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**Sample essays 2017**

**Vassar College**

# My Life Anonymous

## Topic of Choice

"Come on! Speed it up! Just a bit left to go!"

He was out of his mind.hell, they were both out of their minds. I was not going to be able to make it. I couldn't remember why I had ever agreed to go with them. The weight of the excessively large un-inflated rubber raft weighed down on my back and made it feel as if I were carrying a person.

We had been trudging uphill through the woods for the better part of an hour with no end in sight. The heat and extra weight had quickly taken its toll on me. I was exhausted and looked it; I was drenched in sweat, dirty, tired, and too far into the hike to dare mention going back.

"Your gonna see how nice it is! Carry the boat a bit more and I'll take it up ahead."

My friends Ryan and Rylan had made the trip before and were in good enough shape not to feel the hike. I had been promised it was worth the effort and reluctantly agreed. That they knew about this unmarked path and lake in the middle of nowhere was typical of them; both were the outgoing types who enjoyed adventurous outings and the unexpected two things I had avoided while growing up.

I grew up to be a wallflower of sorts in my small world. From the time I was in kindergarten to the eighth grade, I attended a small Catholic school minutes from where I live. For nine years I went to school with the same twenty-one students, advancing from grade to grade. However, in those nine years I spent no time with my peers outside of the classroom. While I yearned to socialize with them, I criticized their activities and alienated myself out of fear.

Shyness and a fear of embarrassment took control of my life. I avoided every activity and invitation in anxiety of not fitting in, of not knowing what to do, and of having no way out. As a result, my routine didn't vary much: I went to school, did my work, got on the bus home, and stayed inside until the next day. My parents thought it was normal; they themselves had no friends where we live and thought nothing of my spending so much time alone.

Before long, I managed to isolate myself almost completely. By the time of our graduation, I had developed no friendships within my class. I dug a hole for myself and accepted my behavior as "normal" and part of my personality. I wallowed in my self-pity and attempted to justify my being alone. I created an endless list of reasons, "They only like sports and I'm not the sports type," "I'm more of an indoors person," "They don't want to try and understand me," among others.

Ryan and Rylan showed me I was wrong though. Although I knew Ryan those nine years, it was not until high school that we began to spend time together. He introduced me to his circle of friends and his best friend Rylan. From then on, I spent as much time as possible with Ryan and Rylan. They made me realize I wasn't the misfit I convinced myself I was. Although our interests were varied, they nevertheless reached out and made an effort to understand me. They pulled me out of my solitude and made me feel as if I had been one of the gang my whole life. I in return made an effort to try to understand them. Often times against my instincts, I would go along with them no matter how crazy it seemed and to my surprise, would enjoy myself. However, this trip was not one of those times

I was unsure of whether I wanted to go back home or push on and arrive at our destination. With no end in sight, I threw the raft on the ground and looked back at the trail. Whether they saw that I was worn out or knew that I wouldn't enjoy the rest of the hike, I don't know, but just then, as I turned around to face them waiting for me, Ryan asked:

"There is still a while to go and we're still going to have to walk back..." he admitted, finally letting me know the reality of how much I still had to hike. "Do you just wanna head back instead?"

I hesitated. I looked back again at the lonely woods where the sunlight didn't reach the ground. There is no way to avoid this I thought. Looking at my friends and smiling, I lifted the raft off the ground, and sprinted past them.

"No! We're going!"

# Challenges of the New Millennium Anonymous

## What are some of the challenges facing the world at the dawn of the new millennium?

The advent of the year 2000 signifies a new world of hope and challenges for our country and the planet. With developments in technology such as the Internet, the world is coming closer together than ever. It is vital for the survival of our planet that we become more tolerant and understanding of other cultures so that we can work together for the benefit of future generations. During the past century, two World Wars and countless smaller struggles have decimated nearly every part of the planet. Today, too many countries and specific ethnic groups are involved in conflicts across the globe which are causing incredible violence and death. This makes it imperative that we teach the values of tolerance, diversity, and cooperation to our children.

Unfortunately, many people (especially teenagers) are very apathetic when it comes to global issues. When most people my age watch the evening news, they often feel very removed from the international situations and issues that are presented. The drug war in Colombia, Indonesian political crisis and solar eclipse in Rumania hold no personal significance or even interest for most teenagers. For me, however, these events are more than just images on a television screen. Through an organization called Children's International Summer Villages (CISV), I have developed close friendships with people from all of these countries and many more. CISV is a non-profit, international, educational organization that operates in over eighty nations. Its purpose is to foster cross-cultural friendship and understanding for people of all ages.

When I was eleven years old, I traveled with a delegation of three other children and an adult leader to Munich, Germany, to participate in what is known as a Village. Living with other children from twelve different countries for a month was an experience that completely changed my view of life. I gained a different perspective on what it means to be a member of a world community and formed extremely close friendships with many people who did not speak English.

I continued participating in local CISV activities and have attended three National Board Meetings for the organization in Cincinnati. When I was thirteen I traveled to a camp in Washington, D.C. I went to Detroit as a counselor for eleven-year-olds when I was sixteen, and this past summer I flew to Finland for three weeks to be part of a Seminar Camp. Created for seventeen- to nineteen-year-olds from twenty different nations, this event was the best experience I've had. At the beginning of the Seminar Camp, the participants had to decide as a group what we wanted to get out of our time together and what sort of focus the camp should have. As a participant, I was involved in planning each day's activities, which ranged from serious discussions of current events to intricate role-playing games and trips around Helsinki. Problems were discussed and solved in 'open meetings', which were similar to the Quaker Meetings for Business at my school. The skills of compromise, creative problem-solving and respect I have learned throughout my years at a Quaker institution were very useful to me.

Despite the different cultures and perspectives each person brought to the group, what we discovered as a result of our time together was that we were all fundamentally very similar. If these skills and experiences could be passed on to the global leaders of tomorrow, I believe that we would have more peaceful and successful resolutions to world conflicts.

One simulation we created had the delegates pretending to be refugees waiting to pass through immigration. As with every activity at our Seminar Camp, this simulation was followed by an in-depth discussion during which we each shared our individual experiences and perspectives on the subject. I was amazed to learn just how powerful my United States passport really was. Several people had experienced discrimination and mistreatment while trying to obtain visas or participate in CISV camps. One friend from Brazil had been held in a foreign airport for two days solely because of his nationality, and another had been detained because of his 'suspicious' appearance. One delegate from Lebanon told of being kidnapped during that country's civil war. The realization of how much easier my life is because I was lucky enough to be born in America really hit me. I believe that the democratic values and human rights we enjoy in this country should be fundamental to every nation.

At the end of July, I returned home with more than just photographs and Finnish souvenirs. In a remarkably short amount of time, I had become more independent, self-sufficient, and knowledgeable about the world and its inhabitants. My international experiences with CISV, through which I have learned skills of cooperation, trust, and tolerance, have truly given me global perspective. Hopefully, I will be able to further these talents at college and use them in the future to enable others to achieve the sense of world community that I have found. I am committed to making the CISV experience available to as many people as possible in every country. Because of CISV, I was inspired to take a strong interest in foreign languages, so that I would be better able to communicate with my international friends. Currently, I am learning French, Spanish and Welsh, and hope to branch out further in college. This is very important to me, because I believe that understanding our similarities and differences is the only way in which the human race will survive and prosper in the coming millennium.

# Rebuilding the Bubble Anonymous

## Open Essay Question

When I was a little kid I used to carry around notebooks which I filled with hundreds of stories ranging in length from a single, whimsical sentence to pages and pages of fantasy. Every hour of the day, there were countless images and ideas running through my head. I remember writing down my stories while riding in cars, while walking down the street, while sitting through another day of second-grade math. My parents couldn't stop bragging about my creativity, and my third-grade teacher signed my yearbook with, "I'm waiting for your first novel." And then, somewhere along the way, I lost it. My mind grew up, and my colorful, crazy inner world was taken over by training in that purely adult skill: Logic. I started thinking, "Nah, rabbits can't dance." Gradually I turned away from creative writing, and after a few years, when I stopped to look for my imagination, it seemed to be lost.

Children look at the world with a certain clarity missing in adults. Children don't censor or second-guess themselves, and are thus able to express their ideas more purely. When they write stories, they don't worry about infusing each word with deep multiple meanings, and often come closer to expressing what is truly going on inside their mind. After re-reading some of my old stories, I've come to realize that my ease of expression was founded in my lack of self-consciousness about the English language. I was entirely unconcerned with grammar, with topic sentences and supporting paragraphs, and yet my ideas shone through in spite of -- or perhaps because of -- my unawareness of the science of writing. Language, if wielded with too much calculation, can be extremely limiting. Thoughts don't naturally come in coherent sentences; words are just a common ground that people have invented to make communication easier. A lot of pure meaning is lost in the translation of an image or idea into words. We all assume that language is such an innate part of us, but it's not, not really.

Perhaps it's not so with everyone -- I can't pretend to know what's going on inside other people's heads -- but my thoughts simply don't come in word format. I don't think in verbs and prepositions. My ideas, when they come, bubble up inside my head as bright, round, colorful pictures that are nearly impossible for me to describe. After those first few years of easy expression, it's become very difficult for me to put my creative ideas into writing, because it frustrates me that I have these beautiful pictures and emotions floating around inside my head that don't convey themselves readily onto paper. For me, words can get in the way of writing.

In high school, being a good analytic writer is considered far more important than being able to write a beautiful, imaginative story. Over the past several years, I've worked hard at becoming a good analytic writer, yet my attempts at creative writing have been few and far between. I remember one story in particular, a creative assignment on The Scarlet Letter. I was reading the final chapter of the novel when I jumped up off my bed, and ran to my desk to jot down a single sentence. It described -- badly -- an image that had just come into my head, an image of a young girl staring out the window of her apartment building, watching a woman standing in the glow of a streetlamp with hail stiffening her carefully-done hair. The words that I wrote at the time, however, did not describe the image in my mind. The story was horrible. I remember selecting each word carefully, loading each sentence with multiple meanings and terrible self-consciousness. What I realized then was that it wasn't that I didn't have the ideas; I just couldn't find a natural way to word them. I was trying to imitate people I considered "great" writers: Austen, Hawthorne, Ginsburg. What I hadn't yet found was my own method of expression.

Recently I've started writing stories again. I've been allowing myself to simply write down what comes into my head, sentence after sentence, without concerning myself with semantics and form. And, at last, here it is again: my imagination! When I allow myself to find my own way through my head, without concerning myself with how others might view my writing, I am at last able to tap into that imagination which, I now realize, has been there all along.

Perhaps imagination emerges only when the mind isn't being stifled by facts and rules, but when it is roaming and questioning and discovering new ideas, as it does during childhood. This year, more so than ever, my classes are making me think, and my teachers are giving me the freedom to develop my own ideas about what I'm studying. I've found that my class discussions overflow into my phone conversations with my friends, and are explored at the dinner table with my family. Every day I find myself questioning different things about my life, sparking my imagination and urging me to write. At last, I'm beginning to understand that there is a place for imagination alongside those "writing rules" I've learned, and I think I'm finally learning how to put the two together.

# A New Life Konstantin Drabkin

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

I still remember it like it was yesterday. After seven days of grueling labor pushing my body to its limits, I was proudly walking - no, strutting. As my clean and pressed uniform held my new ribbons for the world to see, I looked up to the stands to find the people I cared noticed, and there they were, proudly snapping away with their cameras as Captain McClelland announced my name. Earning a spot in Leadership Academy, an NJROTC boot camp, is a privilege; graduating is a life-altering circumstance.

In the first day, the drill instructors broke us down, removing the protective bubble wrap of the individual, leaving behind raw, primal beings. We were then left on our own to fix ourselves. For the next seven days, we would be nothing more than mosquito bait in the blistering sun. Many tacitly accepted the situation, concerned with simply surviving the week; I chose to rise up and use this chance to improve myself. All of life's tedious little lessons I thought I knew began to truly make sense. Suddenly I could not picture myself as anything other than a perfect gentleman, complete with self-discipline and a well-developed code of honor. That was my rebirth.

As I left the stadium following the graduation ceremony, I sped by my new friends, quickly exchanging goodbye's and congratulations. I was a man on a mission. I had to take my family to the restaurant; I owed them a proper meal. As I would do for my guests so many times later, I held the door for my family, waited patiently for them to begin eating prior to enjoying my first real meal of the week. The pangs of hunger gave me strength. It felt great to behave like a gentleman. As I go about my every day life, I take every chance to help someone else. My motivation comes from knowing what is right.

"Act like there is a camera fixed on your face, with your family watching 24/7," my Drill Sergeant, Chief Petty Officer Morales, told me. During Leadership Academy, personal honor was an object that was graded on a daily basis. Thievery, disrespect, and dishonesty were not tolerated, and troublemakers were immediately sent home without the coveted completer's cord. I take personal pride in upholding the highest standards of morality. Though my ideals often face ridicule in the world that widely accepts complete lack of effort and motivation, I stand by my beliefs. The only gratification I need is knowing that I am representing my family, my school, and my country to the best of my ability. This is not to say that such behavior always comes naturally, but I have learned that self-discipline almost always pays off in the end.

According to the United States Army, "Pain is weakness leaving the body." Rigorous discipline is a key factor in nearly everything I accomplish, from fitness to academics. Following my graduation from Leadership Academy, I knew that I was capable of doing anything I set my mind to, and with only four months of training I won my age division in the Paul Bunyan marathon. Upon my return to school I was disappointed to find out I had already completed all of the advanced placement courses I was pre-qualified to take. Rather than face a lack-luster year, I decided to take on an array of new A.P. Courses. Without ever taking a computer class or Spanish III, my A.P. Computer Science and A.P. Spanish courses are an uphill battle, but one I am winning. Though the week I spent at Leadership Academy had a very powerful effect on me, its permanent change comes from the choice I make every day by defining myself as a disciplined, honorable gentleman.

# On my own Anonymous

## Who has had a profond influence on your life?

Cowardice surged through me as Emma sneered down at me. Her eyes pierced my own, seemingly oblivious to the glints of sunlight through the boughs of the shadowy trees.

“Apologize!” Emma demanded, and I trembled. Raising my hand to shield my eyes against the sunlight, as though saluting, I began to wish I had not challenged Emma in front of her friends. I stared dumbly down at the soil and wished vehemently that I could vanish from this scene with a girl I once looked upon with awe and fear. As I stood there, I forced myself to examine the chain of events that had led me to this confrontation.

My small, large-eyed best friend, Inseeia, had committed the crime of accidentally brushing past Emma in the lunch hall. ''You stupid idiot!'' Emma shouted at Inseeia, who stopped short in fear and looked to me for defense. And what did I do? Nothing. I thought Emma’s verbal attack was a mistake, but I tried like the rest of my peers to view her behavior as harmless fun. However, as the weeks progressed, Emma’s attempts to embarrass my friend only intensified – and still I chose to avoid confrontation than defend my friend. I wounded Inseeia more deeply than any nasty comment from Emma ever could; I betrayed our friendship for the approval of a mean-spirited person.

Seeking to escape my shame, I delved into my book collection and came up with ‘The Kite Runner.' Instead of solitude and distance in its pages, however, I found the inspiration to stand up Emma’s abuse and defend my friend. I read:

I stopped watching, turned away from the alley. Something warm was running down my wrist. I blinked; saw I was still biting down on my fist, hard enough to draw blood from the knuckles. I realized something else. I was weeping. From just around the corner, I could hear Assef's quick, rhythmic grunts. I had one last chance to make a decision. One final opportunity to decide who I was going to be. I could step into that alley, stand up for Hassan - the way he'd stood up for me all those times in the past - and accept whatever would happen to me. Or I could run. In the end, I ran.

I felt like Amir, the narrator, who did nothing as bullies attacked his friend even though my conscience screamed at me to act. But while Amir chose to leave his friend – and live with the knowledge that he allowed Hassan to be raped – I decided to gather the moral courage to do the right thing and stand up for Inseeia despite my fear of getting hurt.

The thought of Amir came to me as I stood there before Emma, her “Apologize!” still loud in my ears, and gave me the courage to lift my head and stare directly into Emma's eyes. I suddenly saw her for who she was, an insecure young girl who needed to pick on other people in order to feel important.

“No!” I shouted, hardly recognizing my forceful voice. Taking advantage of Emma’s surprise, I continued. “'There are a hundred people like you, who are so pathetic they need to make other people feel bad to drag them down to your level. I just pity the day for you when everyone sees you for the cruel person you are.'' I ignored her futile jeers and left the scene, feeling for the first time that I had redeemed myself and finally become worthy of Inseeia's friendship.

Emerging from the secluded woodland to the playground, I met the approval of my peers – they had heard Emma’s shrieks and guessed that she got what she deserved. But it was Iseeia’s smile that reinforced to me the importance of standing up to oppressors and defending one’s friends. I realized that I was going to be – had to be – someone who would be make a difference by following her conscience and refusing to be ruled by fear. Feeling years younger, profoundly changed, I followed Inseeia and our classmates back to the classroom.

# Drawing My Life Anonymous

## Topic of your own choice: vignettes of personal experiences

By now, color and form are two essential ways I express myself. In my art I often draw myself as a stick figure with a shock of bright red hair. My family, friends, and even strangers have always commented on the thousands of freckles that pepper my body. This may be why I first began to notice the colors and forms that surround me and to use them for myself. I painted my room orange with a thick magenta stripe. I wear vibrant clothes with colorful patterns and detailed designs. I am even writing this essay through pictures. First, I draw the moments when I have learned most about myself. Then I write thoughts and words on the sketches I have made.

Along the edges of the paper I write some facts about my life: For six summers, I lived with eight girls for a month in a ten-by-twenty-foot cabin. I went to Willard Elementary School in Ridgewood, New Jersey through fifth grade and all I can remember is the playground. My younger sister gets to do things before I did, but at least I don’t throw like a girl. Orange County is full of evangelists and born-again Christians while I am an atheist. My high school was built on an old landfill, but luckily we get a strong breeze from the ocean. Each month I get a $250 allowance. Unfortunately, it is not enough for Disneyland. After six weeks in China, every time I see toilet paper in a bathroom I smile to myself.

I draw two identical tall towers and two groups of stick figures. One group sits at desks in my seventh grade classroom in New Jersey. The teacher says, “If any of your parents work near the World Trade Center, go call them now.” Karen’s father worked on the top floor. He went downstairs to get a doughnut, and Krispy Kreme saved Mr. Price. Twelve others in our town lost their lives. The second group stands talking in my tenth grade classroom in California. They say, “My uncle’s friend was on the runway.” “My cousins were going to visit the Twin Towers that day.” They compete for the worst story.

I make a box with a list on it: “What Do We Compete For?”

New Jersey

The most exclusive country club.

The best-known school.

The most valuable antiques.

The most “friends” in the Hamptons.

California

The fastest car.

The biggest bra size.

The richest husband.

The youngest wife.

With my marker I draw my friend Robert’s fire-engine-red Ferrari. White racing stripes glide along the length of the body and I am the stick figure in the passenger’s seat. I print words crawling around the wheels and tumbling out as exhaust: The engine explodes to life with the push of a button. Between fourth and fifth gear I feel a moment of silence, a void of movement or sound before we catapult down the Pacific Coast Highway. We are 17, and the Ferrari is Robert’s third car. This is the twisted world I now live in.

Dull green and brown earth, small red temples: I draw a giant mountain bowl filled with morning silence. I am standing at the center of the bowl in a square white courtyard, watching a Tibetan Buddhist monk pray on the steps of the monastery. Through the stillness my mind jabbers: Could I live the way he does? Do I have an untapped reservoir of devotion and discipline? I think of the differences between my home and his, my life and his. So pointless, so futile. The aged monk lifts his red robe, bows his head, steps across the high threshold and through the door.

# LOZAD Ian Randall Claflin

## Topic of your choice

Thursday, March 19, 2009. The time is 6:55 AM. As my shirt proclaims, this is a special day. I pass my sister as she leaves to catch the school bus and she is wearing the same shirt. I drive to school and find that dozens of my friends are also wearing them. The questions begin to pop up throughout the halls of Cheshire High School. What are these shirts? What do they stand for? Why are people wearing them? …Because this day, March 19, is LOZAD – a day to breathe a sigh of relief and give thanks, to whatever deity, deities, or force of probability you believe in, for the fact that zombies do not exist.

LOZAD stands for “Lack of Zombies Appreciation Day.” It is a “holiday” I created on which we celebrate the fact that zombies, arguably the most horrific fictional monsters in popular culture, do not exist… yet! Yes, LOZAD is a parody of other holidays, but that did not deter interest. When I first thought of LOZAD, I asked a number of people if they would celebrate such a holiday and all of the responses were positive. As the date drew nearer, I recruited a group of friends to spread the news of LOZAD. Orders were taken for tee shirts and in the end, the “holiday” was a huge success. When the last bell of the day rang and the halls of Cheshire High filled, people I didn’t even know could be heard wishing each other “Happy LOZAD.”

Lack of Zombies Appreciation Day owes its success in part to the widespread popularity of zombie media. In fact, it’s been nearly five decades since George A. Romero produced “Night of the Living Dead” and zombies dominated horror. Since then, it has been common for vampires to be the most popular monsters in literature and movies. Recently, however, the slew of immensely popular zombie-themed books, video games, and movies has “zombiefied” the genre once again. Literary scholars might be horrified to know that the rewrite Pride and Prejudice and Zombies recently outpaced the popularity of Austen’s more sedate Pride and Prejudice, breaking into the top 5 on the New York Times best seller list. Clearly, the zombie craze is at its highest point in history, even more popular than its previous reign in the 1960’s. But why are zombies so popular? How has the zombie deposed the vampire and taken its place on the throne of horror? I believe the answers to these questions can be found by taking a closer look at our society.

From Bram Stoker’s nineteenth century Dracula to modern day depictions, vampires are classy, aristocratic, and sexy. This reflects the circumstances characterizing various reigns of vampire popularity; times of prosperity, when people felt good about themselves and about the future. Bright time periods spawned an attractive monster. Now, however, the world does not seem so bright. Global terrorism, economic trouble, and ever-mounting tensions between the East and West have darkened humanity’s horizon. This is not an atmosphere for vampires; it is an atmosphere for zombies. While the bite of a vampire offers immortality, the bite of a zombie offers a nightmare existence of squalor and decay. As the war in Iraq continued to escalate, many Americans saw it as a mindless campaign that devoured resources while hurting the nation. The same can be said of a horde of zombies, a mindless berserker force that consumes all it comes into contact with, gaining strength while those around it weaken. If we go back in time to the first reign of the zombie, we will find a strong parallel. The 1960’s were turbulent times, with a very unpopular war in Southeast Asia, the civil rights movement, and the youth of our nation feeling disconnected and distrustful of the government. Uncertainty, discontent, and an unpopular war plagued the ’60’s and these very same conditions are fueling the social and economic upheaval of this decade. Yes, these are the perfect times for zombies!

I love humor and LOZAD has a very humorous side to it. On the outside it’s a great joke, making light of one of the grimmest concepts in literature and movies. However, the “holiday” has a more serious aspect. Zombies represent this generation’s fears. This humorous celebration was, in a deeper way, an expression of fear. Fear of continued pointless conflict, fear that the country may not recover from the damage wrought by the Bush Administration, and worst of all, fear that our world could one day come to an end. We laughed as we joked about zombies, we cheered as we blasted video game zombies, we screamed when movie zombies jumped out of nowhere, and hiding beneath the surface of this was our deep, barely acknowledged fear.

As a writer, a huge part of my work is the expression of emotion. While little of my work revolves around zombies, one of my poems does well in expressing the darkest fear that zombies represent. Here is the poem, entitled, “The End.”

We did not know.

Like children playing on the edge of a cliff,

We crawled so blindly toward our own destruction,

Never seeing our fate.

We did not know

That in our heart of hearts

Something malign was growing:

A parasite feeding on our arrogance.

We did not know

That we were wrong.

It was inconceivable;

How could we be wrong?

We did not know

That all around us our hate and anger

Was manifesting itself:

A shadowy army of waking nightmares.

We did not know

That in our foolishness

The weapons we launched to destroy our enemies

Would be the harbingers of their masters’ undoing.

We did not know

That from the ashes of the east

Would arise irradiated but strong,

A plague to end all plagues.

We did not know

That with that plague would come,

What we can finally say with all certainty,

A war to end all wars.

We did not know

The abominations we could be,

For from within the darkness of our souls

Our enemy thundered forth.

We did not know

That with each enemy destroyed by our invincible army

Two more would be born,

For our hate is their elixir.

We did not know

That we could be destroyed,

That our leaders could be killed,

That we were not immortal.

We did not know

The fury of Hell,

But we should have,

For we are its architects.

We did not know

That it would come to this:

Hiding among burned out ruins

From the howling horrors roaming the streets.

We did not know

What god would do this.

But no god did this.

We did.

So next March 19, smile at some one and wish them “Happy LOZAD.” Be happy “they” don’t exist! Be hopeful that a new optimism, currently in its infancy and born from a newly elected president, will help keep the zombies at bay. Perhaps most importantly, be thankful that we live in a country where there are opportunities for positive change because we are free to express our discontent with our government through humor, the arts, literature, or whatever peaceful means we choose.

# From Tackle Practice to the Barre Anonymous

## Describe an aspect of yourself that you find interesting or unique.

I lead a double life. You don’t often find someone who both dances and plays football. I suppose that makes me a statistical anomaly, because I go to tackle practice at six a.m. and barre class at six p.m. I love dance because it’s art with muscles; poetry of the body. It’s all grace, emotion, and poise. It can simultaneously tell a story, stir a feeling, and please the eye. It is beauty in its purest form. I treasure football, however, because it’s art by cavemen; war with shoulder pads. It’s all strength, agility, and bloodlust. It can single-handedly reduce grown men to petulant children. It is a battlefield with mascots.

Tap lessons, step lessons, and show choir were integral parts of my childhood. I was never athletic as a child. I had only the vaguest concept of football. I fell asleep at the Bronco games my parents took me to. I focused my attention entirely on what I could do onstage and had zero interest in what happened on the field.

As I got older, my love of dance grew…but so did something else. I found myself in pick-up games of touch-football and basketball. By eighth grade, I was something of an athlete. Although I still danced, I was now a “sporty” dancer. As I phased into high school, I continued to dance. I didn’t think I was good enough to play for the school football team; however, I was satisfied with my one extracurricular activity.

Sophomore year I was forced to reconcile my two worlds. At the same time that I was cast as the Arabian Prince in a local studio’s rendition of The Nutcracker Suite, I was convinced to play right offensive guard on my school’s eight-man team. My muddy cleats began sharing bag space with my leather flats. Slowly, my two lives merged.

I was an unlikely candidate for football. I wasn’t particularly large or fast. My hand-eye coordination was laughable. I despised early-morning practices, painful tackling drills, and the sense of team unity that eluded me. A few of my classmates had talked me into joining the team. “It’ll get you in shape,” they said. The upperclassmen on the team, however, were of the opinion that I was completely out of place on the field. I needed to go back to my dance studio where I belonged.

Halfway through the season, that changed. Practice that morning had been particularly embarrassing—I had missed all of my tackles and a junior had planted me on my backside right in the mud. I turned to the sound of a senior on the team calling my name. “There’s something you should know,” he said. Apparently the junior I faced during practice had made disparaging remarks about me when I wasn’t there. The senior told me that he and his friends had shut the junior up, and that if people ever said anything bad to my face I should let him know. “I’ve got your back,” he told me.

For the first time, I was more than just some kid who showed up at practices and warmed the bench. I was a Firebird Football Player—and proud of it. It wasn’t about conforming to the jock stereotype that was expected of me, it was about finding my own niche—a happy medium between dancer and athlete. From that point on, I was both. I introduced the team to some more advanced dance stretches and used the strength I developed on the field to lift ballerinas with the greatest of ease. I never got “ripped”, but I became quick and agile. The following year I was a starter on the team.

So you see, the double life I lead isn’t double at all. My life is simply a two-sided coin. One side Alvin Ailey, the other side Mike Oher. Maybe my divided attention will inhibit me from becoming a pro at either of my pursuits, but that doesn’t bother me. I’ve come to realize that it’s balance in my life that I truly treasure. Not having to give up either of my passions is what’s most important to me.

# The Balcony Anonymous

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

This is the balcony that extends into infinite dimensions. Inside: paintings and the smell of dusk. Lined against the tiled walls are canvases both void and filled. A soft light overhead. There is something extremely calming about occupying this platform, transforming it into surreal dimensions. In the studio I am expanding both into my mind space and the concrete space of my artwork.

Very often, a friend would read my poetry, view my paintings, and ask: what was your inspiration? What draws it all together?

I am never really sure how to answer. To be honest, I have never found any conceptual disparity between visual art and the written form. My urge to create, or express, is like letting out a breath of air. And by creating art, I am able to crystallize that exhalation and preserve it forever. When I paint, language and brushstrokes coalesce into the same motive: to translate my cognitive abstractions into concrete expressions. To tentatively let you into my mind space, this is the trance-like state I fall into when creating: the sky is a stretch of watercolor spreading into little streams, telegraph poles streamlining my ideas into electric currents, reverberating into houses; electric wires gone loose. And beside the overarching landscape, materializes the side portrait of my mother. The silhouette of a slender arm, then the shoulder's precise curvature.

Some people say that art is cathartic. That statement is only half-true. In the very beginning, creating each artwork is like wrestling forever with an unknown contender who seems to come from the realm of artistic perfection. Even when my artwork is finally polished and displayed under the glowing light of art exhibitions, I am not lost in the applause. Interlaced with each brushstroke and each nuance of color is the memory of a self-limitation I've been able to conquer. Thus, out of all the artworks I've ever made, the ones I value the most are not necessarily the most aesthetically successful, but are the ones in which, like a war hero, I battled through to claim victory. In those rare, precious moments, when transfixed by the wild waltz of my imagination, I would feel as if I've reached the apex of divinity. Existing in between the initial concept and the unclaimed, unchartered space of the blank canvas, I've never stopped believing that a secret awaits--perhaps the truth to the wholeness of life, the interconnected beauty of the entire cosmos.

The balcony door opens: I step away from its light, covered in paint. But I do not hurry to wash the colors off my skin. Instead, I let these chaotic remnants of my arduous creations stay, because after hours upon hours inching towards an artistic ideal, my body becomes at one with these brushstrokes, and I am no longer alone.

# For the Love of Hockey Anonymous

## 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 think I was Canadian in a different life. Not because of my love of French, though strong, or my craving for maple syrup, though incessant; no, this Canadian lifestyle manifests itself through a kind of hockey mania. While my friends enjoy watching baseball and eating hotdogs or tailgating at football games on Sunday afternoons, the American sport fetish skipped me completely, leaving a puck-shaped hole in my heart.

Of course being born and raised in the South makes this love a forbidden one. As we play yet another round of h-o-r-s-e in P.E., my soul yearns for the crack of a slapshot, the whistle of a perfectly timed wrister. The coach tells us to pick up the pigskin, we're headed to the field. No, my heart screams, not another touch football game! You're smiling! How can you enjoy this? We march to the stadium anyway, the others oblivious of the superior game waiting for them on the ice. Our team gets the ball first and runs it past the blue line, ahem, the fifty yard line. Stop, start; stop, start. Fifteen minutes later and we've advanced exactly zero feet.

This madness does not exist in hockey. There is no mass-tackling, blitz-faking, backtracking nonsense. Just the smooth sound of sharpened blades gliding over polished ice, the smack-crack-clang of a deflected shot hitting the post, the deafening silence of an entire arena holding its breath during the pressure-riddled penalty shot, the blaring siren of the puck finally meeting the twine.

A certain camaraderie runs through the veins of hockey fans. Unlike the plethora of basketball/football/baseball fans running amok, the population of the hockey fan is much like that of the dwindling polar bear. Once while at a restaurant (by the beach, no less) my family had a waiter who divulged to us that he was a Flyers fan. I could have cried a) because it was like being one of those poor polar bears, wandering solo, thinking you're the last of your kind, when all of a sudden you round a snow dune to find out it is in fact not a snow dune but another polar bear and you are no longer alone in the world and b) out of pity because, come on, really, a Flyers fan? You traded your captain away to the now two-time defending Stanley Cup Champions and for what? An undisclosed draft pick? The back-seat GM in me rages like an inferno, but I digress.

The glorious, nail-biting, edge-of-your-seat turmoil of hockey stems from the setup, not the goal. Sure, the siren is a relief to hear, but convincing the P.E. coaches to try a two week street hockey unit that turns into a three month ultimate tournament is what breathes life into my pseudo-Canadian spirit. Whether the score is a zero-zero stalemate in double overtime or a seven-one blowout in regulation, the game always offers something priceless, even if that's just getting to know the kindred polar bear chanting next to you in the bleachers.

# Independently Phoebe Bain

## How did you hear about Vassar?

I learned about Vassar the way I grew up - independently. I stumbled upon the school online one lonely night while my single mother traveled for business. Upon visiting Vassar, I remember having goosebumps. The college was Phoebe incarnate, from the vegetarian options in the cafeteria to the flexible core curriculum that would allow me to find out more about myself than any other school. Even Lisa Kudrow can attest to the fact that Vassar is a place for Phoebes.

As is often the case with love, I could not pin down what about Vassar’s ideology I adored so much. That is, until I received a Vassar viewbook in the mail. I started reading en media res and marveled at how Vassar does not define individualism as what school activities you participate in, but as the character that results from rigorous examination of your own mind. I always had a hard time explaining my definition of individualism until I saw my own opinion put into words in that blue viewbook. As I read on, the similarities between Vassar’s paradigm and my own became even more uncanny.

For instance, I have quite the obsession with the American Women’s Suffrage Movement. My busy single mother and her group of spinster girlfriends raised me, and as a result I fervently support equal rights in every sense. Vassar and I were built on the same foundation. And upon reading about Ellen Swallow, I was about ready to pack my bags and move onto campus before my senior year of high school even began. With our matching environmentalist and feminist beliefs, Ms. Swallow and I seemed astoundingly similar as well. However, the biggest parallel I drew from the viewbook was this: Vassar is a community of intellectually curious people. My teachers have described me as intellectually curious from elementary school onward, whether I was the best in the class or struggling to reach my goals. I believe that Vassar is the wiser version of myself. Upon looking at my reflection in 2019, I would love to see even more of a resemblance to Vassar.

# 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.

# Why Vassar Anonymous

## Why Vassar?

During the overnight at Vassar, my nighttime ritual was disrupted by the unexpected presence of a male Vassar student in what I thought was a female bathroom. Startled, I ran back into the dorm. There, my host explained to me that the bathrooms at Vassar are gender neutral as a way to promote gender inclusivity. Despite my initial shock, I quickly embraced the idea of a gender neutral bathroom and appreciated how Vassar emphasized the inclusion of all identities and open mindedness.

This open mindedness extends to Vassar’s academic experience, as well. Until I sat in on a writing seminar at Vassar, I had never really taken an interest in Latina women and their effect on US-Cuba relations. As a prospective international studies major, I was completely floored by the new wave of information that had come my way. Having been limited by pesky biology and calculus requirements all throughout high school, the only humanities courses I could take were all related to US history. Whether it’s Latina feminists or religion in North Africa, Vassar’s open, diverse curriculum will help redefine how I see the world and refresh my very concept of learning.

Vassar also provides opportunities on and off campus to build connections. As a prospective international studies major, I would gain access to a multitude of internships and job opportunities available in the city through Vassar. Additionally, Vassar has the traditional, suburban campus that would help me find community among students, while still being connected to the occupational opportunities that I would need to make the most of my experience.

In big ways and small, Vassar provides a learning environment where students can craft their own education and decide their own goals. It’s a campus that proud promotes inclusion and acceptance, and it’s a campus where I could continue to gain new perspectives.