms ahead of them. But of course, being in Bangladesh on vacation, this is no ordinary traffic jam; it starts because a rickshaw swerves into a jeep in order to avoid hitting a family of chickens crossing the road. With the entire street covered in debris from the crash, people impatiently honk from their cars to get an ambulance there faster. Half an hour passes by and it still has not arrived, and the little girl is still craving a mango lassee. Begrudgingly, her father agrees to go buy her one. They leave the car and the mother is left with her older daughter. As they sit in the car, the girl begins to drift off to sleep…when she is suddenly startled by a rapping knock on her window. Her head snaps around, and her jaw drops at the sight outside of the car.

Seeing that I was only ten years old, it is understandable that I screamed when I saw what stood outside my window that day in Bangladesh. Immediately, just from looking at them, I knew that the two men standing there begging for spare change were unlike every other person I had ever seen doing the same thing. For starters, one was perched on the others shoulders; strange, but at second glance, I realized that it was because he had no legs. The other man? He had no arms. Both were wearing ragged clothing and were truly all skin and bones, with their shoulder bones sharply jutting out of their bodies.

I leaped into my mother’s arms and instantly felt guilty, for the looks of utter misery on the men’s faces drooped even lower. Never had I ever felt a stronger need to give a person some sort of compensation, because it was in plain sight that these people truly needed it. Begging my mother for permission to give them some spare change, she allowed me to do so. I opened my tiny clasp purse my grandmother had made me and looked into my modest collection of Bangladeshi coins I had collected thus far on our vacation. At that point in my life, I had been collecting foreign coins for many years, and coveted every single one that went into my collection. I thought hard about what was more important; expanding my already extensive assortment of coins, or giving these men a few dollars to buy themselves some source of strongly needed nourishment.

When we returned back home to America later that summer and I told my best friend all about my vacation, she was astounded that I had decided to give my coins to two complete strangers. My other friends agreed, that they would have just kept it for themselves, and told the men to ask someone else. They all asked why I had made such a decision, and at the time, I told them that I simply felt it was the right thing to do. However, it was the plain fact that I had physically encountered poverty, right in front of my face, that had driven me to make that choice.

In my life, I constantly hear of impoverished people from third world countries who go hungry for days, live in scant housing, and are more prone to disease than any average person living in America. I’ve seen programs on television that show such people who are much less fortunate than me, and naturally, it saddens me to know that they will never have the opportunities that I am privileged to have in my own life. However, despite the fact that I know that these kinds of situations exist in the world, it never really hit me until that day that was I on vacation with my family in Bangladesh, at the young age of ten. I knew, when we first arrived in the Dhaka airport, that this would not be like any other vacation we had been on.

My family has traveled quite a bit in the past, and Bangladesh was unlike any of the other countries we've been to, because the extremes were plainly manifested right in front of our eyes. We visited the villages, where sheep and cows roamed the streets, and the thick air smelled of ghee and straw bales. And we spent time in the city, in which the crowded, pebbly streets were occupied by people walking, bustling along in rickshaws, and rumbling by in cars. In both of these parts of the country, the poor were everywhere. It was impossible to not encounter a beggar on the side of the street every five minutes, and it was equally impossible to not be shocked at the extreme poverty-stricken conditions that you saw them living in. Children with enormous tumors protruding from their bodies played on the streets, people missing limbs – like the two men – made their way around with no assistance from passersby, and elderly citizens took their time limping through the maze of bodies in the packed, sweltering city. I had always known that poverty existed, and I knew that it was awful; but to see it right in front of my very eyes? That really hit home. And it made me realize just how terrible some people have it, making me feel guilty for all of the blessings that I have in my own life. Constant running water, food, shelter, clothes. All of these things that I had taken for granted my entire life, suddenly became privileges that other people would give anything to have in the smallest amounts.

That day, I rolled down my window slowly and reached my tiny, plump hand out to the man perched on the other’s shoulders. He spread out his bony, wrinkled fingers with his palm out, and in it I placed one, two, three shiny dollars coins. I looked up to him and when our eyes finally met, his thin lips curled into a grin I would never have imagined would have fit on his thin, hollowed out face. Giving both men a genuine smile in return, it was ironic that the emptiness in my little purse was the complete opposite of the gratifying feeling that was growing inside of me, expanding until I couldn’t stop smiling.

Since that experience, I have been a strong believer of the idea that being physically exposed to a concept is far more effective than simply being told of it, or watching it on the other side of a television screen. I’ve incorporated this philosophy into all aspects of my life; when I work in the summers at a day camp on a local farm, I constantly use animal and plant encounters as learning opportunities for the children, instead of simply having discussions about them or reading a book. I now stop and appreciate moments that make me love the life I’ve been given, instead of disregarding them as nothing special. I’ve learned to appreciate life as it comes, because I now realize that once-in-a-lifetime experiences are given to us a lot more often than we think they do.

# Political Advocacy as an Intern Anonymous

## Common Application: topic of your choice

Shark Day 2011. 100 miles from the ocean, but the fate of the top predator of the oceans, key to the health of marine ecosystems, would be decided right here in Sacramento. The role I got to play on Shark Day was cutting off the tags that said “Made in China” from the small stuffed shark toys we were handing out. Such is the life of an intern. But I also got to watch close up as public policy was being made.

I was lucky enough to be an intern in the offices of the organization coordinating the lobbying for shark fin ban, Assembly Bill 376, and lucky enough to learn that the path to environmental protection can be a very strange one indeed.

I found myself calling every Jamba Juice in three counties (there are a lot more than one would think) to find one that had something other than the environmentally blacklisted Styrofoam cups, which we could never serve to the crowds of environmental activists who were descending on us by the hundreds. There was a class of fourth graders from a tiny school in Santa Barbara led by a teacher dressed head to toe in a shark costume—a costume which our more politically savvy lead lobbyist insisted be put instead on the cutest, tiniest little girl in the class. A suitable candidate was found and with the help of a dozen scavenged binder clips the suit was resized to fit our newest tiny lobbyist. There was the Monterey Bay Aquarium’s contribution—seven boxes of tiny stuffed sharks—that became my responsibility to de-nationalize.

But notwithstanding the trivial and sometimes ridiculous things we did, this bill was serious. Shark populations are declining at a rate unprecedented in human memory. This bill would have not only stopped shark finning in US waters, but also stopped the import and export of shark fins through California. Our state was a small consumer of shark fin itself, but the biggest traders were based right here in San Francisco and the shark fins they imported fed the markets of Hong Kong and Tokyo.

There was huge opposition to this bill, including from legislators who had been with us on dozens of previous environmental fights. Some of the Chinese-American legislators considered it an attack on their culture, in which shark fins are a delicacy to be enjoyed on the most special occasions. Shark fins equal money and a portion of that money had gone from the traders who sold shark fin to their favorite legislators over the years. I gave letters and alerts to dozens of legislators, making sure the right information got to the right people. The opposition had teams of highly-paid corporate lobbyists and what did we have? Ourselves, a dozen environmental groups, and a tiny little girl in a shark costume.

But California passed AB 376 and banned the importation and sale of shark fins. My participation in this little political fight may have been limited, but it let me see what can be done and give me a glimpse of what I would like to do. Being a small part of this effort meant a lot to me. And someone had to cut those tags off.

# Becoming a Baha'i Anonymous

## Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.

Despite the bleak November evening, the people around the kitchen table were filled with joy. We had just finished studying the first of the Ruhi books, a series designed to teach the basics of Baha’i, and the tutors, Mary Kay and Chet, were elated that David and I, the pupils, wanted to join the faith. After studying since March, I felt in my heart that I had found what I was seeking, and I told Mary Kay that I was ready. She congratulated me with a loving embrace as comforting as my own nana’s. I filled out the Baha’i registration card, and just like that I became a Baha’i at age fifteen in my sophomore year, the fourth Baha’i in Suffield, Connecticut.

Since becoming a Baha’i I have learned so much about how to live my life so I can be a better person. The knowledge I have gained about other religions has made it easier for me to understand them and be open-minded. Understanding is key to eliminating judgment. Now I try never to judge people because I have no right, being imperfect myself. Gossiping is equally frowned upon in the faith and by trying to stop I feel more kindness and love within me. Another part of the faith is chastity, which I believe will make my future marriage more meaningful. The final aspect is that I can never drink alcohol, which means I will never succumb to the alcoholism that runs in my family and I will always be able to think straight. Overall, I love who I am as a Baha’i.

However, it is difficult adjusting to life as the only Baha’i in my non-religious family and mostly Christian school. Writings in my faith tell me to be brave and unfazed by opposition because God is always with us, but ignoring strangers’ criticisms is exponentially easier than ignoring those of someone you love. My stepfather told me that he never wants me to host Baha’i events in his house. My grandma tried to convince me to not be a Baha’i anymore. One friend told me not to talk about the faith with her and my best friend told me Baha’i is a cult. It’s easy to feel like no one supports me or understands me, and that isolation is the most painful feeling in the world. Overcoming that fear of aloneness is an ongoing process.

But I know that my struggles are worth it when I reflect on who I have become. I cannot say whether or not it is the right path for everyone, but I know that following the Baha’i laws will shape me into a fuller, happier person and make my life more rewarding. It is the hardest challenge I have ever undertaken. Every morning I wake up with the desire to improve. That motivation is the healthiest part of my life. Without the Baha’i Faith I would be a fraction of the person I am today.

# The Diversity of Thought Anonymous

## A range of academic interests, personal perspectives, and life experiences adds much to the educational mix. Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in a college community, or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you.

To the outside world, my high school is the antithesis of diverse. When my peers considered me a legitimate minority for being a redhead, I assumed “diversity” to be a dirty word within the ivory-skinned social scene. However, I discovered that diversity exists beyond skin color or ethnic background: our different thought processes reveal a much deeper form of diversity that is often overlooked. Modern American society preaches tolerance and respect for all skin colors, however, little is said regarding diversity of thought. It is simple to look beyond the color of one’s skin, however, when there is a difference in opinion, any remnants of prejudice tend to rear their ugly heads. Such was the case of our school’s politics club.

“We need more liberals,” the club co-president tells me. From the get-go I sense an “us versus them” mentality among club members, which worries me. Despite this partisan recruitment, I decide to join the Politics Club. Every Monday, a handful of us gather after school to bicker about the week’s political happenings. Literally divided by a line of desks, the young democrats and republicans hurl stale arguments and falsified statistics back and forth until a stalemate is declared for yet another week. With each passing meeting, I realize how counterproductive our squabbling is. By the end of the year, I am ready to take action against the futile quarreling. After winning the club election for co-president, I return in the fall of my junior year fully prepared to revamp the very essence of the club.

“This year, I want answers,” I declare as I open our first meeting of the year. “Last year we brought together two sides to each political story, but no ground was gained, and no problems were solved. I’m not interested in knowing what the Democratic party has to say, or what the Republican party has to say, and especially not what your parents have to say. I want to hear what you believe. What must our nation do to fix the problems? Give me answers.”

Instead of lining up in our partisan trenches, we begin to sit on desks in a circle, a subtle yet pivotal change to the meetings’ atmosphere. Republicans and Democrats alike collaborate on a club constitution to be strictly adhered to, and include policies such as mandatory objective research and support for claims made during debates. I am witnessing my club revolutionize itself into a haven for discussion rather than bickering, and a tight-knit community highly conducive to our original goal: answers.

Our school has always possessed a unique diversity of thought. However, that diversity can only be productive when all viewpoints collaborate. Problems are not remedied with opinions; they are remedied with answers found through compromise. With our transformation, a community was established where diversity not only existed, but produced progress. Through my experience with the Politics Club, I learned how to use a diverse situation to create a place for problem-solving. I look forward to embracing the diversity of thought I know I will find in college, and I will use that opportunity to strengthen and enhance the school community.

# The Backyard Anonymous

## Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

I remember when the flowers stopped blooming.

All throughout my childhood there was always one thing that would instantly make me happy. I had a beautiful backyard in my childhood home. The smell of the ripe red mango trees and the chirping of the blue birds always roused my senses. I lived for the freshly cut green grass and the lovely white orchids hanging by the patio. What really made my backyard stand out was the majestic fountain carefully crafted in the center. My favorite memories are when I would bathe in the large limestone fountain and my parents would be watching me from a distance. Those are the days that are so vivid in my memory.

Routinely, my father always made sure the fountain would continually spout water from its elegant pores, and my mother would always plant exquisite flowers of deep fuchsia and subtle orange. I would contentedly watch them work in the background on the long summer days as the horizon of my wooden fence began to swallow the sun in its entirety. I was surrounded by bliss as the fragrance of the sweet peas lingered in the new light, and the sky was a picturesque shade of purple. One day, however, the beauty began to collapse. The decay of my backyard mirrored the decay of my own parents’ marriage. My heart began to beat slower and slower each day with this harrowing consciousness.

When my father left, the regal fountain I had always admired came to a halt, and water has never sprouted out from it again. The sweet peas and the white orchids, even the daisies, refrained from smiling, yet the poor soul of my backyard kept fighting for its beauty, yearning to be nurtured. Sadly, that dream never came for my backyard or me, as the long grass and weeds of foreclosure consumed my house. Once situated in our new, quaint apartment, I decided to make my own garden.

From then on, I decided never to depend on my parents’ marriage or any force in the world to construct my own happiness. I realized that I must create my own pleasure, and it must stem from the roots within me. I filled my balcony with tulips, lilies, daisies, even cactuses, and most importantly the white orchids I everlastingly enjoy. The fresh self-beauty within me spread out onto all the plants and creatures on my balcony and ricocheted into my attitude towards life. Without the establishment of my own happiness, I could never reach my dream of helping others reach theirs. Now, I can positively say I am at peace with myself.

From gloom to bloom, my happiness reawakens as I look out onto my balcony and see the orchids in the radiance I’ve always known.

# Eclectic Appetite Anonymous

## Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again? (650 words or less)

A few Thanksgivings ago, my mom decided to buy a whole pig and roast it herself. Unfortunately, the pig had a ghastly aroma which filled the whole house, and everyone immediately scolded her for the acrid smell ruining their Thanksgiving meal. Initially, no one ate it – it’s a little different from the traditional ham. But, being as hungry as I was, I decided it couldn’t taste as bad as it smelled. So, I was the only one to try some, and it became my favorite dish. Now the story is repeated every year by my proud mother, whose fourteen year old daughter consumed a questionable part of a pig, when not even the adults could overcome the odor.

Growing up with Korean cuisine, I became familiar with ingredients rejected by American palates – garlic beetles, fermented cabbage, and shrimp heads, just to name a few. While my peers indicate their disgust by slightly gagging or widening their eyes in disbelief, I shrug my shoulders and insist that it’s all healthy, yummy, and, most importantly, edible. When I’m sick, I can consume a whole bowl of miyeok guk (seaweed soup). My dad still thinks it’s strange, but my favorite part of sundubu jjigae is eating the shrimp whole, with all of the flavor concentrated in the head, eyeballs included. In a particularly brave moment, I ate a risky hoagie customized by my bored and slightly devilish friends. When I took the first bite, I was surprisingly pleased. I ate almost the whole thing, until the bread started to get soggy from the pickle juice… and mayonnaise, barbecue sauce, horseradish, and mustard. I had no idea what else it contained until they gave me the receipt with all the ingredients listed – which I keep tacked to a board in my room, where I proudly display this proof of my strong stomach.

My eclectic taste has also allowed me to carry my open-mindedness outside of the kitchen. To some, my meals are disgusting. To me, they are delicious and familiar. It frustrates me that a world of flavors and satisfaction remains unimagined to those who refuse to try something because it’s alien to them. In hopes that I do not convey the same judgment upon others, I try to give people, like food, the benefit of the doubt. I strive to understand foreign concepts, to accept opportunities more freely. A few years ago, I took a hip hop class at a local dance studio, even though my only experience was briefly in ballet 8 years prior. After permanently leaving soccer a few years ago, I joined rugby, a considerably more dangerous and confusing sport than anything I had ever experienced. My junior year, I took Sociology and C++ programming, even though their low credit weight would put my GPA at a disadvantage. However, I found myself enjoying C++ so much that I continued on to take AP Computer Science this year, which I would not have considered had I not taken the risk in the first place.

Whether it’s with a meal that I eat, or the courses I tackle in school, I cannot resist trying new things, even if they serve no direct purpose (my hip-hop dancing skills have hardly improved). There is a Korean saying: “One who is full with more food on the table will waste.” Ever since my grandmother starting greeting me with “Are you hungry?” I have tried not to take food, or anything, for granted. Dubbed the “garbage disposal” of my peers, I thank my fast metabolism and continue to indulge. My everlasting hunger, for food and knowledge, has me always wanting more and never wanting to waste opportunities. I hope that I will always make the same decision as I did that Thanksgiving - to reach out of my comfort zone and challenge the hesitation of others.

# Defending Ballet and Beyond Anonymous

## Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?

I'm not usually one to disrupt a class.

It was a Monday morning in my first-period freshman health seminar. The lights were low, half the class was already asleep, and the 20-year-old television was slowly gearing up to play some low-budget video filmed in the '80s.

My health class covered topics that would make new high schoolers giggle, like contraception or diagrams of a uterus. While we spent most days watching birthing videos or debating which was the most dangerous hallucinogenic (what we considered "the fun stuff"), our curriculum also covered mental illness, including eating disorders. We watched this video, which aimed to show the consequences and the realities of anorexia. What struck me was that all of the main characters in the film, all of the girls struggling with their self-image and starving themselves, were ballet dancers.

I was dumbstruck. I had been a ballerina for eleven years, and this wasn't the reality of what I saw every day. My fellow dancers are strong athletes; all of us were—and still are—extremely healthy. Dancers can have eating disorders, and, surely, that happens, but why did anyone have to make ballerinas the focus? It is just as likely that a normal girl or boy who plays basketball or takes art classes can have an eating disorder; in fact, over one-third of teenage boys develop habits related to eating disorders, and not a single male was featured in the film. By pigeonholing ballet dancers into a tiny, sick box, they were putting non-ballet dancers (who might be actually affected by eating disorders) outside of it. If a problem like this is identified primarily with ballerinas, many of those who do have an eating disorder may not question their habits. Using this stereotype as the film's subject was irresponsible.

I went to my teacher, distraught, and told him how angry I was. Somehow I ended up in front of my entire class, loudly telling them that the stereotypes portrayed in the film were not a reflection of the reality of a ballet dancer, and that our sport is one that pushes us to be healthy and strong, not fragile bags of bones. I probably made a fool of myself, but I was so angry that an art form that has brought me joy and has kept me healthy could be seen as something linked to mental illness.

This experience is where I developed my opposition to typecasting. I often find myself responding with "please don't say that" to those who assume that because I—or any other persons—have a trait, it leads to a definitive conclusion about our character or lifestyle. Being a woman doesn't make me weak or emotional; being a ballet dancer does not make me anorexic.

I am slowly unlearning the stereotypes that I have grown up with. I am questioning why my brother never learned how to fold laundry and why girls' football is treated as a joke (the name "powder-puff" doesn't exactly garner respect). I have to teach myself to fight the subconscious push to categorize others or myself. Stereotypes cloud who we are as people, and I do not want to be judged because of a conclusion based on my exterior. In the words of Nicki Minaj (perhaps the last person you'd expect a ballet dancer to quote): You will not tell me who I am; I will tell you who I am. I am not a stereotype; I am a tapestry of different, but wonderful, traits, thoughts, and feelings. Only I can tell you who I am.

# Germany Grace Redford

## Research shows that an ability to learn from experiences outside the classroom correlates with success in college. What was your greatest learning experience over the past 4 years that took place outside of the traditional classroom?

Studying abroad in Germany, my classmates and I dreaded waking up early and walking to our classroom in the notoriously rainy city of Tubingen. Mr. Schneberger spoke about the anatomy of a cathedral, and we made it clear how confused we all were. After our lengthy seminar session, Mr. Schne took us to see the surrounding area and told us to take notes during our roaming lecture. He completely blocked oncoming traffic, but I hardly noticed. I was too caught up in his lecture on the history of the buildings, how a cathedral signifies the center of a town. I finally understood the difference between a barrel and groin vault.

For the remaining days of the trip, Mr. Schne wiped out the classroom curriculum and continued to take us to see gargoyle-adorned churches, statues of the four Evangelists, and even historical sites such as the Eagle's Nest and Dachau. These came to be known as our "classroom without walls" sessions. My classmates and I reflected upon our favorite churches while resting in our hotel rooms, instead of indulging in typical girl talk. Through it all, the "classroom without walls" heightened my enthusiasm for learning. I was eager to witness more and more of Germany's rich history and architecture through Mr. Schne's lectures. I enjoyed every minute, and early morning grogginess soon turned into the pleasure of hard-won knowledge.

# Food & Family Anonymous

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

“Food is the way to a man's heart.” This surprisingly sexist saying has always been a coveted motto among the women in my large Latino family. The number of times my abuela disclosed what she believed to be the secret to love to me is incalculable. My first memory of these words was at the much too young age of 10, when my grandmother was babysitting me. Usually, when we were over at Abuela’s (Spanish for "grandmother") fun things like coloring and playing dress-up were on the agenda, but today was different. My Abuela believed it was her duty to teach me a crucial life skill, the art of making a tortilla. This thin flatbread made from flour was and is an essential part of life in my household. It is served with almost every meal, and all great women in my family have perfected this culinary talent until it's basically second nature.

The lesson was a bit stressful and was definitely not as fun as playing tag with the neighbors outside. I learned how much work my mom put into making tortillas every night, and I finally got an explanation of her unnatural strength: kneading that dough was no joke. For the next week, I told everyone I saw about my accomplishment; they gave their apathetic and courteous “congratulations,” and now I understand why. The traditional tortilla is an almost perfect circle, at the time mine were looking more like misshapen potatoes. But that didn’t stop me from being the proudest kid on the block.

Two weeks after the life-changing lesson, my mother, sister, and I made our annual trip to Honduras, our country of origin. Unfortunately, this trip is one of my most memorable not for the fun, but for the great loss my family experienced, the death of my uncle Mario. He was a ray of light in all of our lives; he lived with me and, every morning, he would sing a ‘wake up song’ at the top of his lungs, starting each dawning day with joy. When I heard about the car accident that took his life, I sat there as my heart sank. I had never endured such pain until that moment: this meant that I would never again hear that wake up song in his voice. My family, especially my mother, was devastated. We were so far away from him, and no one had dealt with this type of loss. Within the madness of planning the funeral and arranging the burial, we children were often left alone, a second thought to the obviously more important problem.

The morning of the wake, about 15 women from my family had come over to clean the house. Everyone was so preoccupied that no one had begun cooking lunch, which gave me and my cousins a great idea: we'd cook for them! We decided to make baleadas, a traditional Honduran meal consisting of beans and sour cream in flour tortillas. I decided to take charge and put myself on tortilla duty, and thus we started making dough and re-frying beans. I kneaded the dough as fast as possible and when all the components were done the assembly line of cousins whipped up about 30 baleadas, and began serving the hard working women. I will never forget how my mother teared up when I served her the meal; she couldn't believe what I had done. My mother still remembers that moment herself, and remembers the relief she felt because she had one less thing to worry about. I was finally one of the tortilla experts in my family, and in my abuela's eyes I was ready for marriage. In my eyes, I was ready for maturity -- any and every version my life may offer.

# Overcoming Adversity: Strength through SufferingSarah Marosi

## What role did overcoming adversity have on your college decision?

It was only a short bike ride, a temporary goodbye to a town I’d be leaving for a week or two, just there and back I told myself. Little did I know that on June 10, 2007, my life would completely change. The greatest obstacle I have had to overcome was thrust upon me. Although the coward could turn and walk away forever, I would never be the same.

As the rape disguised itself as something I was deserving of for two years, I entered a phase of extreme cynicism, bitterness, and depression. When girls giggled in the locker room about “losing their V-cards,” to which my only reply was “yeah, I still can’t ride a bicycle,” my peers failed to see the irony. Showers were long as I scrubbed my skin until it bled in an effort to cleanse myself of the impurity. My headphones spat nothing besides Leonard Cohen, Conor Oberst, Elliott Smith, and other legendary depressing musicians. However, with maturity, a better education, and the influence of two extraordinarily strong women as my mentors, I have outgrown my episode of bitterness and cynicism.

Instead of asking myself “why me,” I force myself into asking “why not me?” Now, after two years of secrecy and almost five since the attack, I refuse to stay silent. My experience will no longer serve as a hidden mystery or forgotten occurrence, but as a starting point for a tale of empowerment. No longer obeying the demands of that twisted soulless man, my lips will speak for all those women, children, and often forgotten men who were not as lucky as me. If I do not speak out about my experience, my attacker and the institutions that allow such crimes to exist will remain active and dominant. The crime acted upon me as a twelve-year-old girl opened my eyes to the harsh realities of a patriarchal society that not only embraces but also glorifies a rape culture. Before that life changing date, I was completely ignorant of the things I am now fighting for and the movements in which I am now an active participant.

In college, I plan to pursue majors such as gender studies and psychology. My hope is to build a strong foundation that will aid me in a career of exploiting a society that teaches “don’t get raped” instead of “don’t rape” and work towards global gender equality. I want to spread a message to all that they are not victims of sexual violence or of the patriarchy. They can be more than survivors; they can be warriors.

# My favorite place Noelle Simon

## Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?

When I was seven years old, I used to think my floor was made of hot lava or occasionally under siege by a pack of angry anacondas. So, at night when it was time for me to go to bed, I would have to take one giant leap to make it to the massive fluffy island in the middle of the room, which served as my safe haven for the night. Once the blanket was over me, I was untouchable.

When I was nine, I decided that I would camouflage myself amongst the hordes of stuffed animals that coexisted with me on my bed. I did this because I believed that when my father came in the next morning to drag me off to the doom that was the fourth grade, he would be unable to find me. (Naturally, he found me.)

The point of these stories is that some of the most vivid memories I have from my childhood have been focused around the seemingly mundane piece of furniture that is my bed. This essay was probably designed to be written about some destination location - like how I climbed the Swiss Alps and had a chocolate tasting at the top in a remote ski lodge, or a time I went to Saint Tropez and went sailing with a group of French and Italian male models. But, come on, let’s be honest. No man can ever hold you like four posters and a soft down comforter in your choice of colors.

A bed is something that is everlasting. While things in your life are changing, you will (hopefully) always have a bed to come home to. Beds foster your craziest fantasies and make them come to life while you sleep. Beds are supportive, while being predictable and cozy at the same time. A bed is like a fresh start, because after a good night of sleep, the possibilities for the next day are limitless. A bed is something that most people take for granted. So, for once, why not write about its awesome glory?

So yes, while lying in my bed I do feel perfectly content. It is nice to know I have somewhere I can go to press the pause button on life for a moment and just relax. Lying motionless in bed gives me time to focus on cultivating my weirdest thoughts into usable and meaningful ideas; it gives me time to reflect on the day and focus on what's to come.

# Bittersweet Endings Megan Jennifer Wang

## 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.

I have an affinity for magnificent endings. The final words of a novel, the last bite of a salted caramel chocolate bar, or the teetering crescendos of a timpani at the end of a grand symphony by Beethoven are just a few examples. When life presents you with beautifully packaged situations, like Christmas presents on display during the holidays, you can almost taste the finality and accomplishment that is waiting for you at the end of it all. Thus, as I nervously approached the fifteen-foot metal podium to conduct the finale of my last senior year marching band show, I wondered if the conclusion of my marching band experience would live up to what I had hoped for.

I rubbed my sweaty hands anxiously in anticipation for the second half of the show, in which I was to conduct the finale. I am aware of the brilliant dazzling lights as well as the crowd’s cheers competing with the band blasting the jazzy runs of “Crazy Little Thing Called Love” by Queen. And as I do before every performance, I mentally review the few checkpoints that prepare me for this last hurrah. In fact, it is these very checkpoints that translate to the bigger lessons that I have gathered from my experience in marching band.

The first is to stay confident. My job as a drum major is to conduct the band and control the tempo. There is no room to be sheepish. Previous unfortunate situations have forced me to realize that a drum major without a backbone leads to the music falling apart, as the different sections of the band don’t establish the important connection necessary in a marching band. “Confidence is key” is something that has been ingrained in me as a leader, and a phrase I repeat to myself whenever I need to strengthen my resolve, in any situation.

Then, I remind myself to pay close attention to how the sections of the band phrase the music, and to accept their tempo if they all play well together. If I try to fight what my team has already set for me, I will only create unnecessary friction. In this sense, compromise is everything. Even off the field, compromise and understanding the sentiments of others can be eye-opening and humbling.

I move to the next fundamental concept on my checklist: remembering your passion. Even though it’s a drum major’s responsibility to provide the tempo, it is also his or her duty to indicate emotion in the music, and inspire the band. It’s imperative to remember the millions of rehearsals where you felt stronger than the sun, or like collapsing in a heap of sweat and tears, because to me that constitutes passion. Through the years, I have learned to translate my adoration for this activity into everything I do. While intelligence and technical skills may allow one to go quite far in life, nothing can replace fueling passion into hard work to achieve aspirations. The first half of the show has now concluded, and I can hear the encouraging cheers from the crowd as I look across the field and see all the faces of the band members, each flush with eagerness. As the smooth synthetic grass from the stadium cushions my every step, I finally remind myself of perhaps the most crucial yet surprisingly forgettable thing about performing: to enjoy every second of it.

The podium greets me like an old friend. I grip the sides of the ladder, and try to commit this bittersweet feeling to memory. As my arms extend I can barely contain my excitement - I feel ready after going through my checklist. The sadness that comes with endings has dissipated, replaced with a sharp alacrity for what is in store for me on the horizon. I wave my arms to introduce the first ringing note of Karn Evil 9 and let the music sink in.